

Tony Blair

The Old New Goes to War



Ken Coates



Parade of the Old New

I stood on a hill and I saw the Old approaching, but it came as the New.

It hobbled up on new crutches which no one had ever seen before and stank of new smells of decay which no one had ever smelt before.

The stone that rolled past was the newest invention and the screams of the gorillas drumming on their chests set up to be the newest musical composition.

Everywhere you could see open graves standing empty as the New advanced on the capital.

Round about stood such as inspired terror, shouting: Here comes the New, it's all new, salute the new, be new like us! And those who heard, heard nothing but their shouts, but those who saw, saw such as were not shouting.

So the Old strode in disguised as the New, but it brought the New with it in its triumphal procession and presented it as the Old.

The New went fettered and in rags; they revealed its splendid limbs.

And the procession moved through the night, but what they thought was the light of dawn was the light of fires in the sky. And the cry: Here comes the New, it's all new, salute the New, be new like us! would have been easier to hear if all had not been drowned in a thunder of guns.

by Bertolt Brecht
from *The Darkest Times*
1938-1941

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Tony Blair

The Old New Goes to War

By Ken Coates

I

It would be wrong to pretend that the British Parliamentary debate on war with Iraq lacked interest and excitement. But by far the most exciting intervention was made the day before the debate itself, when Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary, and then leader of the House of Commons, made his electrifying resignation speech, which was far better than any of those made in the debate which followed the next day. Blair made one of his resounding affirmations of motherhood and apple pie, but there were two very disconcerting features of the following debate.

The first was that there were innumerable references to the perfidy of the French who were alleged to have spoilt Britain's victory at the Security Council with their threatened veto. No-one outside the reach of the British press will recognise this nonsensical claim. The British resolution had the support (fitful) of the United States and Spain with the intermittent promise of succour from Bulgaria. No-one else ever indicated their readiness to vote for it, so that, when it was withdrawn, this was clearly because it had no support. That the British need to scapegoat the French is perhaps understandable, because they are engaged in a murderous breach of the United Nations Charter, and it must be difficult to stand alone and take the responsibility.

But the second disconcerting feature about the British debate was the enormous number of speakers from the Labour side who had come, not without some courage, to reject the Government's main arguments, and to oppose its resolution, but who felt nonetheless that it was necessary to devote large parts of their speeches to praising the great Leader, and swearing their undying fealty to him. At times, these declarations took on an almost ceremonial aspect, as if they were a dignified part of the constitution. One could see a certain identity with the political institutions of North Korea, where loyalty, at any rate, is not undervalued. In the event, 139 Labour MPs voted against the war, out of a total of 217 oppositionists, including Liberals, Nationalists, and a handful of Conservatives led by Kenneth Clarke.

Now the bombs are falling, and perhaps we should take stock of how we arrived at this impasse.

The British people remain resolutely opposed to all this militarism, and their Prime Minister's continual protestations of peaceful intentions merely add to the very widespread anger of those who are outside the political classes. But anger is difficult for members of the political classes, because the fountain of all patronage can only be abused once by anyone with hopes of preferment.

The British Government's fatal obsession with Iraq dates back a long way. At the height of its power, the Thatcher administration became involved in a complex labyrinth of arms deals and defence related contracts. Mrs. Thatcher's son, Mark, made corners of this labyrinth visible, when it became clear that he was accepting commissions on some of the deals which were negotiated. From time to time there was a *frisson* of scandal, as in the Al Yamamah case.

Over a prolonged period, whilst the Iran/Iraq war continued, weapons were sold to both sides, often in triangular deals involving other parties which could camouflage the direct relationship. One of the entrepreneurs engaged in this export was Gerald James, the Chairman of a leading arms manufacturing company, who has written a most revealing book (*In the Public Interest* published by Warner Books in 1996). He alleges that the Thatcher Government, which had publicly outlawed the illegal weapons trade, in fact systematically undermined its own bans on the forbidden exports with the direct involvement of institutions in the City, the Civil Service, and the Intelligence Services. The Thatcher Government's reputation for sleaze began to be earned during these years of partial disclosure, which made it clear that those standards of probity which had been deemed to be traditional in British politics had been consistently and continuously widely violated. James's book points to a web of public companies, front companies, off-shore accounts, banks, lawyers, accountants, not to say participants in the secret state, whose initial connections had been forged during the Cold War, but whose subsequent development had evolved into a daunting and, for some, profitable autonomy.

The British Embassy in Washington, says James, played a key part in the co-ordination of the diverse outposts of this web. A guiding hand which Thatcher employed was that of Charles Powell, her Foreign Affairs adviser in Downing Street, and close confidant. Slowly and intermittently, the dubious arms deals of the Thatcher era became public knowledge. Documentation was imperfect and not

always accurate. But by a process of accretion, an image developed which was to prove quite lethal for the Conservative administration. The regime became associated with a powerful stench of corruption, much of which is explained in Gerald James's book.

Undoubtedly, the Blair project gained a very great deal from this development. Blair was young, apparently untainted, and well situated to present himself as the voice of public honesty. He was 'European' enough to promise the business community relief by adhering to the euro. It was credible for him to bid to take over the leadership of a large part of the Conservative vote, appealing to Middle England by embracing the heritage of 'one-nation' Conservatism. Thus we saw the astonishing about-face of the decision to abandon the Labour Party's explicit socialist commitment in Clause IV of the Party's Constitution. Strongly denied at first, Blair accomplished miracles of spin in persuading his Party to dump its century-long commitment to common ownership.

At first, new members flocked to the Labour Party, and its 1997 electoral victory undoubtedly rested on the engagement of a new generation of more idealistic conservatives, alongside the majority of 'Old' Labour supporters. The centre of gravity had moved, and British politics had been fundamentally changed.

But the fundamentally cautious and conservative nature of the new administration was quick to become apparent. Alienation and estrangement followed inexorably. The trade unions were quickly antagonised: but so were the pensioners, the public services, students and their parents, the churches and the new party members, who began the long march of withdrawal. Party membership fell and fell.

These strong shifts of opinion were but imperfectly registered, because the constitutional mechanisms of the Labour Party were boldly reformed to annul its residual grassroots democracy. The policy-making functions were all hived off to very controlled 'policy forums' and other devices designed largely to eliminate the decision-making role of Labour's Conference, which had been, at its height, a veritable Parliament of Labour.

More and more the Party organisation came to resemble a career structure, a mechanism for choosing councillors, school governors, local quangos, and other minor officials, up to and including an army of national appointments at a more elevated level. The Party Conference became a commercial exhibition, known more for the length of its standing ovations than for the forensic logic of its speeches.

With the assertion of blatant patronage as the governing principal of British political life, sleaze and corruption began their inexorable return, if they had ever gone away. The same desperate search for Party funding implied closer and closer associations with business, and more and more dubious arrangements.

One continuous theme, however, marked out the Blair ascendancy. The close affinity with the United States was absolutely not negotiable, even if it undermined Britain's European alliances, and thus undercut part of New Labour's influence with the business community. Early on in the story of Tony Blair, we find Charles Powell's brother, Jonathan, meeting the new leader in the Washington Embassy, where he was head of Chancery. It is widely presumed that this function involves the co-ordination of British intelligence with the American intelligence services. Be that as it may, before his election victory, Tony Blair made a visit to the Washington Embassy, and it is said that he there recruited Jonathan Powell to join his staff. At first blush, this is an unusual, if not audacious career move. Why should a Foreign Office high-flyer, clearly marked out for the most significant promotions, accept a job in a politician's office? But Powell became and remains Blair's *chef de cabinet* and an integral part of his ascendancy. His extraordinarily well-developed American contacts have certainly served his master well, if you are willing to follow the Faustian pact which the Blair team has concluded with the dark forces.

How could Blair make the transition from most loyal retainer of President Bill Clinton, to principal ally and cheerleader for the Bush administration, red-necked reactionaries all, hell-bent on the extinction of an axis of evil which, long before the attack on the Twin Towers, was seen by the Vice President and his cohorts as the target for continuing war?

The transatlantic influence on centre left Parties has been increasingly formal and continuous over recent decades. When the American polity was besieged in the early 1980s, with the peace movement which focused on the Euro missiles and called for a nuclear-free zone from Poland to Portugal, the quiet American response was to establish a Committee for the Successor Generation, aimed at eroding what were perceived as 'anti-American' attitudes. We should remember that the European Nuclear Disarmament Convention in Perugia, in 1984, brought together the official representatives of almost all the Social Democratic Parties in Europe, excluding only the French (who were wedded to the *force de frappe*),

almost all the West European Communists, most of the Greens and an overwhelming contingent of Church activists and leaders. When I was invited, a year or so earlier, to speak about European Nuclear Disarmament in Belgium, I found myself in a salon with half the Belgian Government.

The unparalleled respectability of the peace movement was not to last. President Reagan set his men to work to reclaim the lost ground in Europe. The chosen mechanism for American recovery was established in 1985.

On the 21st March the President invited a group including Rupert Murdoch and Sir James Goldsmith to consider the problem of ensuring, throughout the West, the emergence of a 'successor generation'. Ambassador Dailey was recalled from Dublin to co-ordinate a strategy with Walt Raymond of the CIA and Charles Wick of the USIA. It was quickly agreed to focus on 'our needs in Europe' ... 'The problems of European public opinion ... are sufficiently great that this is enough of a task to take on at this time'. The British chapter of this initiative was to become known as the British American Project.¹ It was finally launched in 1985 by a promising cluster of young media executives and political high flyers such as Liz Symonds, Trevor Phillips, Peter Mandelson, Mo Mowlam, Chris Smith, George Robertson, Wendy Alexander and Jeremy Paxman. Not all of these spoke kindly of the new organisation, once they had sampled it. But many found it useful. Julia Hobsbawm, the daughter of the eminent historian, and the founder of the PR company Hobsbawm Macauley, which had intimate associations with New Labour, was 'an influential member' of the BAP, which brought together matching numbers of British and American personalities, providing 'a brilliant networking opportunity'.

This kind of networking accompanied sustained efforts, with American support, to remove the commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament from the Labour Party's programme.

Nonetheless there was a very profound pacifism at large in European Socialist Parties, which also showed itself within the Christian Democratic Parties and other formations of the middle ground. During the first Gulf War, in 1991, 139 Members of the European Parliament signed a declaration which I circulated to the effect that 'We do not support this war, and will take no part in it'. The true opposition to that war was even wider.

In the early part of the 1980s, the British Labour Party had called for

the simultaneous winding up of Nato and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, as part of the approach to the nuclear disarmament of Europe. But with the actual implosion of Soviet institutions, the Warsaw Treaty Organisation was unilaterally abrogated. In sharp contrast, the United States began a systematic campaign to recruit new members to Nato, pressing hard on the frontiers of Russia, and establishing a new 'Partnership for Peace' to associate former neutrals and other States which had up to that time been actual constituents of the USSR.

Europe underwent a slow but prolonged withdrawal from pacifism, so that the real development of American military thinking at first obtained very little attention on the Eastern side of the Atlantic. All eyes had been on the Cold War, and the facts of American domination were initially unremarked. The United States was seen to be in a most powerful position, beyond effective military challenge either by former enemies or friends. But the codification of this position into explicit hegemony, with the official doctrine of 'Full Spectrum Dominance', took time to emerge.

Meanwhile, the most painful part of British Labour's readjustment from pacifism had taken place with the apostasies of Neil Kinnock, who had been a passionate, and very convincing advocate of nuclear disarmament. For him, the conversion to Atlanticism must have been a very painful trauma. But the change was accomplished when it became clear that all the pundits thought that the Labour Party was finding its commitment to disarmament an electoral liability. The Chairman of British CND, Joan Ruddock, was elected as a Labour MP, and began the steady drift away from the politics of disarmament. Almost all the young people in the Labour Party, as late as the mid-1980s, had been partisans of CND. No-one would attend a selection conference without wearing a conspicuous CND badge. The commitment was assumed to be axiomatic in Constituency Parties, and most trade unions. The young Tony Blair fought his first election campaign alongside Tony Benn, as a strident supporter of nuclear disarmament.

The erosion of this commitment, which was a defining cultural component of Labour for a couple of decades, should be the subject of detailed study and analysis. But by the time that Tony Blair was elected as Labour Leader in 1994, the commitment was but a vestige of what it used to be. Ageing Members of Parliament, and of the European Parliament, sustained their youthful beliefs. But the nuclear argument had lost its pressing urgency with the ending of the Cold War, and the political commitments which were crystallising

under the surface of international politics had not yet emerged into the daylight.

The American Democrats opened the discussion on geopolitical matters, which was most famously and elegantly presented by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his influential tract: *The Grand Chessboard*. Brzezinski had been President Carter's National Security Advisor in Afghanistan, during the confrontation with the Russians in which the United States played a major role. Here it was that the first volunteer Arabs raised the flag of Islam against the Russian invaders. Brzezinski wrote to Carter to insist that the Russians could be defeated in Afghanistan, thus, he thought, redressing the American defeat in Vietnam which weighed so heavily on the self-image of American leaders. More: Brzezinski began to draw wider lessons:

'... how America 'manages' Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions ... About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well ... Eurasia accounts for about 60 per cent of the world's GNP and about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources... Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played.'²

The ghost of Alexander the Great had joined post-Cold War America, although American Presidents were not yet moved to keep flasks of water from the Nile and the Danube in the entrance to the White House. For Brzezinski,

'Eurasian geostrategy involves the purposeful management of geostrategically dynamic states and the careful handling of geopolitically catalytic states, in keeping with the twin interests of America in the short-term preservation of its unique global power and in the long-run transformation of it into increasingly institutionalized global cooperation. To put it in a terminology that harkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.'³

If, in Brzezinski's hands, this design has a 'soft' outline, veiling the brutal realities, under Bush there are no such sensibilities. For the present administration, orders are orders. This has been very well understood by Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary who,

speaking in a House of Commons Select Committee on Tuesday 4 March 2003, said that at stake was the commitment of the United States to multilateral initiatives and organisations such as the United Nations itself and Nato. If Europe were to refuse to fall into line, he said, dire consequences would follow:

‘... you are right it is the United States which has the military power to act as the world’s policeman, and only the United States. We live in a uni-polar world; the United States has a quarter of the world’s wealth, the world’s GDP, and it has stronger armed forces than the next 27 countries put together. So its predominance is huge. That is a fact. No one can gainsay it; no one can change it in the short or medium term. The choice we have to make in the international community is whether, in a uni-polar world, we want the only super-power to act unilaterally and we force them to act unilaterally or whether we work in such a way that they act within the multilateral institutions. What I say to France and Germany and all other European Union colleagues is to take care, because just as America helps to define and influence our politics, so what we do in Europe helps to define and influence American politics. We will reap a whirlwind if we push the Americans into a unilateralist position in which they are the centre of this uni-polar world.’

Small wonder that Mr Brzezinski was quick to distance himself from the present American strategy, which was altogether too unsophisticated for so nuanced a thinker.

Unfortunately for Mr Straw, the whirlwinds have been delayed, and Old Europe has remained unafraid. But American military doctrine remains firmly in place, predicated on the brutally clear doctrine of ‘Full Spectrum Dominance’.

‘The ultimate goal of our military force is to accomplish the objectives directed by the National Command Authorities. For the joint force of the future, this goal will be achieved through full spectrum dominance – the ability of US forces operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations. The full range of operations includes maintaining a posture of strategic deterrence. It includes theatre engagement and presence activities. It includes conflict involving employment of strategic forces and weapons of mass destruction, major theatre wars, regional conflicts, and smaller-scale contingencies. It also includes those ambiguous situations residing between peace and war, such as peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, as well as non-combat humanitarian relief operations and support to domestic authorities.

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The label full spectrum dominance implies that US forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronised operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains – space, sea, land, air, and information. Additionally, given the global nature of our interests and obligations, the United States must maintain its overseas presence forces and the ability to rapidly project power world-wide in order to achieve full spectrum dominance.¹⁴

All this adds up to a fairly clear imperial charter. If it took time to arrive in the understanding of European political leaders, this was partly because it was accompanied by attempts to revise the constitution of Nato, and by the hope that Brzezinski's goal of 'long-run transformation ... into increasingly institutionalized global co-operation' might be part of a mutually acceptable world order.

The advent of George Bush put paid to this hope, which was always somewhat platonic. Firstly, the new President made short work of declaring his right to pre-emptive action. His Nuclear Posture Review made chilling assumptions of the need for first strike nuclear strategies. He wasted no time in indulging the consensus of lesser States about the need for global co-operation to prevent damage to the environment, and at once repudiated the Kyoto protocols outright. Not only did he greet the proposals for an International Criminal Court as unacceptable, but he immediately embarked upon a series of measures aimed at sabotaging any powers which the Court might claim in order to judge American citizens. These and a series of other actions, including the unilateral repudiation of Treaties, made it impossible to believe that the President shared Brzezinski's desire for internationally institutionalised global co-operation, on any other basis than that of naked imperial power. All this comes to a head in the American decision to attack Iraq, with the blessing of the United Nations had it been available, but as we have seen, on its unilateral initiative when not.

This painful evolution in American political and military thinking has provoked serious political argument between the most eminent spokesmen engaged at different times. But their English counterparts and subordinate allies have been largely passed over in the discussion. The benign manipulations of Mr. Jonathan Powell made it possible for Tony Blair to arrive painlessly from the anterooms of Bill Clinton into the outer offices of George Bush. Gone were Brzezinski's reservations about international co-operation, and firmly in place were the fulminations of Mr. Cheney and Mr.

Rumsfeld. It is true that Tony Blair cultivated the image of mediator, emphasising the influence of Colin Powell on the American Presidency. But Blair was nothing if not surefooted in his support for every practical move made by the Bush Presidency, whether it left thoughtful Democrats in despair or not.

Thus have the carefully built elisions of the British American Project, and the profound fudges of the post-Cold War days been dissolved in a pattern of unambiguous belligerence as a client of Full Spectrum Dominance. Dominance, of course, is not for sharing. If you don't dominate, in the carnivorous universe of George Bush then you have to be dominated, and that has turned out to be the fate of Tony Blair and his diminishing retinue of European followers.

But today, among the British people and most of their contemporaries, the peace movement is back among us. Reagan's recovery programme to stabilise the ancient compromises of the old political sleaze have run their course. Now, thousands of schoolchildren are demonstrating against the war. The new generation is arriving, and honest political organisation begins to be possible again.

Footnotes

1 cf Tom Easton: *The British American Project for the Successor Generation*, Lobster, Summer 1997, p. 10 et seq.

2 *The Grand Chessboard*, Basic Books, New York.

3 Ibid, p.40.

4 United States Department of Defence: *Joint Vision 2020*, 30th May 2000.

II

Law versus War

The enforcement of international law is commonly not advanced by the outbreak of war. When the war itself is arguably illegal, this perception applies with redoubled force. There follow three case studies which are self-explanatory.

i

Torturers' Charter

Cracks are appearing in the foundation stones of our civilisation. Long held taboos about national sovereignty have already fallen, outside the solitary bastion of the megapower. All other sovereignty is qualified if not abrogated. Now, the universal prohibition of torture is the latest victim of agnostic questions from new realists. On January 11th *The Economist* opened its first leader with the question: 'Is torture ever justified?' With some diffidence, *The Economist* answered 'No'. But perhaps, it thought, sleep deprivation, lengthy interrogations, the use of the truth serum, might be defined as falling outside the domain of torture.

What provoked *The Economist* to think these thoughts? There has been a controversy in *The Washington Post*, triggered by an important article which appeared on December 26th 2002.

'Deep inside the forbidden zone at the US-occupied Bagram airbase in Afghanistan, around the corner from the detention centre and beyond the segregated clandestine military units, sits a cluster of metal shipping containers protected by a triple-layer of concertina wire. The containers hold the most valuable prizes in the war on terrorism – captured Al Qaeda operatives and Taliban commanders.'

This valuable cargo seems to have been made for ill-treatment. Non-cooperators are kept standing or kneeling for hours on end, hooded or clad in spray painted goggles. At times they are held in painful or awkward positions and deprived of sleep with a twenty-four hour bombardment of lights, under 'stress and duress' techniques.

By contrast, co-operators are given modest creature comforts, friendly interrogators and, 'in some cases, money'. Some of the non-cooperators are given over to foreign intelligence services who are far less squeamish about torture than the Americans are supposed to be. This process of hand-over is called 'rendering'. Not all non-cooperative prisoners need to be 'rendered' because the Americans maintain a number of detention centres where the due process which should rule

in the rest of the United States does not hold sway. The off-limits ground in Bagram is one of these, and the island of Diego Garcia* is another (see page 16). American officials superintend most of the interrogations, we are told, especially those of senior captives. Smaller fry are handed over to less squeamish interrogators in Jordan, Egypt or Morocco, together with lists of the questions to which the CIA requires answers. These 'extraordinary renditions' are subject to no legal controls, although the appointed torturers have frequently been the subject of angry denunciations by American human rights organisations.

'According to US officials, nearly 3,000 suspected Al Qaeda members and their supporters have been detained world-wide since September 11th 2001. About 625 are at the US military's confinement facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Some officials estimated that fewer than 100 captives have been rendered to third countries. Thousands have been arrested and held with US assistance in countries known for brutal treatment of prisoners, the officials said.'

The head of the CIA's counter-terrorist centre is Cofer Black. 'There was a before 9/11, and there was an after 9/11' he said. 'After 9/11 the gloves come off.' Part of the glove stripping process is that of rendering. 'We don't kick the shit out of them. We send them to other countries so they can kick the shit out of them.'

Mind altering drugs are by no means the only devices employed in the administration of such kickings. Systematic deprivation of sleep, selective withholding of pain-killing drugs for wounded people, and other more or less 'acceptable' cruelties are by no means the only standard treatment for rendered victims. Before they are rendered, says *The Washington Post*, captives are often softened up by MPs and US army special forces troops who beat them up and confine them in tiny rooms. Commonly they are blind-folded and thrown into walls, tied up in painful postures, exposed to loud noises, and an unremitting tone of intimidation. Prisoners taken for transport are 'packaged', fitted with hoods and gags, and often tied to stretchers with duct tape.

How does rendering proceed? The CIA has no standard formula for dealing with the cases it exports. Sometimes, for instance in Saudi Arabia, 'we are able to observe through one-way mirrors the live investigations' said a senior US official. 'In others, we usually get summaries. We will feed questions to the investigators'. The Saudis have been very helpful to American enquiries, as was acknowledged by George Tenet in his speech of December 11th 2002. But, says *The Post*,

Saudi Arabia is suspected of withholding certain information which might prove embarrassing to the Saudi royal family. This explains the increasing tendency for rendition to be moved from Riyadh to Egypt.

Rendition to Jordan is comparatively popular because the Jordanians are considered to be very professional interrogators. 'The most frequently alleged methods of torture include sleep deprivation, beatings on the soles of the feet, prolonged suspension with ropes in contorted positions and extended solitary confinement' said the 2001 report of the State Department on Human Rights in Jordan.

Morocco is another popular centre for rendition, notwithstanding a recent official ban on torture, which human rights organisations believe to be more honoured in the breach than the observance. Another destination which provoked strong protests in Germany was Syria which accepted the rendition of a Syrian who also held German citizenship.

Bob Woodward and his colleagues, who contributed to this report, gave rise to a considerable controversy. Prominent among the contributors was Professor Alan Dershowitz, who called for the legalisation of torture to enable it to be controlled. Dershowitz is a civil libertarian, who wishes to put an end to the blind-fold culture of American interrogators, forcing them to apply for a torture order or warrant in each individual case where tortures are to be applied. The argument for such control is based on the presumption that illicit torture has been widespread and continuing. Since the CIA has beyond doubt been involved in training torturers in a variety of countries in Latin America and further afield, what Dershowitz says will ring true for many people.

'If anyone has any doubt that our CIA, over time, has taught people to torture, has encouraged torture, has probably itself tortured in extreme cases, I have a bridge to sell you in Brooklyn.'

But the question is not whether we want to buy Professor Dershowitz's bridge. The legitimisation of torture would undoubtedly mean an exponential increase in its use, given the present culture of rabid irrationalism. Of course, what is known to everyone who has worked in the field of rehabilitation of victims of torture is that the torture is not about the pursuit of information, but about the humiliation of its victims. It seeks to break their will to resist. It applies cruelty for the explicit purpose of de-humanising its victims. This purpose does not take account of or comprehend its unintended result which is the

dehumanisation of the torturers themselves, and those who employ them.

It would be unwise to say that no truthful information is ever extracted by the administration of pain. But what is absolutely plain is that torture normally generates false confessions, because people will say anything to stop the pain, even if only intermittently.

After the war on Iraq there will be many more prisoners ready to be tortured, whether by 'our own' specialists, or by suitable foreign volunteers from among the lackeys who are willing to assist in rendition. Cruelty will be in season. How will this conduce to the restoration of peace, or the development of human rights, or the growth of civilisation? We are about to establish new schools and universities of brutality, to which the only antidote known to us at this time is human sympathy and solidarity. This will be generated in the peace movement, or nowhere.

***Diego Garcia** has the status of a British Indian Ocean Territory. It is leased by the United States who use it as a strategic military base. There is no British Civilian Administration on Diego Garcia. The island usually has a small complement of less than 50 Royal Naval personnel under a Royal Navy Commander who also acts as the representative of the British Foreign Office.

When the allegations of torture on Diego Garcia were raised in the British House of Lords, on 8 January 2003, Baroness Amos, the Foreign Office Minister, denied them. She said 'The United States Government would need to ask for our permission to bring any suspects to Diego Garcia. It has not done so, and no suspected terrorists are being held on Diego Garcia... under current British Indian Ocean Territory law, there would be no authority for the detention of Al Qaeda suspects in the territory.'

A further enquiry elicited a response from Charles Hamilton of the Overseas Territories Department in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office who replied that: 'Under the various treaties governing the use of Diego Garcia by the US, they would have to ask for our permission before they could hold suspected terrorists there. As Baroness Amos said in the House of Lords on 8 January, they have not done so, and they have assured us that there is no truth in the press stories.'

We sought a response from the *Washington Post* to Baroness Amos's original denial. Barton Gellman, one of the journalists responsible for the article of 26 December, informed us that he saw no reason to modify their story. He wrote:

'Our experience with spokesmen most likely mirrors yours: they persuade themselves sometimes that they avoid a lie (while appearing to call something true false) by using private definitions of ordinary language. The formulation of Baroness Amos might be consistent with a view that those being held are

not suspected “terrorists” but perhaps “associates” of some organisation, or that being held aboard a ship is not “on” Diego Garcia. (I don’t know if they’re aboard ship or not.) Or again that those present are not “held” because they’ve voluntarily agreed to be questioned there in lieu of transfer to some place nastier.

A more complex statement – referring to a secret base for interrogation and torture – might be denied with many things in mind. The spokesman might maintain an unspoken view that the methods of questioning don’t count as torture, and therefore that the entire sentence is wrong because it uses “and” to link interrogation to torture. I don’t know what was in the minds of your officials, but I do not exaggerate the way the game is now played in Washington.

What we have from our sources is that some al Qaeda suspects are indeed being held and questioned at Diego Garcia. The British government could go some way to clearing this up by permitting you or us to pay an unrestricted visit. If I had anything else I could tell you I would publish it, and I haven’t.

ii

**Who Administers the UN?
The Censored Iraqi Declaration**

The overwhelmingly larger part of Iraq’s report on weapons of mass destruction, delivered in December 2002 in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1441, was withheld from the elected members of the Council. We are still seeking an explanation of how this censorship came about, who did it, and on what mandate. The following letters and newspaper article chronicle the story so far.

Letters published in *The Times*

February 13, 2003
Weapons declaration
From Professor Ken Coates

Sir, Jack Straw claims that Iraq’s declaration about its weapons of mass destruction, submitted to the United Nations in December, ‘was neither full, accurate, nor complete’ (Comment, February 5).

The elected members of the United Nations Security Council will have to take Mr Straw’s word for it, since we understand that more than 8,000 of the declaration’s 11,800 pages were omitted when it was circulated to them.

The full dossier was given to the United Nations and transported to New York, where by some mechanism it came into the hands of the

United States Administration, which promised to copy it for members of the Security Council. In the event, two thirds of the declaration were withheld from the ten non-permanent members. I wrote to these members asking whether British press reports on these matters were true (an inquiry to the office of the Secretary-General had produced no response).

The current President of the Security Council, Joschka Fischer, confirmed these facts. In a letter dated Monday, February 3, his office writes:

‘The facts of the case as you present them are correct. In fact the Iraqi statement of around 12,000 pages of 8th December was given in full only to the five permanent members of the Security Council.’

Who authorised this substantial deletion?

Yours sincerely,

KEN COATES

(Chairman), Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation

* * *

February 18, 2003

From Mr Llew Smith, MP for Blaenau Gwent (Labour)

Sir,

Professor Ken Coates asks (letter, February 13th) who authorised the deletion of 8,000 pages of Iraq’s original declaration to the United Nations last December, prior to its distribution to non-permanent UN Security Council members.

I asked the Foreign Secretary about this removal of information in a written question, to which I received the following reply from junior Foreign Office Minister, Denis MacShane:

The President of the UN Security Council decided that the Iraqi Declaration should first be given to [permanent] members of the Security Council with the expertise to assess the risks of proliferation... UNMOVIC and the IAEA will judge what material needs to be excised before it distributes the declaration to all Security Council members (Hansard, December 17, 2002, col.764W).

While I can accept the sensitivity of some of the details in the Iraqi declaration, which could contain information on how to make certain weapons of mass destruction, I do not accept that the diplomatic delegations of member states of the United Nations Security Council

would be unable to keep confidential information that should remain so.

I prefer the suggestion made at the time (report, December 12) that the Iraqi declaration named US and UK suppliers to Iraq's military programme that our Governments did not want made public, as it would show direct complicity in building up Saddam's weapons arsenal.

Yours sincerely,
LLEW SMITH
House of Commons

* * *

February 26, 2003
Implications of weapons dossier cuts
From Professor Ken Coates

Sir, In his response to my letter published on February 13, Llew Smith, MP (letter, February 18), throws a further interesting light on the suppression of two thirds of the Iraqi dossier on weapons of mass destruction which was submitted to the United Nations on December 7.

However, I have recently received more informative letters from the Swedish Foreign Secretary and from Hans von Sponeck, the former Assistant Secretary-General to the UN who resigned in protest at UN policy in 2000, who is glad that this matter has now emerged into the public domain.

On December 7 the presidency of the Security Council was held by Colombia. I understand that the United States deployed all the arts of persuasion to ensure that Colombia yielded up the Iraqi dossier on the implausible pretext that the Americans had superior photocopying facilities to those which were available in the United Nations Secretariat. I still have not been able to elicit precise information about how the suppression of so much of the dossier was decided. But there is a more serious matter.

Both the British and Swedish Foreign Offices agree that the permanent members of the Security Council were involved in transferring to Unmovic and the IAEA the decision about what to excise. But the Swedish Foreign Minister registers the opinion that the Security Council cannot risk having an A team and a B team, one of which is informed, and the other not.

Certainly the permanent members have a special status in respect of voting, but they have no constitutionally valid special status in terms of access to information, or rights to withhold inconvenient information from their colleagues.

This raises a vital principle. As Hans von Sponeck writes in his letter to me:

‘It is not only a case of unacceptable differential treatment of permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, it is also a challenge to the neutrality of the UN Secretariat.’

Yours sincerely,
KEN COATES
(Chairman),
The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation

* * *

Letter from Hans von Sponeck

14 February 2003

Dear Professor Coates,
The seriousness of the ‘dossier incident’ indeed has been overlooked by media and others because of the speed with which the Iraq crisis is evolving. It remains nevertheless a most serious issue which is unique in the history of relations between the UN Secretariat and an individual member government. It is not only a case of unacceptable differential treatment of permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, it is also a challenge to the neutrality of the UN Secretariat. When the broader issue is about war or peace the behaviour of the US Government becomes even more unacceptable. One government insists on a privileged position through premature acquisition of a key document. This in fact reduces the UN to being a tool to a member state.

I am grateful that you are raising this matter,
Yours, Hans von Sponeck

* * *

**Exchange with Joschka Fischer,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Germany**

31 December 2002

Dear Foreign Minister,

As was widely reported in the press, The Iraqi Government prepared an 11,800 page dossier on its role in relation to weapons of mass destruction. We understand that this dossier was given to the UN and transported to New York, where by some mechanism on which we are not completely clear, it came into the hands of the United States administration, which promised to copy it for members of the Security Council.

It has been reported in the British press that in fact the non-permanent members of the Security Council were given more than 8,000 pages fewer than the number which were submitted originally by the Iraqi Government. Is this true? Can you tell us what explanation has been offered for the decision to furnish less than full information about the operation of resolution 1441 to members of the Security Council? How is it expected that you can play a full part in the deliberations which are to come, if you are not in possession of all the evidence?

Since questions of peace and war will be at stake, do you not think that it is obligatory that all members of the Security Council should, by right, receive all relevant information on the subjects to be decided?

Yours sincerely,
Ken Coates

* * *

Dear Professor Coates

Many thanks for your letter of 31st December to the Federal German Foreign Minister Herr Joschka Fischer who has asked me to reply to you,

The facts of the case as you present them are correct. In fact the Iraqi statement of around 12,000 pages of 8th December was given in full only to the 5 permanent members of the Security Council. At this point in time the Federal Republic of Germany was not a member of the security council.

As you know, our temporary membership (of the security council)

began on the 1st January. The circumstances of the distribution of documents to the 15 members of the Security Council was a decision of the former chair of the security council, Colombia. I can imagine that the Colombian diplomatic representatives at the United Nations in New York are in a better position to answer your, in my opinion, very valid question, in regard to the reasons for the particular modality of document distribution that took place at that time.

Once again, many thanks for your letter. I ask for your understanding that I've replied in German.

With friendly greetings and best wishes for your work
Writing as instructed
Dr Ingo Winkelmann

* * *

Exchange with Anna Lindh, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sweden

5 February 2003

Dear Professor Coates,

You are indeed correct in assuming that Iraq has taken much of my time these last few months. Iraq remains an issue high on the EU agenda, and it is of course also an important issue on the Swedish domestic political scene. As for the latter, I am glad to note the political support my Government has received from most other Swedish parties for our position which, as you know, emphasizes the need for a peaceful solution to the conflict, letting the inspectors fulfil their mandate, and keeping the UN Security Council in control of the process.

I do agree when you, in your letter, state that the administrative conduct of the United Nations should be beyond reproach. I do not, however, agree with your description of how the Iraqi declaration was handled by the Security Council, UNMOVIC and the IAEA. The Iraqi declaration was addressed to UNMOVIC and the IAEA, and they received one original set each. After Council consultations it was decided that the five permanent members should receive a copy of the declaration in full, in order to be able to advise UNMOVIC and the IAEA on what parts could possibly be edited out of the declaration. For logistical reasons, the permanent five agreed to let the copying be done by the USA.

UNMOVIC then received advice and suggestions from the permanent five, but the final edited version of the declaration is the work of UNMOVIC itself. I understand there were no differences between UNMOVIC, the IAEA and the permanent five on what parts should be taken out. The 8,000 pages that were taken out are supportive documents, containing technical information, which Iraq at earlier stages had already submitted to the inspectors and to the Council. These 8,000 pages are available on request to the non-permanent members of the Council (I understand that no such request has yet been made to UNMOVIC or the IAEA).

I am therefore satisfied that the handling of the declaration was made in a way that ensured that UNMOVIC and the IAEA had unrestricted and uncontrolled access to the declaration. That is, in this case, the most important aspect of the process.

Not having taken part of the declaration myself, I cannot comment on the need to edit it. I have, however, for the sake of non-proliferation, an understanding of the need not to unnecessarily circulate information that could be used by others in order to gain information; for example, technical information about nuclear weaponry.

As for the handling of the declaration in the Council, we are concerned by the criticism made by Norway and others, that it showed that the Council risked being divided into an 'A-team' and a 'B-team'. This is serious, and we should make sure that the Iraqi declaration is a unique case, and does not set a precedent.

Yours sincerely,
Anna Lindh

* * *

Mrs Anna Lindh
Minister for Foreign Affairs Sweden

13th February, 2003

Dear Mrs Lindh,

I am very grateful for the trouble you have taken to respond to my enquiry about the handling of the Iraqi declaration by the Security Council, UNMOVIC and the IAEA. Yours is the most detailed

description of events that I have been able to elicit, and I do very much appreciate your kindness in spelling it out. I had previously received a letter from the German Foreign Ministry, on the instructions of Joschka Fischer, which confirmed 'the facts of the case as you present them are correct'.

As you will see, I quoted this in my recent letter to *The Times*, publication of which was slightly delayed whilst they made their own independent enquiries. But your letter presents the matter in a different light. Of course, Germany only joined the Security Council after these events had already taken place, and so it is understandable that some misunderstandings could arise, especially in a complex case like this one. However, at least part of the difficulty arises from the letter of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations, dated 7th December 2002. This letter is addressed to Mr. Alfonso Valdiviso, the Colombian UN Ambassador, who was President of the Security Council at the time. I enclose a copy, which, I am sorry to say, is not very readable. It says that the declarations required of Iraq are 'contained in' the letter. Does this mean that there were, in fact, two copies, one of which went to the Colombian President, and the other of which was split between the two relevant inspectorates? I ask you this question because we received a journalistic account of various alleged pressures which were said to have been brought to bear on Colombia by the Americans.

Of course, I would like to set the record straight, and to inform *The Times* newspaper about what you have said, and also, as a courtesy, to inform Joschka Fischer.

It has been precisely because I agree with you and the Norwegians that an 'A-team' and 'B-team' are incompatible with good governance that I have been anxious to get to the bottom of this affair. It is my understanding that the Irish Government shares this conviction. I am very pleased that you uphold an identical view.

I very much fear that war may break out whatever happens in the Security Council, although of course I hope that wiser counsels will prevail. It seems to me that a very large majority of Europe's peoples would prefer to take the Swedish road, had they only got the opportunity so to do.

Yours sincerely,
Ken Coates
Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation

Revealed: 17 British firms armed Saddam with his weapons

Neil Mackay, Sunday Herald, 2/24/03

<http://www.sundayherald.com/31710>

Seventeen British companies who supplied Iraq with nuclear, biological, chemical, rocket and conventional weapons technology are to be investigated and could face prosecution following a *Sunday Herald* investigation.

One of the companies is International Military Services, a part of the Ministry of Defence, which sold rocket technology to Iraq. The companies were named by Iraq in a 12,000 page dossier submitted to the UN in December. The Security Council agreed to US requests to censor 8000 pages – including sections naming western businesses which aided Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme.

The five permanent members of the Security Council – Britain, France, Russia, America and China – are named as allowing companies to sell weapons technology to Iraq.

The dossier claims 24 US firms sold Iraq weapons. Hewlett-Packard sold nuclear and rocket technology; Dupont sold nuclear technology, and Eastman Kodak sold rocket capabilities. The dossier also says some '50 subsidiaries of foreign enterprises conducted their arms business with Iraq from the US'.

* * *

Letter from Mr Gerald James

These excerpts are from Mr James's letter about the censoring of the Iraqi Declaration on weapons of mass destruction.

'I am writing to you as a result of seeing the correspondence in *The Times*. My interest in such matters goes back to 1988. I was Chairman of Astra Holdings PLC, which was a major Defence Company with operations/subsidiaries in the UK (BMARC, Astra Pyrotechnics, Haley & Wells etc.) in the USA (Walters Group, Accudyne, Kilgore), Canada, Belgium (PRB). We supplied a wide variety of ammunition, fuses, weapons, to various Governments. Our main customers were the US Department of Defense and the UK Ministry of Defence but we supplied a large number of Nato, Commonwealth and other

countries. The background story is set out in my book *In the Public Interest*. Our company was collapsed by the Government after the original directors were removed in 1990, some two years later in 1992.

Astra was heavily involved in supplying Iraq and Iran with a variety of weapons/ammunition during the Iran/Iraq war and after. We were also involved in a wide variety of clandestine operations to conduit countries, and other dubious destinations. Some of these activities later received much publicity through two Trade and Industry Select Committees – Project Babylon and Long Range Guns 1992 and BMARC Project List/1996. I was also involved with the Foreign Affairs Select Committee re Pergau Dam/Malaysian Arms Deal 1988; the Public Accounts Committee; the Defence Select Committee; the Scott Inquiry; a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Inquiry and subsequent collapsed DTI prosecutions and various other matters. Our company was connected to other so-called scandals, where the true stories were hidden – BCCI; Ferranti/ISC; Polly Peck; Maxwell; Allivane; Ordtec; Matrix Churchill; SRC, etc.

Subsequent to the publication of my book I received a limited amount of documents on discovery proceedings but the vast majority, thousands of files and documents, were concealed and remain concealed. These documents were seized/stolen by Ministry of Defence (MOD) Police in 16 raids. So sensitive were the contents of some of these files that the MOD Police, Ministry of Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department of Trade and Industry, etc. lied about them to Parliament, Select Committees, the Scott Inquiry and were allowed to get away with it. The Intelligence Services (M16/SIS), the Security Service (MI5), Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS), Central Intelligence Agency, DIA, National Security Agency, etc. all played a part.

What I discovered as Chairman of Astra, and one of the main reasons for the Company's demise, is that we were part of a huge international operation involving public companies, front companies, off-shore accounts, banks, lawyers, accountants – a vast web. No doubt the scheme had its origins in the Cold War but it has taken on an existence of its own. The operation launders money, weapons, manipulates foreign policy, bribes, threatens and enriches selected individuals – politicians, civil servants, company directors, industrialists, bankers, lawyers, etc. The operations are cloaked in the all embracing secrecy epitomised by phrases like “National Security”,

“National Interest”, “Commercial in Confidence”, and Public Interest Immunity Certificates.

I discovered in our case that we had an agent (we have a dossier of evidence from Treasury Solicitor and Directors of MI5 and MI6) of both MI5 and MI6 on our Board. This individual was not prosecuted by the DTI in their collapsed case. In fact the case collapsed when the DTI, fearing mass exposure, released via the Judicial system one document only which showed the DTI Inspectors had recommended no action by the DTI. In spite of this the accused Directors were prosecuted for four years at a cost of £4 million to the taxpayer. I do not wish to go into the whole case but I want to indicate to you why the Iraqi dossier had 8,000 pages removed.

There is no doubt that if we had a legal system which was not totally corrupt these situations would be impossible. As it is there is a control of Ministers via the permanent Civil Service Government and control of the Judicial system and Courts through the Lord Chancellor (unelected). The Judiciary are salaried by the State and the legal system is heavily controlled down to the level of barristers and solicitors. Those who do not toe the line are out. Like the Church prior to the Reformation, the legal system is an unreformed and vast money making machine. I know Scott’s Inquiry was a total farce and “covered up” dealing with trivia... Select Committee Chairmen are selected by the Whips Office – whips like Ministers have security service clearance. Clerks to Select Committees are appointed via the Lord Chancellor’s Office...The Intelligence Services and Security Services have the means to bribe and blackmail and compromise everyone – and do so when required.

One of the facts I discovered is that much of the secret operation involved in the Iran/Iraq war was run from the British Embassy Washington. We were part of it. No doubt similar relations exist today which is why the UK is out of tune with France, Germany, Russia, China etc on Iraq currently. The Gonzales Congressional Inquiry in the USA exposed large numbers of UK companies and connections with Iraq, never mentioned even in the Scott Inquiry.

I have struggled for 13 years to obtain my own company documents, without a lot of success. I know that if I had obtained these documents, the Government’s proposed war with Iraq would now be impossible. I also know such documents would make the Scott Inquiry look ridiculous. The documents would also have collapsed the UK government. The Iraqis in their dossier have exposed names,

identities, connections – individual and commercial – which the UK and US could not risk exposed Exposure would discredit both Government and their policy past and present.

In the course of my struggle I have obtained some interesting papers nevertheless. Some of these have been forced out only because the authorities were put in a corner and because not all officials are corrupt. Why is Sir John Brown still Auditor General at the age of 69 – well beyond Civil Service retirement age? Sir John was appointed by Mrs. Thatcher in 1988 and previously had been senior Civil Service procurement officer of MOD. He was involved in all the major controversial Thatcher defence deals like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, etc. The only one investigated was Saudi (Al Yamamah). Most of the Members of the Public Accounts Committee and Parliament were not allowed to see the report...

To illustrate my point and to illustrate the secrecy of real Government, [there is] one document I did obtain. It is known as the Savill Memorandum. Savill was the head of the Nuclear proliferation department of the DTI (known as "XNP"). The note refers to the Astra and BMARC papers held by the DTI Inspectors, etc. It is dated 12th June 1995. The note is written to Mr Gibson, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the President of the Board of Trade (DTI) who was then Michael Heseltine. The key phrase is: "He says that DTI similarly would not tell Parliament what was in them", i.e. Astra papers. I believe this illustrates the arrogance and flagrant disregard permanent and corrupt government has for Parliament and democracy. It explains how 8,000 pages can be removed from a dossier, which could mean the difference between war and peace, with total contempt for democracy, parliament, the electorate and the World community. Apart from you and Llew Smith who has done much about it?

The press and media are also now largely controlled on such controversial issues... Please note much of the illegal activity was conducted on our premises, notepaper, etc. without our knowledge via parallel bank accounts etc. The point is we have corrupt institutions and that democracy is an illusion. Lying, deception, manipulation of the truth and concealment of evidence are the hallmark of the British and increasingly so of the US State... Please also note all major defence deals like Saudi, Malaysia, Jordan, Indonesia etc were used as conduits to supply Iran, Iraq and other prohibited destinations. The Bofors India deal is a further example.'

iii

Adhering to the Geneva Conventions?

(a) Burying the War Dead

In March 1991, I was Chairman of the European Parliament's Sub committee on Human Rights. With two of my colleagues, Peter Crampton and Henry McCubbin, I wrote to the press about the question of the enforcement of the Geneva Conventions in respect of the burial of the war dead.

The actual number of Iraqi military casualties of that war has long been disputed. In particular, those killed in the famous 'turkey shoot' during the retreat from Kuwait, and those buried alive with them in the aftermath, were never enumerated. In May 1991, the US Defence Agency estimated that 100,000 Iraqi troops had been killed. Other estimates have been much higher. This is what we said then:

'All of us noted that General Schwarzkopf announced that he "was not in the business of body counts". We have also noted that no-one could give a close estimate of the numbers of people killed in the Kuwaiti desert. We have all seen some pictures of the preparations of the mass graves, and we have been informed that many Iraqi soldiers were unidentifiable. No doubt the burial of these dead will be a horrendous job, because so many people have been incinerated or pulped by fragmentation bombs.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember how European wars have culminated. After the dreadful slaughter of 1914-18, the Versailles Treaty resolved on the following principles concerning the identification and burial of the dead.

Article 225

The Allied and Associated Governments and the German Government will cause to be respected and maintained the graves of the soldiers and sailors buried in their respective territories.

They agree to recognise any Commission appointed by an Allied or Associated Government for the purpose of identifying, registering, caring for or erecting suitable memorials over the said graves and to facilitate the discharge of its duties.

Furthermore they agree to afford, so far as the provisions of their laws and the requirements of public health allow, every facility for giving effect to requests that the bodies of their soldiers and sailors may be transferred to their own country.

The following article laid down terms for the burial of deceased prisoners of war and interned civilians.

After the Second World War more universal provisions were agreed.

Tony Blair – The Old New Goes to War

The Final Act for the revision of the Geneva Conventions was agreed in 1949. Article 16 reads:

Parties to the conflict shall record as soon as possible, in respect of each wounded, sick or dead person of the adverse Party falling into their hands, any particulars which may assist in his identification ...

Here the Convention identifies eight different matters on which records should be compiled. Article 16 continues:

Parties to the conflict shall prepare and forward to each other through the same bureau, certificates of death or duly authenticated lists of the dead. They shall likewise collect and forward through the same bureau, one half of a double identity disk, last wills or other documents of importance to the next of kin, money, and in general all articles of an intrinsic or sentimental value, which are found on the dead. These articles, together with unidentified articles, shall be sent in sealed packets, accompanied by statements giving all particulars necessary for the identification of the deceased owners, as well as by a complete list of the contents of the parcel.

In article 17 it is laid down that before persons are buried or cremated they should be carefully examined, if possible by doctors, to confirm death, establish identity and enable a report to be made. Article 17 also insists that the dead be “honourably interred” if possible “according to the rites of the religion to which they belonged”. Article 17 also insists that at the end of hostilities there should be an exchange of lists showing “the particulars of the dead interred therein”.

If such provisions are acceptable at the end of wars between Europeans, by what right are they modified when the victims live in West Asia? Are we to assume that the Geneva Conventions have been suspended by General Schwarzkopf? We think that the United Nations owes the world an explanation on this matter.’

General Schwarzkopf has moved on, but his successors are still repeating the old mantras. Spokesmen from both the British and American forces in Iraq have recently told us that they are ‘not in the business of body counts’.

The difference is that the first Gulf War was about ‘liberating’ Kuwait while the second is supposed to ‘liberate’ the Iraqi people themselves. But if their war dead are unceremoniously dumped, this will not establish confidence that mutual respect will follow.

Back in 1991 we were promptly informed by the office of the

International Red Cross in Geneva that they had already sought to act upon those provisions of the Geneva Conventions which we mentioned in our letter. In fact, ten to fifteen days earlier they had asked the allied forces to supply all necessary information about casualties in Iraq and Kuwait. But, by mid-March, the ICRC had neither received information from the allies about the numbers of dead soldiers who had been buried, nor had they been informed whether any efforts had been made to identify the corpses, nor whether such efforts had been sufficient, within the terms of the Geneva Convention. Nor again had they been sent any reports on these matters, or even informed as to whether such reports were being drawn up.

But the Iraqi Government had already responded to the Commission's enquiries concerning the numbers of allied deaths.

Of course, the allied governments were, and remain, obligated to comply with the request for information from the Red Cross. 'Therefore there is reason for concern' said a spokesman of the ICRC when we enquired about progress on this issue.

By the beginning of June 1991, the ICRC had continued its enquiries, but it had learnt very little. When my assistant, Lydia van de Fliert, telephoned the Commission, she was informed by Mr. Wasserfallen that 'the question of the missing in action and the mortal remains is a very touchy and sensitive one'. Unfortunately, this question has once again become relevant because history has been repeating itself in a most macabre way.

I never found out whether the International Committee of the Red Cross received any answers to its enquiries. The upholding of the Geneva Conventions, for the United States and Britain, appears to be a very one-way street. West Asians and other lesser breeds need not apply.

* * *

Tony Blair – The Old New Goes to War

(b) The Treatment of Prisoners

A letter to Dr. Jakob Kellenberger, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Dear Dr. Kellenberger,

I am sure you will have seen the press reports on 1 April which claimed that some Iraqi prisoners of the American and British forces may be sent to Guantanamo Bay, to be held there alongside Al Qaeda prisoners for interrogation.

The Washington Post has apparently reported that some 'irregulars' are destined for Guantanamo Bay, and the British press has estimated that three hundred suspects captured near Nassiriyah are involved.

What is the present situation of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners? Has the ICRC maintained its original view that all these detainees were entitled to be treated as prisoners of war under the terms of the Convention?

Have the allied forces made any formal approach to the ICRC to determine the legality of the proposed incarceration in Cuba?

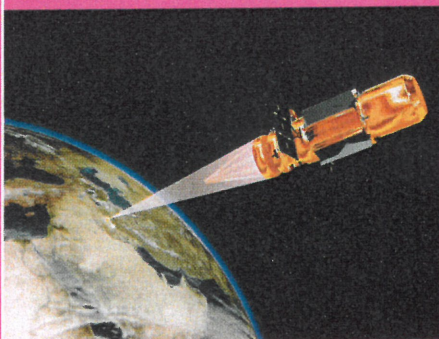
Yours sincerely,
Ken Coates

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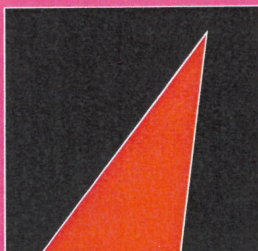
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