

MEDIA RELEASE

Britain complicit in 10 million deaths, new book claims



Britain is complicit in the deaths of around 10 million people since 1945, according to a book published today.

Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses by historian Mark Curtis also pieces together the Blair government's "public deception campaign" on Iraq and reveals government plans to increase "information operations" directed towards the public. Citing official documents, it discloses that the government has in effect abandoned a commitment to international law and is poised for a new period of global military intervention in alliance with the US.

Unpeople documents recently declassified government files to reveal:

- British support for the 1963 killings in Iraq that brought Saddam's Ba'ath party to power

- British arming of Baghdad regimes' brutal aggression against the Kurds throughout the 1960s
- A covert British military role in the US war in Vietnam and secret correspondence from Wilson and Heath privately backing the US
- The Heath government's support for the Idi Amin coup in Uganda in 1971 and the 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile
- Covert operations to overthrow governments in Indonesia and Guyana
- Previous "dirty wars" in the Middle East, involving extensive war crimes, in Oman, Aden and Yemen

The new research calculates the number of deaths from British military interventions and at the hands of regimes strongly supported by Britain. Britain bears "significant responsibility" for between 8-13 million deaths.

Notes for Editors:

- 1 Mark Curtis is a former Research Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and author of *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World* (Vintage, London, 2003). He is currently Director of the World Development Movement; www.markcurtis.info

UNPEOPLE - BRITAIN'S SECRET HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

IN MORE DETAIL

10 million deaths

This is the estimated number since 1945 for which Britain bears significant responsibility.

- “Direct responsibility” (where British military or covert forces have played a direct role in conflicts) amounts to 4.0 - 5.7 million deaths.
- “Indirect responsibility” (where Britain has provided strong support for allies engaged in aggression or killing) amounts to 3.3 – 6.2 million deaths.
- There are two other categories – “active inaction” (where Britain specifically helped to block international action to halt killings) and “others”.
- The total figure – allowing for often wide variation in estimates – is 8.6 – 13.5 million.

Blair and Iraq

- Piecing together public statements and evidence from the Hutton and Butler reports shows that the British government understood the war was illegal. The government has also inferred, in an unnoticed response to a parliamentary enquiry, that it will no longer be bound by international law: “*We will always act in accordance with legal obligations but also effectively to defend the UK’s people and interests and secure international peace and stability*”. (Emphasis added)
- The government promoted a “public deception campaign” and fabricated the case for going to war. The key point is not an intelligence “failure”. The intelligence services indeed failed to state that Iraq possessed no WMD but they clearly told the government that Iraq was only a threat in response to an invasion. The conclusions of the Hutton and Butler reports that the government did not “sex up” intelligence is nonsense - the Al Qaeda link, the 45 minute claim, the Niger uranium story and the overall threat from Iraq were all exaggerated or fabricated.
- Andrew Gilligan’s story was essentially correct. It was wrong in stating

that the 45 minute claim was inserted by Alastair Campbell knowing it was wrong; but right in stating that it was inserted knowing that it was wrong since it appeared in the dossier implying that it referred to long-range weapons – which Geoff Hoon, John Scarlett and Richard Dearlove all knew to be wrong (ie, they knew it referred only to battlefield weapons).

- The government has announced that “information operations” will increase in future. According to the Ministry of Defence, British military strategy “will place greater emphasis on information and media operations, which are critical to success”.
- The December 2003 Defence White Paper is an extraordinary document detailing unprecedented plans to project military power around the world, ostensibly in response to terrorism. It calls for "*expeditionary operations*" in "*crises occurring across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*" involving new cruise missiles, combat aircraft and aircraft carriers. Britain's military is poised "*for more frequent operations*". Its "pre-emptive" military strategy - "*in the post-cold war world, we must be prepared to go to the crisis, rather have the crisis come to us*" - is not taken from the US: this was drawn up by British planners in 1998, before the Bush administration took office.

1963 Iraq killings

5,000 members of the Iraqi Communist Party, including doctors, lawyers and other professionals, were hunted down and killed by the military regime that seized power in a February 1963 coup. It has long been known that the US passed a hit-list of names to the new regime. The British documents show that officials knew the massacres were occurring and welcomed the new regime as it was carrying them out. A Foreign Office official wrote: "*Such harshness may well have been necessary as a short term expedient*". Britain's Ambassador, Roger Allen, wrote: "*We should support it [the regime] and help it in the long term to establish itself so that this communist threat may gradually diminish*". The Foreign Office stated: "*We wish the new regime well*" and wanted to "*make friendly contact as soon as possible with the Ba'athist and nationalist leaders*".

Arming aggression against the Kurds

In 1963 and 1965 Baghdad launched brutal offensives, described by British officials as a "*terror campaign*", against the Kurds, who were demanding autonomy in Iraq. Britain supplied various categories of arms

knowing they would be used against the Kurds: 18,000 rockets to the Iraqi air force, 280,000 rounds of ammunition, mortar bombs, machine guns and armed helicopters. Demolition slabs were exported knowing that they “*will probably be used... for the demolition of Kurdish villages*”.²⁷ Hawker Hunters previously supplied by Britain were used in “*indiscriminate air attacks*” against villages. The Iraqi campaign involved the use of poison gas but when Kurdish leader, Mustafa Barzani, appealed to Harold Wilson in 1965 to prevent Baghdad further using such weapons, Wilson simply did not reply. This complicity was the precedent for Baghdad’s chemical attacks in the 1980s.

British role in the Vietnam war

- The government always denied sending troops to Vietnam, but the documents show they did. The covert “Noone mission”, under Richard Noone, a British adviser to the colonial Malayan government, began in summer 1962 and was active for at least a year. It appears to have included SAS troops acting under civilian cover and was attached to US units.
- Britain also denied providing military support to the Vietnamese regimes. But the documents show that Britain provided “counter-insurgency” advice and trained hundreds of Vietnamese soldiers. The brutal US “counter-insurgency” programmes were in fact based on British prototypes developed by Robert Thompson, a senior official in the colonial Malayan government.
- The documents reveal private British backing for all stages of US military escalation. When Harold Wilson sometimes dissented from specific US actions in public, he invariably reassured US President Johnson of his continuing support in private. For example, when the US bombed Hanoi and Haiphong for the first time in June 1966, Wilson told parliament that “*we have made it clear that we would oppose any bombing involving Hanoi or Haiphong*” and issued a statement disassociating the government from the bombing. Yet the documents show that the statement was passed to the US for approval while Wilson assured Johnson that “*I cannot see that there is any change in your basic position that I could urge on you*”.

British support for Idi Amin

- The January 1971 coup was strongly welcomed by British officials. They were keen to see the back of the Milton Obote government which

was threatening nationalization of British commercial interests and criticising the UK over selling arms to apartheid South Africa. After the coup, senior Foreign Office official, Harold Smedley, wrote that *"Anglo-Ugandan relations can only benefit from the change"*. Officials recognized that Amin was *"corrupt and unintelligent"* and immediately acquiesced in the new regime's repression. One Foreign Office official wrote that *"I can appreciate that a period of rule free from all politics... could be desirable"*. Dozens of armoured cars were supplied along with a military training team. In August 1971, when Amin established a military junta and a month after hundreds of army officers were killed by forces loyal to Amin, Britain offered a £10 million loan.

- British initial support for Amin helped to consolidate his rule, soon leading to a reign of terror in which 300,000 were killed. The break with Amin only came in June 1972 when Amin called for joint African exercises with the Soviet navy and with army indiscipline increasing. In August, Amin announced he would expel Asian British passport-holders. The documents also show British refusals to participate in moves by Obote loyalists to attempt a return to Uganda.

The Pinochet coup in Chile

- The CIA's role in overthrowing the Salvador Allende government has long been known. The British documents show that officials welcomed the toppling of the democratically-elected government, immediately sought good relations with the new military junta and connived with it to mislead the public. British officials shared US fears of Allende's nationalization programme and recognised that the poor had gained under Allende. After the coup, Ambassador Richard Seconde noted that British businesses *"will be overjoyed at the prospect of consolidation which the new military regime offers"* and that *"the lack of political activity is, for the time being, no loss"*. Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home stated: *"For British interests... there is no doubt that Chile under the junta is a better prospect than Allende's chaotic road to socialism"*.
- Seconde also made an agreement with a junta member on the wording of a British government statement mildly expressing concern about events in Chile. Douglas-Home stated that this was done *"to defend our relatively early recognition of the new government against domestic criticism"*.
- The Heath government immediately made clear to the junta that it

would honour the arms contracts made with Allende and hoped for more offers, though *“we shall wish to play these as quietly as possible for some time to come”*.

Past “dirty wars” in the Middle East

- The documents reveal a covert British operation to destabilise the republican government in Yemen that took power in 1962, fuelling a civil war costing around 200,000 lives. MI6, with SAS and mercenary support, organized secret arms supplies to Royalist forces in Yemen and in neighbouring Aden to fight the Egyptian-backed government. Mine-laying and sabotage operations were conducted along with *“assassination or other action against key personnel... especially Egyptian intelligence service officers”*. While this was occurring, Prime Minister Douglas-Home told parliament that: *“Our policy towards Yemen is one of non-intervention in the affairs of that country”*.
- The documents reveal military attacks on civilian targets such as livestock and water supplies, in suppressing revolts in Aden in 1964 and Oman in 1957. In the latter, secrecy was recognized as paramount: The Foreign Office noted: *“we want to avoid the RAF killing Arabs if possible, especially as there will be newspaper correspondents on the spot”*. The British commander stated that throughout the campaign *“a game of bluff and deceit was carried out, which was far from pleasant”*.