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Britain's Blair Reflects on Iraq War

Voice of America News reported on September 1 that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote in his newly published memoirs, *A Journey: My Political Life*, that he does not regret his decision to engage Britain in the war in Iraq, stating that he did not foresee the "nightmare" that has unfolded there. The book was published on August 31, the day that the United States formally ended its combat operations in Iraq, while leaving behind an "advisory" force of 50,000 personnel.

Blair spent three years writing the 718-page book, which he describes as "a frank account of my life in politics which illuminates what it is like to be a leader, both for the U.K. and also of course on the international stage. It charts the difficult decisions, the highs and the lows."



[Reuters news](#) reported that, in his book, Blair wrote that he felt "desperately sorry" for the lives cut short in the war, but said the mistaken belief that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction was an "understandable error."

"I have often reflected as to whether I was wrong," he said. "I ask you to reflect as to whether I may have been right."

The former British PM, who was a close ally of President George W. Bush at the outset of the war, seemed somewhat contrite about his role in the decision to go to war: "I feel words of condolence and sympathy to be entirely inadequate," he wrote of the war's casualties. "They have died and I, the decision-maker in the circumstances that led to their deaths, still live."

A report in the British [Guardian](#) newspaper on August 31 quotes Blair from his memoirs:

"I can't regret the decision to go to war.... I can say that never did I guess the nightmare that unfolded, and that too is part of the responsibility. The truth is we did not anticipate the role of al-Qaida or Iran. Whether we should have is another matter; and if we had anticipated, what we would have done about it is another matter again."

Blair writes of his anguish about how families of the fallen may not understand his pain at the loss of so many lives. "Do they really suppose I don't care, don't feel, don't regret with every fibre of my being the loss of those who died?" Blair writes as he pays tribute to coalition soldiers and Iraqis who lost their lives.

"The anguish arises from a sense of sadness that goes beyond conventional description or the stab of compassion you feel on hearing tragic news," he adds. "Tears, though there have been many, do not encompass it. I feel desperately sorry for them, sorry for the lives cut short, sorry for the



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families whose bereavement is made worse by the controversy over why their loved ones died, sorry for the utterly unfair selection that the loss should be theirs."

The *Guardian* observed: "Blair admits that the intelligence that Saddam possessed a WMD program 'turned out to be incorrect.'"

Amazingly, reports the *Guardian*, despite admitting this error, Blair *still* maintains that the invasion of Iraq was the correct course of action. He defends the decision by citing a 2004 report that included tapes of meetings between Saddam and senior staff at which the WMD program "was discussed."

A report in the [New York Times](#) for September 1 seems to indicate that Blair has not sufficiently pondered the wisdom of the Spanish-born philosopher and essayist George Santayana, who wrote in *Reason in Common Sense*: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Noted the *Times*:

Separately, Mr. Blair, in a BBC interview to mark [*A Journey's*] publication, urged a tough Western approach to Iran's nuclear program, including possible military intervention, saying it was "wholly unacceptable" for Tehran to seek a nuclear weapons capacity....

"I am saying I think it is wholly unacceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapons capability and I think we have got to be prepared to confront them, if necessary, militarily," he said. The interview is to be broadcast later on Wednesday, but the BBC released segments of it earlier.

"I think there is no alternative to that if they continue to develop nuclear weapons," Mr. Blair said. "They need to get that message loud and clear."

One wonder why, if Blair is so alarmed about the possibility of Iran developing a nuclear arsenal, he favored removing Iran's most bitter and powerful adversary, Saddam Hussein, from power. As an article in [Wikipedia](#) notes: "During the [1980-1988] war [between Iraq and Iran], Iraq was regarded by the West (and specifically the United States) as a counterbalance to post-revolutionary Iran. The support of Iraq took the form of technological aid, intelligence, the sale of dual-use and military equipment and satellite intelligence to Iraq."

The West, it seems, never learns from history that the surest way to foment conflict in a region — and to generate ill-will besides — is to interfere in the status quo.

Some may say that it is easy from our vantage point seven years later to question decisions made by world leaders (particularly George W. Bush and Tony Blair) who possessed inadequate information. That argument is negated, however, when we look at the conclusions made by a member of the U.S. Congress, whose access to intelligence sources was undoubtedly even more limited than what was available to the two heads of government.

Speaking before the House of Representative on September 10, 2002 — six months before the U.S./UK invasion of Iraq — Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) presented a list of 35 "[Questions That Won't Be Asked About Iraq](#)."

Among the questions Dr. Paul raised:

- Is it not also true that we are willing to bomb Iraq now because we know it cannot retaliate — which just confirms that there is no real threat?
- Is it not true that those who argue that even with inspections we cannot be sure that Hussein might be hiding weapons, at the same time imply that we can be more sure that weapons exist in



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the absence of inspections? ?[Emphasis in original.]

- Is it not true that the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency was able to complete its yearly verification mission to Iraq just this year with Iraqi cooperation? ?
- Is it not true that the intelligence community has been unable to develop a case tying Iraq to global terrorism at all, much less the attacks on the United States last year? Does anyone remember that 15 of the 19 hijackers came from Saudi Arabia and that none came from Iraq? ? Was former CIA counter-terrorism chief Vincent Cannistraro wrong when he recently said there is no confirmed evidence of Iraq's links to terrorism?
- Is it not true that northern Iraq, where the administration claimed al-Qaeda were hiding out, is in the control of our "allies," the Kurds? ?
- Is it not true that the vast majority of al-Qaeda leaders who escaped appear to have safely made their way to Pakistan, another of our so-called allies? ?
- Has anyone noticed that Afghanistan is rapidly sinking into total chaos, with bombings and assassinations becoming daily occurrences; and that according to a recent UN report the al-Qaeda "is, by all accounts, alive and well and poised to strike again, how, when, and where it chooses." ?
- Why are we taking precious military and intelligence resources away from tracking down those who did attack the United States — and who may again attack the United States — and using them to invade countries that have not attacked the United States? ?
- Is it not true that the constitutional power to declare war is exclusively that of the Congress? Should presidents, contrary to the Constitution, allow Congress to concur only when pressured by public opinion? Are presidents permitted to rely on the UN for permission to go to war? ?
- Are we prepared for possibly thousands of American casualties in a war against a country that does not have the capacity to attack the United States? ?
- Did we not assist Saddam Hussein's rise to power by supporting and encouraging his invasion of Iran? Is it honest to criticize Saddam now for his invasion of Iran, which at the time we actively supported? ? Where does the Constitution grant us permission to wage war for any reason other than self-defense? ?
- Is it not true that since World War II Congress has not declared war and — not coincidentally — we have not since then had a clear-cut victory?
- Why don't those who want war bring a formal declaration of war resolution to the floor of Congress?

A reading of the entire list will demonstrate that Rep. Paul's observations in 2002 — even *without* the advantage of hindsight — indicated a more realistic understanding of how to combat terrorism than do those of Blair (and Bush, and Obama) *with* that advantage.

Photo: Copies of Britain's former Prime Minister Tony Blair's book are seen displayed at a bookshop in London on Sept. 1, 2010: AP Images



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