



JUNE 2003

C
N
D
B
R
I
E
F
I
N
G

Lessons from the war in Iraq

Submission by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
to the House of Commons Defence Select Committee

Introduction

THE Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) thanks the Defence Select Committee for giving it an opportunity to make a submission to this very important inquiry. CND has a special interest in this inquiry, given that the stated aim of the war in Iraq was to disarm the country of its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). CND's aims and objectives are: to campaign non-violently to rid the world of nuclear weapons and other WMD and to create genuine security for future generations; to change Government policies to bring about the elimination of British nuclear weapons as a major contribution to global abolition; to co-operate with other groups in the UK and internationally to ensure the development of greater mutual security.

It was within the context of its aim and objectives that CND rightly felt that it was its political and moral duty to take a leading role in mobilising public and political opposition to the war in Iraq. Events before, during and since the war have consistently vindicated CND's reasons for opposing the war.

Consider the following:

Illegality of the war

From the outset, CND had no doubt that a military attack on Iraq under any circumstance would be illegal. To prove this point, CND obtained a legal opinion from Rabinder Singh QC and Charlotte Kilroy of Matrix Chambers, which categorically stated that both the Resolution 1441 and the UK/US Draft Resolution did not expressly, or by implication, authorise Member States to use force to disarm Iraq; and that the UK would be acting in violation of international law if it were to join in any attack on Iraq in reliance on the two documents. The vast majority of the members of the United Nations Security Council took a similar view. Most importantly, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: "unilateral action taken outside the Security Council would not conform to the UN charter". *BBC News, 14th March 2003*

Conduct of war

As CND and other NGOs had warned before the war, it is clear today that there have been severe

humanitarian consequences for the Iraqi civilian population. Although the exact number of people who died or otherwise suffered as a direct and indirect result of the war may never be known, news reports and witness accounts by aid organisations have indicated that the indiscriminate military destruction of civilian homes, public utilities such as the main electricity grid and water and sanitation facilities, have exacerbated the suffering of a significant proportion of the population of Iraq already extremely vulnerable as result of 12 years of sanctions.

Today, television sets are bringing to our living rooms heart-breaking images of children facing imminent deaths through chronic hunger, epidemics, water borne disease and from wounds received in direct military attacks. On 30th April, Al-Jazeera TV and other news media reported that 55 people had been killed and dozens more were wounded by a bomb dropped on a popular Baghdad market. "Overnight", the report went on, "a US B-2 stealth bomber dropped two earth-shattering 4,600lb bombs on a communications tower in the capital". Ali Ismail Abbas, the 12-year-old Iraqi boy who lost both his arms and his entire family in a missile attack on his home in Baghdad, came to personify the unspeakable horrors of the war in Iraq. The British government has actively contributed to these horrors.

In a recent Foreign Office Circular entitled: *Iraq – Frequently Asked Questions*, the department admitted that the UK had used both cluster bombs and depleted uranium in the war in Iraq. In its answer to the question: "How can you justify the use of cluster bombs and depleted uranium?" the document states: "Cluster bombs are lawful weapons that provide unique capability against certain legitimate military targets, such as dispersed armoured units... UK forces fired depleted munitions during the conflict because they are the most effective anti-armour weapons". Unfortunately, no due care seems to have been taken to ensure the protection of civilian population against such weapons.

Given this compelling evidence, CND decided to serve Mr Tony Blair, Mr. Geoff Hoon and Mr. Jack Straw with a notice, which made it clear that if the UK acted

so as to breach any International Humanitarian Law (IHL) within the definition of 'war crimes'¹, CND and others would take steps to ensure that they were held accountable within International Criminal Law. Since then, an International Coalition of lawyers and NGOs has come to the same conclusion and warned Blair of possible illegal war crimes.

Lessons from conflict in Afghanistan

Although CND had strongly and unreservedly condemned the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the USA, it also opposed with the same passion, the subsequent US-led military attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. CND believed then, as it does now, that the USA could and will only ensure its own security by engaging in multi-lateral negotiations with other countries to promote global peace and justice for all. After all, the war in Afghanistan shared several common features with the one in Iraq: each war was led by the USA and closely supported by the UK; each was declared to be a "war on terror"; each was presented to the world as a war to liberate the ordinary people in each country; and each was meant to ensure security for the USA in particular, and the world in general.

Since the end of active military operations in Iraq, more similarities between the two wars have emerged. For example, as in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq saw the use of awesome military weaponry including cluster bombs and depleted uranium against a comparatively poorly-armed country and unknown numbers of civilians were needlessly killed. A recent report by the US-based Human Rights Watch on Afghanistan concluded: "Far from emerging as a stable democracy, Afghanistan remains a fractured, undemocratic collection of 'fiefdoms' in which warlords are free to intimidate, extort and repress local populations, while almost completely denying basic freedoms." To underline the political and security problems in Afghanistan, last week the interim President Hamed Kazzai threatened to resign if the warlords do not put down their arms and co-operate with the central government.

The same week also saw a chain of seemingly well-coordinated terrorist attacks, which took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Casablanca in Morocco and in Tel Aviv in Israel. In UK, heavy concrete slabs have been placed around the House of Commons as protection against possible terrorist attacks, while in East Africa six countries have been placed on high security alert. Meanwhile, Osama bin Laden and his deputy Mullah Omar of Afghanistan, as well Saddam Hussein and his top officials are yet to be apprehended, or declared dead. Most importantly, the alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction are yet to be discovered more than five weeks after the end of the war.

Summary

In order to objectively assess the lessons of the war in Iraq, it is necessary to ask one fundamental question: did it achieve its objectives? Clearly, the war has so far failed comprehensively to achieve what it was meant to deliver, namely, the disarmament of Iraqi WMD, the liberation of Iraqi people and the democratisation of their country. However, it has succeeded in achieving some spectacular but un-intended outcomes both in the UK and abroad.

In the UK, it has created deep divisions within the British people, Parliament and within the government, which suffered the resignation of two high-profile Cabinet Ministers and five junior Ministers. It has also left the British Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary facing a possible investigation by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Internationally, it has severely weakened the United Nations, created divisions both within the Security Council in particular and the Member States generally, thus unsettling the international order. It has also created splits within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies and within the European Union.

Socially, it has heightened religious polarisation between Christian and the Muslim communities around the world. In Iraq, it has caused wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure and the deaths or injuries of unknown numbers of people, mainly civilians. It has also caused the breakdown in law and order, which led to the looting of the 700-year-old Iraqi antiques and the theft of radioactive materials from Iraqi nuclear research centres. In summary, the war in Iraq has left the Middle East region in particular and the world in general more insecure than it has ever been before.

Conclusion

If the war in Iraq has taught us any lesson at all, it must be about the futility of trying to achieve the disarmament of weapons of mass destruction through unilateral and pre-emptive military attacks against selective countries. It was therefore with deep regret that CND read the speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which was delivered at the Centre for European Reform on 19th May. He said:

"Since 11 September, all EU Member States recognise that the world has entered a dangerous new era. And we would all agree that the threats to our security – from terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and chaos and contagion from failing states – may in extremis require a military response."

This statement indicates that the UK has not learned any lesson from the failure of pre-emptive military attacks on Iraq and is leaving open the prospect of the use of similar attacks as a tool of attempted disarmament.

CND calls on the Defence Select Committee to remind the Government to recognise and honour its obligation under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), particularly the final statement of the 2000 Review and Extension Conference in which the UK and the four other declared nuclear weapons states gave an “unequivocal undertaking to

accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals”.

They also committed themselves to a programme of 13 practical steps to achieve this goal. Therefore, the government must not only honour this commitment, but also abandon the selective use of military force as a disarmament policy and support non-discriminatory disarmament under the United Nations. This, in CND’s view, is the only way to ensure peace and security for the British people and internationally.

Published by CND Information Department • 162 Holloway Rd • London N7 8DQ.

Tel: 020 7700 2393 • Fax: 020 7700 2357

email: enquiries@cnduk.org • <http://www.cnduk.org>