

## The reporting of Iraq and Israel: an abuse of media power

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I'd like to start with three short anecdotes.

A friend went into Blackwells university bookshop in Oxford and asked the counter clerk: 'Do you have a copy of Alan Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel*?' 'There is no case for Israel', the counter clerk replied.

A distinguished and influential military figure confided to me that Rupert Murdoch had given a personal order that articles in *The Times* against the Iraq war should be drastically limited — and that he had done so, 'on the instruction of the Jewish lobby in America'. Furthermore, George Bush had invaded Iraq because 'he had Ariel Sharon's hand up his back'.

At a recording of the BBC radio panel show *Any Questions*, in the solid Conservative heartland of Wokingham in Berkshire, an overwhelmingly conservative audience applauded and cheered the veteran far-left activist Tariq Ali when he said that that America was the fount of world terror, that George Bush was more of a danger to the world than Saddam Hussein, and that if any country was a menace to world peace through its weapons of mass destruction it was not Iraq but Israel.

How has Middle Britain come to applaud the view — hitherto confined to the most extreme left-wing circles — that the President of the United States is more of a danger than an unbalanced dictator with a terrorist history? How have such solid citizens come to view a democracy — Israel — that has been under attack since its foundation as the greatest threat to world peace? And how has the ancient libel of sinister global Jewish power been allowed to rear its head so openly once again?

Britain is gripped by an unprecedented degree of irrationality, prejudice and hysteria over the issues of Iraq, the terrorist jihad and Israel. All three are intimately linked; all three, however, are thought by public opinion to be linked in precisely the wrong way. This is because all three have been systematically misreported, distorted and misrepresented through a lethal combination of profound ignorance, political malice and ancient prejudices.

This systematic abuse by the media is having a devastating impact in weakening the ability of the west to defend itself against the unprecedented mortal threat that it faces from the Islamic jihad. People cannot and will not fight if they don't understand the nature or gravity of the threat that they face, so much so that they vilify their own leaders while sanitising those who would harm them.

Yet that is what is happening. Public debate in Britain is now marked by a collapse of objectivity, truth, fairness and balance. Logic and morality have been stood on their heads.

Victims are portrayed as oppressors, while mass murderers have to be understood and sympathised with. The outcome is an ugly and dangerous climate in which prejudice and lies have achieved the status of unchallengeable fact; a climate which is now being eagerly manipulated by terrorists who know that if they ratchet up their barbarism and distribute the video the result will merely be an ever greater public clamour for Tony Blair to split away from President Bush and shatter the coalition in defence of the free world.

The public has been grossly misled by the British media, and falsehoods have become accepted as fact, so much so that any statement of actual facts which undermine this mindset are excised from the debate altogether.

In this talk, I will first of all look at the twisting of the reporting, then suggest why this has happened and then finally discuss the effect it is having.

The reporting of Iraq is not actually about Iraq at all. From the start, there has been very little attempt to produce a balanced picture of a highly complex situation. Instead, the media has viewed everything that has happened through a prism of opposition based on the certainty that Bush and Blair took their countries to war on a lie.

Of course, some media organisations supported the war in Iraq. But the anti-war mindset quickly came to dominate the debate, in my view largely because of the BBC, whose influence over the country – particularly over conservatively-minded people who tend to regard the Beeb as their secular church – cannot be over-estimated. The nature of that influence could be gauged very early on by the reaction during the war of the crew of the flagship Royal Navy carrier *Ark Royal*, whose crew turned off the BBC because of its relentless defeatism and negatively skewed reporting – which was so outrageous it even drew a protest from its own correspondent in the war zone.

For the BBC and other media, there was always one story about Iraq – that the war was a criminal folly. Their original predictions that Saddam would not be toppled, of mass uprisings all over the Arab world, of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis turned into refugees proved wrong. So they kept shifting the goalposts and rewrote history to prove that Bush and Blair were malign or stupid or both. When no WMD were found, they seized on this to claim that the war was only fought because we were told there were WMD stockpiles. What started as argument about how to contain the menace of Saddam has now turned into the assertion that Saddam posed no threat at all.

As Sir Max Hastings wrote in the *Guardian*:

‘Yet it bears stating again and again that we went to war, launching thousands of British soldiers into Iraq, on a pretext now conclusively exposed as false’. (Max Hastings, *Guardian*, September 20 2004)

But it was not the pretext for war that was false but arguments of people like Hastings and countless other prominent journalists who have rewritten history. It is just not true that we went to war on account of the stockpiles.

If you read the actual speeches and written statements by Tony Blair or Jack Straw, it is clear that the overwhelming emphasis was on Saddam's refusal to obey the binding UN resolutions, his resulting failure to prove that he had destroyed his WMD programmes and renounced his intention to continue developing WMD, and the dangers posed by the axis of rogue states, WMD and terrorism. Yes, the existence of the stockpiles was inferred from the fact that the weapons inspectors had repeatedly itemised all the WMD that Saddam was known to have had and which was still unaccounted for. But they were not the reason for war.

In any event, it is a leap of logic to state that because no WMD have been found, none ever existed in the first place. This doesn't follow at all. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Several explanations for what happened to the missing WMD are eminently plausible. Saddam could have destroyed them in the immediate run-up to war. He could have transported them to a neighbouring country: indeed the former head of the Iraq Survey group Dr David Kay said some of it was hidden in Syria, an observation not reported by the British media. Or they could still be buried somewhere in Iraq: it would all fit into a double garage, and Iraq is a huge country. Given Saddam's history, the conclusions of the weapons inspectors during the 1990s that they were being obstructed and lied to, and the intelligence the world believed when it signed up to UN resolution 1441 in 2002 which stated Saddam had WMD, any or all of these explanations would be rational. But instead, the media decided irrationally that absence of evidence of WMD was evidence they never existed.

The final report of the Iraq Survey Group told us that Saddam destroyed his WMD stocks in 1991 and didn't produce any significant amount after that. There was much crowing by anti-war commentators that this proved there were never any WMD in Iraq after all, and renewed calls for the Prime Minister to apologise for misleading the country. But that report also said that Saddam was using the money he had siphoned off from the oil-for-food programme to buy WMD material; and that he had re-started a ballistic missile programme forbidden by the UN. These findings alone showed that Saddam had been in breach of the UN resolutions, the legal basis for war. Moreover, the report also said that Saddam had destroyed his WMD stocks in 1991 'in order to conceal Iraq's WMD capabilities'; and also that in 1998, the weapons inspectors had detected VX-related compounds on ballistic missile warhead fragments, and had discovered a document describing the use of 'special weapons' by the Iraqi Air Force. All these things - along with repeated references to Saddam's intention to resume WMD production when the sanctions that were falling apart finally ended - indicated that Saddam was still very much in the WMD business. Yet none of them was paid any attention, or even in some cases reported at all, by the British media.

Moreover, while commentators made much of the finding that the intelligence was wrong, they also told us simultaneously that the government had lied about it. Well, which was it? Either the government acted in good faith on what all available intelligence was telling it, which is now said to have been wrong; or it misrepresented that intelligence

by distorting and exaggerating it. It can't have been both. Yet commentators are indeed claiming both - and blaming Bush and Blair for both.

Then there was the media's obsession with the claim made in the government's September dossier that Saddam had WMD which could be fired within 45 minutes of the order to deploy them. This one statement — which has now been withdrawn by MI6 — became inflated to ludicrous proportions, largely because the BBC *Today* programme alleged that the government had made this claim, which it knew to be suspect, to 'sex up' its case to the public - a titanic row which pitted the BBC against the government and led to the death of the weapons inspector Dr David Kelly.

Day after day, week after week the 45-minute claim dominated the media's Iraq coverage. But the whole issue was yet another straw man. The suggestion that this one claim had been instrumental in persuading the country of the case for war was demonstrably ludicrous. In all the welter of speeches and documents about Iraq, this 45 minute claim was mentioned five times — of which three were merely repetitions in summaries within the same document. And in any event, the contention that it greatly amplified the danger from Saddam is patently absurd. Why did the claim that he could deploy some of these weapons in 45 minutes make him more dangerous? Would we all have relaxed if we had been told it would take him four hours, or even four days to fire them after giving the order to do so?

And now we're being told that Saddam was no threat at all. That he had no link not just to al Qaeda but to terror. But Saddam's Iraq was a terrorist state. It financed, trained and sheltered terrorists. So how can such a nonsensical statement be made without serious challenge?

Every single development in the Iraq saga has been reported through a prism of prejudice. The whole debate has been characterised by distortion, omission and misrepresentation. The intended outcome is not just to discredit Tony Blair but to induce such cynicism and fury about the Iraq war that Britain withdraws its troops, peels off from the US and undermines the defence of the west.

Take the inquiry chaired by Lord Hutton into the row between the government and the BBC over the claim by the *Today* programme that the government had deliberately over-egged the intelligence. The evidence to Hutton bore very little relation to the press reports of those submissions.

The actual evidence showed quite clearly that the central BBC charge, that the Government gave the country a false prospectus for war by exaggerating the threat from Saddam against the opposition of the intelligence service, was false. But paper after paper cherry-picked or spun that evidence to fit the prior agenda that Blair was a rogue and that Gilligan's story, although wrong, was actually right.

In due course, Lord Hutton duly cleared the government of all charges about the intelligence. As a result, the media was beside itself with fury and contempt. Because

Hutton had failed to deliver the Prime Minister's head on a plate, he was transformed overnight from being portrayed as an exemplary invigilator and tough forensic mind to a government patsy and naïve dupe who had produced a whitewash.

To give one example of the way the press twisted the evidence. The *Independent* newspaper published an article by Dr Brian Jones, a former Defence Intelligence expert who claimed that not a single one of his colleagues backed the most contentious claims in the government dossier. The headline over its front-page splash screamed:

'Intelligence chief's bombshell: we were overruled on dossier'. (*Independent*, February 4 2004)

This implied that, contrary to the Hutton finding, the government did in fact overrule the intelligence services to suggest a threat posed by Saddam that the spies did not believe. In fact, as Dr Jones made abundantly clear, he was claiming that these analysts were overruled within the Defence Intelligence Service itself by their own superiors. This was in fact perfectly clear from Dr Jones's testimony to Hutton, as was his complaint that he and the other DIS staff never actually saw the intelligence relating to the 45-minute claim because it was so sensitive. He had been kept out of the loop. So what price his evaluation of evidence he hadn't seen?

What all this revealed, surely, was not government iniquity but that the intelligence world disagreed profoundly within itself about Iraq - a fact that has been clear from all the unattributable briefings and spinning from within the secret world, which the media have nevertheless swallowed uncritically rather than treating them with the caution that would normally be afforded sources with such likely axes to grind.

After Hutton let their quarry escape, the media moved the goalposts again to the missing WMD. By happy coincidence for them, Dr David Kay, the former head of the Iraq Survey Group, was blowing a fuse in America about gross intelligence errors. His remarks were promptly misreported to support the charge that Saddam was no threat and we were led to war on a lie. Certainly, Kay claimed there had been a major failure of intelligence. But he was specifically referring to large weapons stockpiles. He was not saying Saddam was therefore no threat on the WMD front. On the contrary, he said that 'right up to the end' the Iraqis were trying to produce the deadly poison ricin. 'They were mostly researching better methods for weaponisation', he said.

Let's remind ourselves of a few other things he said in his interim report:

'We have discovered dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002'. (Dr David Kay, ISG Interim Report)

Among the concealed weapons programme he found were:

'A clandestine network of laboratories and safe houses within the Iraqi Intelligence Service that contained equipment subject to UN monitoring and suitable for continuing CBW research... New research on BW-applicable agents, Brucella and Congo Crimean Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF), and continuing work on ricin and aflatoxin were not declared to the UN... 'Plans and advanced design work for new long-range missiles with ranges up to at least 1000 km - well beyond the 150 km range limit imposed by the UN.' (Dr David Kay, ISG Interim Report)

In early 2004 he told Fox Television:

'We know there were terrorist groups in state [Iraq] still seeking WMD capability. Iraq, although I found no weapons, had tremendous capabilities in this area. A marketplace phenomenon was about to occur, if it did not occur; sellers meeting buyers. And I think that would have been dangerous if the war had not intervened.' (Dr David Kay, Fox News, 2004)

Yet none of this was reported by the media, which merely trumpeted Kay's blasts against the faulty intelligence over weapons stockpiles to give the false impression that Kay was against the war and that he thought Saddam had posed no threat from WMD.

Let me take you through an article published in the *Spectator* magazine last summer, which repays study because the way it treats the facts about Tony Blair and Iraq is typical of dozens of articles and broadcast reports. In it, Peter Osborne argued that Blair should be impeached on the grounds that Saddam actually had posed no threat to us unless he was attacked first, and that the grounds set out by Blair for war were now proved to have been a lie.

Osborne wrote:

'The discrepancy between the Prime Minister's version of events ("we know he has stockpiles of major amounts of chemical and biological weapons") and the JIC's cautious view that Iraq "may have hidden small quantities of [chemical] agents and weapons" beggars belief. (*Spectator*, August 28 2004)

But Blair has conceded that the intelligence on the stockpiles was wrong. And yet every intelligence service thought Saddam had these stockpiles. And it is also clear from the Butler report on the use of intelligence on Iraq that in any event, according to British intelligence, no chemical or biological stockpiles were needed as Iraq could make such weapons within weeks.

As the Joint Intelligence Committee said in September 1994:

'Hidden stockpiles are probably unnecessary as the Iraqi civil chemical industry can produce all the precursors needed to make mustard agent and most of those for nerve agents.' (JIC, 8 September 1994; Butler report)

Next, Osborne told us that the motion proposing war with Iraq before the House of Commons read as follows:

'This House recognises that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security.' Osborne went on: 'Today we can see that this statement was nonsense, and in no way calibrated with the intelligence available to the Prime Minister.' (*Spectator*, August 28 2004)

It would be nice if Osborne's report of that motion calibrated with what the Commons was debating that day. For this is what the motion actually said:

'That this House notes its decisions of 25th November 2002 and 26th February 2003 to endorse UN Security Council Resolution 1441; recognises that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security; notes that in the 130 days since Resolution 1441 was adopted Iraq has not co-operated actively, unconditionally and immediately with the weapons inspectors, and has rejected the final opportunity to comply and is in further material breach of its obligations under successive mandatory UN Security Council Resolutions; regrets that despite sustained diplomatic effort by Her Majesty's Government it has not proved possible to secure a second Resolution in the UN because one Permanent Member of the Security Council made plain in public its intention to use its veto whatever the circumstances; notes the opinion of the Attorney General that, Iraq having failed to comply and Iraq being at the time of Resolution 1441 and continuing to be in material breach, the authority to use force under Resolution 678 has revived and so continues today; believes that the United Kingdom must uphold the authority of the United Nations as set out in Resolution 1441 and many Resolutions preceding it, and therefore supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; offers wholehearted support to the men and women of Her Majesty's Armed Forces now on duty in the Middle East; in the event of military operations requires that, on an urgent basis, the United Kingdom should seek a new Security Council Resolution that would affirm Iraq's territorial integrity, ensure rapid delivery of humanitarian relief, allow for the earliest possible lifting of UN sanctions, an international reconstruction programme, and the use of all oil revenues for the benefit of the Iraqi people and endorse an appropriate post-conflict administration for Iraq, leading to a representative government which upholds human rights and the rule of law for all Iraqis; and also welcomes the imminent publication of the Quartet's roadmap as a significant step to bringing a just and lasting peace settlement between Israelis and Palestinians and for the wider Middle East region, and endorses the role of Her Majesty's Government in actively working for peace between Israel and Palestine.' (*Hansard*, March 18 2003)

So the motion was very much longer than the phrase Osborne simply took out of it. What he omitted from the text of that motion showed that the heart of the case for war was Saddam's breach of the UN resolutions:

'That this House notes the opinion of the Attorney General that, Iraq having failed to comply and Iraq being at the time of Resolution 1441 and continuing to be in material breach, the authority to use force under Resolution 678 has revived and so continues today; believes that the United Kingdom must uphold the authority of the United Nations as set out in Resolution 1441 and many Resolutions preceding it, and therefore supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction'. (*Hansard*, March 18 2003)

Next, Osborne asserted:

'Downing Street asserted that the UN inspectors 'proved' that illicit weapons existed inside Iraq. Actually they merely said that the materials were unaccounted for; the distinction was clearly made in intelligence reports but not by the Prime Minister to Parliament.' (*Spectator*, August 28 2004)

But this is what Blair actually told Parliament:

'When the inspectors left in 1998, they left unaccounted for 10,000 litres of anthrax; a far-reaching VX nerve agent programme; up to 6,500 chemical munitions; at least 80 tonnes of mustard gas, and possibly more than 10 times that amount; unquantifiable amounts of sarin, botulinum toxin and a host of other biological poisons; and an entire Scud missile programme. We are asked now seriously to accept that in the last few years-contrary to all history, contrary to all intelligence-Saddam decided unilaterally to destroy those weapons. I say that such a claim is palpably absurd...'. (*Hansard*, March 18 2003)

Next, Osborne claimed:

'Tony Blair told the House of Commons on 24 September 2002 that Saddam's WMD programme was 'active, detailed and growing', in flat contradiction to intelligence assessments showing that programmes had been frozen or "hindered".' (*Spectator*, August 28 2004)

But in 2000 and 2001, the JIC warned:

'It is likely that Iraq is continuing to develop its offensive chemical warfare (CW) and biological warfare (BW) capabilities... Facilities formerly associated with Iraq's chemical warfare programme at its Habbaniyah I and II sites are being reconstructed...'. (JIC, 19 April 2000, Butler report)

'We believe that Iraq retains some production equipment, stocks of CW precursors, agent and weapons. . .' (JIC, 10May 2001, Butler report)

And also:

'We assess that within a year Iraq will begin production of Al Samoud and possibly its extended range version. Both could deliver a conventional, chemical or biological warhead. (JIC, 10 May 2001, Butler report)

And if we're talking threat here, Butler also confirmed that Saddam had indeed tried to buy uranium from Niger, evidence of an ongoing and active nuclear weapons programme, but which was constantly claimed by the anti-war lobby to have been a lie — a confirmation strangely absent from Osborne's article.

Next, Osborne said:

'... over four fifths of the intelligence about Iraqi deception and concealment came from just two sources, both of which have since been recognised as dodgy.' (*Spectator*, August 28 2004)

But as Butler records, the only dodgy sources were ones that came on stream between March and September 2002. Certainly, there are legitimate grounds for concern about the way intelligence was used. A body of information that is necessarily speculative was presented to the public as settled fact. Blair presented his famous dossier to Parliament because the perfectly valid case he had made for war was not enough to persuade his backbenchers. So he brought forward every piece of alarming evidence he could, including material which was unreliable. The Butler report said that certain necessary caveats about the flakiness of some of the intelligence were removed when the government presented it to the public. This was undoubtedly a spin too far. It was a wrong thing to do. But the media promptly made another leap of logic - from 'there were no caveats' to 'there were no WMD'. Yet this did not follow; nor did it follow that the case for war (which the dossier was not) was a lie, nor that all the intelligence was wrong.

For the fact is that for several years, intelligence officials had consistently warned of a continuing effort by Saddam to procure WMD. In March 2002, officials advised:

'Iraq continues to develop weapons of mass destruction, although our intelligence is poor... Iraq continues with its BW and CW programmes and, if it has not already done so, could produce significant quantities of BW agents within days and CW agent within weeks of a decision to do so. We believe it could deliver CBW by a variety of means, including in ballistic missile warheads. There are also some indications of a continuing nuclear programme. Saddam has used WMD in the past and could do so again if his regime were threatened.' (JIC, 15 March 2002, Butler report).

So despite the absent caveats and dodgy sources, any fair reading of Butler's summary of the intelligence would be that the Prime Minister was presented with an overwhelming case that Saddam was still very much in the WMD game.

Blair's case was always the nexus of WMD and terrorism. Yet Osborne and all the others simply ignore and even deny the evidence of the threat posed by Saddam as a puppet-master of international terror. It's not just that Saddam tried to kill President Bush's

father, or paid for and trained Palestinian terrorists. The Senate committee said the CIA was right to believe that Saddam was up to his neck in terrorism against the US throughout the 1990s and was planning further outrages against it in 2002. And although there are no links between Saddam and 9/11, there is considerable evidence of links between Saddam and al Qaeda.

Both the Butler and Senate committees confirm such connections. Butler tells us:

‘Contacts between Al Qaida and the Iraqi Directorate General of Intelligence had dated back over four years. “Fragmentary and uncorroborated” intelligence reports suggested that in 1998 there were contacts between Al Qaida and Iraqi intelligence. Those reports described Al Qaida seeking toxic chemicals as well as other conventional terrorist equipment. Some accounts suggested that Iraqi chemical experts may have been in Afghanistan during 2000.’ (Butler report).

According to the Senate Intelligence Committee:

‘Twelve reports received from sources that the CIA described as having varying reliability cited Iraq or Iraqi national involvement in al Qaeda’s CBW efforts... In March 1998, after bin Laden’s public fatwa against the United States, two al Qaeda members reportedly went to Iraq to meet with Iraq intelligence. In July, an Iraqi delegation traveled to Afghanistan to meet first with the Taliban and then with bin Laden’. (United States Senate, July 7 2004)

Or how about this from the September 11 Commission report:

‘With the Sudanese regime acting as intermediary, Bin Ladin himself met with senior Iraqi intelligence officer in Khartoum in late 1994 or early 1995. Bin Ladin is said to have asked for space to establish training camps, as well as assistance in procuring weapons, but there is no evidence that Iraq responded to this request... the ensuing years saw additional efforts to establish connections...The Central Intelligence Agency reasonably assessed that there were several likely instances of contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda throughout the 1990s, but that these contacts did not add up to an established formal relationship’. (9/11 Commission Report)

Or this, from a Pentagon memo to the Senate Intelligence Committee:

‘Bin Laden was receiving training on bomb-making from the IIS’s [Iraqi Intelligence Service’s] principal technical expert on making sophisticated explosives, Brigadier Salim al Ahmed. Brigadier Salim was observed at bin Laden’s farm in Khartoum in Sep-Oct 1995 and again in July 1996, in the company of the Director of Iraqi Intelligence, Mani-abd-al-Rashid-al-Tikriti...’ (*The Connection*, by Stephen Hayes).

And this, according to Sabah Khodada, a former captain in the Iraq army who worked at the Salman Pak terrorist training camp south of Baghdad:

'This camp is specialised in exporting terrorism to the world... Training is mainly on terrorism. They would be trained on assassinations, kidnapping, hijacking of airplanes, hijacking of buses, hijacking of trains and all other kinds of operations related to terrorism... They were special trainers or teachers from the Iraqi Intelligence and al-Mukhabarat... We know that Arabs, non-Iraqis who come to train in these kind of camps, are going to be sent to very dangerous and important operations outside Iraq; not inside Iraq. They come in small numbers, and they come with the intention to do some real suicidal operations... We all met with Saddam personally... And he told us we have to take revenge from America. Our duty is to attack and hit American targets in the Gulf, in the Arab world, and all over the world. He said that openly.' (*The Connection*, by Stephen Hayes).

Some of this evidence, to be sure, carries health warnings about inconsistencies or unreliability. And its interpretation remains controversial and confusing. On one occasion, the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was reported to have said there was no hard evidence to link Saddam and al Qaeda – and then promptly claimed he had been 'misunderstood' and listed a host of evidence.

But whatever games might have been played in Washington, there's surely simply too much of such evidence to dismiss. Yet none of it has been reported in Britain. Instead, commentators repeat almost daily the mantra that Saddam was not involved with al Qaeda, was not involved in terrorism at all – and now, preposterously, that Iraq only became associated with terror as a result of Bush and Blair's war. Having comprehensively denied, omitted, obscured or distorted the facts over Iraq, the media now claim that the only reason for Tony Blair's actions must be that he is insane.

It is hard to exaggerate the relentless way in which all this nonsense has been promulgated by the media. So why has the coverage of Iraq been so obsessional? Is it just hatred of America? But why should America – or Bush, for that matter – be hated with this pathological level of intensity?

A crucial part of this frenzy has been the firm belief that Iraq was the wrong target. And that's because the media knew what the real target should be. The real cause of terror, goes the prevailing wisdom, is Israel's perceived refusal to grant a state to the Palestinians – a misapprehension unfortunately given weight by pronouncements by Tony Blair himself, who has said that solving the Israel/Palestinian impasse would make the greatest contribution to the war against terror. He has it precisely the wrong way round: only by ridding the world of the sources of terror will the Israel/Palestinian conflict be solved. His inability to give the British public a correct perspective on the relationship between Israel and terror has undoubtedly been a major factor behind both Britain's extreme animosity towards Israel and, ironically, its hostility to Blair's policy on Iraq.

Many articles denouncing the Iraq war contain the giveaway sentence, that it had diverted attention from the real cause of instability: the Israel/Palestine conflict. And some go further. One prominent and distinguished commentator told me that the real issue behind

the Islamic jihad was Israel. 'Really', he said, 'it would have been better if Israel had never been created.'

So Israel is at the core of the fury over Iraq. Yet Israel can hardly be the principal goad for a movement which declares its aim to establish an Islamic state in the north Caucasus or in southern Asia. But then, the real nature of the threat posed by the Islamic jihad is never reported either. The butchers of Beslan were referred to constantly as Chechens or separatists when the evidence was that they came from neighbouring states, that some of them were Arabs and that their goal – according to their leader – was not Chechen separatism at all but an Islamic state in the north Caucasus.

This coyness extends also to failing to report the announced goals of the jihad. So most people are quite unaware that these goals are the defeat of western power, the overthrow of western values including democracy wherever Muslims either live or have a historic claim, and the re-establishment of the medieval Islamic caliphate which stretches from Asia to southern Europe. Most people are quite unaware, because the media doesn't report it, that human bomb terrorism which is ascribed to 'a few unrepresentative extremists' has been sanctioned by various Arab and Muslim states and Islamic religious authorities. They are unaware, because the media doesn't report it, that the hysteria which has produced the human bomb death cult is fuelled by demented propaganda which tells them that the west is out to destroy Islam and that the west is dominated by the Jews who control the media and the money markets and whose particular programme this is.

Unaware of this, people ask themselves what can possibly cause human beings to behave in such a barbaric way. And in their media-induced ignorance, they conclude the only reason must be despair and dispossession. And so they fix on Israel as the cause, because through the relentless TV pictures of Palestinians weeping in the rubble of houses demolished by the Israeli army, with a running commentary which predicates the myth of Israeli tanks against Palestinian stones, they are provided with a neat cause of righteous armchair indignation. The obscenity of using even children as human bombs focuses British ire not at the Palestinians for doing so but at Israel, their target. The actual causes of the slaughter – the indoctrination from the cradle in gross Jew hatred, paranoid delusions about the west and a cult of death sanctified and even mandated by religious edict – are studiously ignored by the media which presents it instead as a dispute over land.

The fact that Islamic terrorism is occurring from Bali to Beslan does not dent the certainty that it's all the fault of Israel. Even though the bombing of the Bali nightclub was perpetrated by a sect whose aim is a pan south-east Asia Islamist superstate, the Independent and other commentators nevertheless claimed that the root cause was the Palestinian problem.

So why are people so irrationally fixated upon Israel as the cause of the world's troubles? One reason is the excessively disproportionate and obsessive attention paid to it, as opposed to other parts of the world where far worse is happening. For twenty years, the British media simply ignored the slaughter of three million Christians by Muslim Arab

militias in the Sudan. And who knows or cares about the massacres in Kashmir, another iconic dispute for jihadists? And when they are reported, the word Muslim is usually absent. Yet the BBC and others never lose an opportunity to refer to outrages by the 'Jewish' settlers in the West Bank.

Moreover, Israel itself is shamefully misrepresented by the British media. As in other parts of Europe, Israel is now demonised in a way that goes way beyond legitimate criticism. The one democracy in the Middle East is being delegitimised as a pariah state, while the media is silent on the despotisms that try to destroy it. Of course, it sometimes behaves badly and should be criticised. But it is held to impossibly high standards of behaviour which are expected of no other country. Its every action is reported malevolently, ascribing to it the worst possible motives and denying its own victimisation. Instead of the truth, which is that every military action is taken solely to protect itself from attack, it is portrayed falsely as instigating the violent oppression of Palestinians.

Such an approach is rooted in the media's astonishing ignorance of history and wilful distortions. The Middle East tragedy is patently not about a Palestinian state, which could have been established any time between 1947 and 1967, and which was actually offered both in 1947 and in 2000, when the only response was an unprecedented campaign of mass murder. Journalists talk about the 'occupied territories' without ever saying this is not an aggressive occupation - as is, for example, the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, which is simply ignored - but in Israel's case it is perfectly legal to hold land where the belligerent entity that has attacked it in the first place still regards itself as in a state of war against it.

The media constantly present Israel's behaviour as brutal and disproportionate. And yes, sometimes it is - and it should be condemned when this is so. Yet there is no acknowledgement of the substantial attrition rate suffered by its forces by choosing to conduct house to house searches in order to minimise innocent casualties rather than bomb from the air, as the Americans would undoubtedly do to minimise their own casualty rate. Indeed, in the battle of Jenin in 2002 when Israel went in to root out terrorists, the media described it as a massacre with hugely inflated figures of hundreds of dead Palestinians. The massacre story ran for days, even in newspapers whose editorial line is sympathetic to Israel. Yet the facts were that only 52 Palestinians died, of whom the vast majority were armed men, and no fewer than 23 Israeli soldiers - an extraordinarily high attrition rate. But the false impression created by the media libel remains to this day.

But then to much of the media, Israel's self-defence is regarded as intrinsically illegitimate. It is routinely described as 'vengeance' or 'punishment'. Sir Max Hastings wrote last September:

'Israel does itself relentless harm by venting its spleen for suicide bombings upon the Palestinian people.' (*Guardian*, September 6 2004).

Indeed, he made clear in this article that he regarded attempts by Israel or Russia to defend themselves against terror by killing terrorists as the equivalent of Nazi tactics or

war crimes. He also suggested that Israel had never attempted any political resolution of its conflict with the Palestinians — astonishingly ignoring the fact that the current intifada was their response to a political process in which Israel was offering them a state of their own. Thus Hastings managed to present the Israeli victims of terror as Nazi-style butchers while the murderous aggression of the Palestinians, whose own demonology of the Jews is sometimes redolent of Nazi images of a subhuman race, was ignored altogether.

But probably the greatest single reason for the obsessive and unbalanced focus on Israel, along with the irrationality over Iraq, is the hostility and prejudice of the BBC's reporting. Unlike newspapers, the BBC is trusted as a paradigm of fairness and objectivity. In fact, it views the world from a political position which is similar to that of the *Guardian* or *Independent*. In other words, its default position is the left. And since it regards this as the political centre of gravity, it cannot acknowledge its own bias. The BBC is thus a perfectly closed thought system.

When it comes to Israel, it persistently presents it in the worst possible light. Its language and tone are loaded, it handles Arab and Israeli interviewees with double standards, and panel discussions are generally skewed with two or three speakers hostile to Israel against one defender or, more often, none at all.

The BBC's bias against Israel is simply staggering. A 30-minute BBC profile of Arafat described him as a 'hero' and an 'icon', and spoke of him as having 'performer's flare', 'charisma and style', 'personal courage', and being 'the stuff of legends'. Ariel Sharon, by contrast, was subjected to a mock 'war crimes' trial.

It constantly presents the Israelis as the aggressors and responsible for the violence in the Middle East — the opposite of the truth. And it wears its heart on its sleeve for the Palestinians who are presented not as aggressors motivated to murder by brainwashing in hatred of Israel and the Jews, but as innocent victims. For example, BBC Radio News said of Israel's raid into Gaza last autumn to stop the rocket attacks from there upon Israeli citizens that this was 'making Israeli streets safe perhaps, certainly making life miserable and intolerable for the Palestinians of northern Gaza'.

A previous radio news bulletin reporting Israel's killing of 14 Hamas terrorists was an object lesson in bias. Reporter Alan Johnston's language made it sound as if the event was on a par with the recent murder of Russian schoolchildren in Beslan. Thus there would be 'many funerals' today for the Hamas 'faithful', much 'anger and grief'. And then came the following startling assertion: 'The movement is struggling to end Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank'. Thus Johnston presented Hamas as some kind of heroic freedom fighters 'struggling' — a loaded word if ever there was one — against colonial oppression. But Hamas of course does not seek merely to end Israel's presence in Gaza and the West Bank. It aims to eradicate Israel altogether as a Jewish state.

That particular week, the *Today* programme broadcast a total of 17 items on the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, four items hostile to Israel, and one item complaining that money for the poor was being diverted to the war on terror. It broadcast no items on the

murder of six Israeli soldiers and the subsequent murder of five more in Gaza that week, events which were mentioned in passing; no mention of the fact that Palestinians had played football with the heads they cut off murdered Israeli soldiers and even placed one of the heads on a desk while being interviewed; and merely two items, on the same day, on the decapitation in Iraq of the American hostage Nick Berg. Thus the BBC's objectivity and sense of balance and, indeed, moral values.

Worse still, far from expressing horror and outrage at the rampant medieval and Nazi tropes of Jew-hatred pouring out of Arab and Muslim countries, the British media seems to agree that there is indeed a world Jewish conspiracy linking the Jews of America, Israel and the war in Iraq.

The *New Statesman* printed an investigation into the power of the 'Zionist' lobby in Britain, which it dubbed the 'kosher conspiracy' and illustrated by a cover depicting the Star of David piercing the union flag. Similar articles claiming undue Jewish influence over America were published in the *Independent* and *Prospect* magazine. When the Labour backbencher Tam Dalyell claimed that both Tony Blair and George Bush were influenced by a 'cabal' of powerful Jews – including people who were not Jews at all, but merely had some Jewish ancestry – his remarks were brushed aside indulgently as an embarrassing outburst by a venerable eccentric. The following day, BBC TV *Newsnight* devoted a substantial item to asking whether Dalyell's claims were true in the US – an item which left the impression that there was indeed a group of tightly-knit Jews in America who wielded far too much power.

Other distinguished writers have openly claimed the Iraq war was a Jewish plot. The late Anthony Sampson wrote in the *Independent*:

'It was the victory of the Pentagon over the State Department which determined American policy in the Middle East, reinforced by the powerful influence of the neo-conservative cabal and the Israeli government'. (*Independent*, May 1 2004).

The much abused term 'neo-conservatives' has become code for Jews who have suborned America. Thus Simon Jenkins, endorsing a recent book, wrote in *The Times* that:

'...a small group of neo-conservatives contrived to take the greatest nation on Earth to war and kill thousands of people', that they were 'traitors to the American conservative tradition' who achieved a 'seizure of Washington (and London) after 9/11' and whose 'first commitment was to the defence of Israel'. 'With the coming to power of President Bush the neocons deftly substituted the threat of Islam for the threat of communism' and on that basis 'sought a "comprehensive revamping of American foreign policy"'. (*Times*, July 2 2004)

So according to Jenkins, the Jews possess extraordinary and sinister power which they exercise in a covert way to advance their own interests and harm the rest of mankind. Thus the Jews have 'seized' Washington, are 'traitors' to the conservative tradition and by implication to America itself, 'disdain' law and diplomacy because they are crazed by

power-lust and the desire to kill people, and so 'deftly' provided a new threat to terrify the world after communism — a threat which doubtless is a figment of their war-crazed imagination and nothing whatever to do with the fact that an Islamist death-cult, financed, trained and supported by a network of rogue states and which has now fanned out across the globe, has declared war on the west and is busy pursuing that murderous objective.

So why has all this happened? Why has the media succumbed to this epidemic of bigotry, blindness and bias?

One obvious reason is simple fear. In Ramallah, when Arafat was alive, reporters who assembled for a press conference happened to witness a man being frog-marched outside and shot. They were threatened with death if they reported it. In tyrannies or police states where information is hard to get, journalists report what they are told and have neither the language skills nor the freedom to inquire whether it is actually true. At home, journalists are terrified of being tarred and feathered as an Islamophobe or right-wing or worst of all, a Sharon-lover. There is no equivalent fear, it seems, of being thought a Jew-hater, which is merely laughed off as another example of Jewish paranoia and Holocaust hysteria.

The second reason is the cult of postmodernism to which the media, like the rest of the intellectual world, has fallen victim. Some time ago, journalism decided that objectivity was bunk and truth was relative. Facts stopped being sacred and news reporting became an expression of opinion. And because truth itself was merely a subjective view, the way was open for propaganda based on lies to be promoted as the truth as long as it fitted the prevailing prejudice.

That prejudice is overwhelmingly the mindset of the left. Since the left demonises America and western capitalism, and lionises the third world and all liberation movements, America or Israel can never be victims, only aggressors, while the Muslim and Arab third world can only be victims because they are the powerless pawns of western imperialism.

This has propelled the left into an unholy alliance with the Arab and Muslim world. As a result, both western leftists and eastern zealots share the perception of America and Israel as the Great and Little Satan, and march shoulder to shoulder behind placards saying 'No Blood for Oil' and 'Death to the Jews'.

But it is not just the left. As some of the examples I've quoted suggest, much of this thinking is shared by conservatives, too. Whereas mainstream, conservatively-minded Americans support the war in Iraq and understand that their country is defending itself against an enemy that has declared war upon them, in Britain the conservatively-minded majority believe that the only reason they are under threat is because Tony Blair allied Britain with America's war on terror. The result is an extraordinary cross-over in which a Labour Prime Minister has become a Republican President's best ally, while many British conservatives — including, I am told, most of the Parliamentary Conservative Party — were rooting for Senator Kerry to win the presidential election.

Of course, there have always been isolationists, appeasers and Jew-haters on the right, and they are certainly in evidence today. But since the left has thoroughly colonised the media and intellectual life in Britain, public discourse has become so warped that the whole centre of political gravity has shifted so that even many centrist people now subscribe to this view of the world.

The outcome is a society which no longer understands how to distinguish truth from lies, no longer understands or accepts the desirability of objectivity and no longer is capable of rational debate based on facts and logic. Instead, all evidence is filtered through prism of prior political prejudice and emotion to which it is wrenched to fit. It replaces evidence by propaganda, rationality by gullibility.

And it is perhaps the single greatest incitement to terror. Terrorism is designed to achieve maximum publicity and to manipulate public revulsion so that pressure is put on the leaders of the democracies to surrender. It cannot be said too often that what drives al Qaeda is not the exercise of disproportionate force by the west but the perception of its weakness and incapacity or unwillingness to fight in its own defence. But even al Qaeda must surely have been taken aback by the craven willingness of the British media to fall into line by abusing and persecuting their own leaders at a time of war. These terrorists know that the more barbaric their acts, the more hysteria and pressure the British media will direct at Blair and Bush. So al Qaeda has every incentive to ratchet up the atrocities. That's why the hostage Kenneth Bigley was videoed sobbing for his life in a cage; and the media duly do what the terrorists want and put it on their front pages and news bulletins, and the pressure on Blair to split from America becomes more and more intolerable.

The appalling result of all this is that, if a terrorist outrage in London were to claim the lives of hundreds or thousands of people, the reaction of many Britons might not be a revival of the spirit of the Blitz and an iron determination to defeat fascism and tyranny. It might be instead to turn on Tony Blair and blame him directly for bringing about the slaughter. And that, of course, is precisely what makes such a terrible outcome more likely. There can be little doubt that al Qaeda, such a shrewd judge of western decadence and the differences in moral fibre between the countries of the west, will have noted the fact that in Britain, the worse the terrorist outrage that is committed, the more the public will turn on Tony Blair. Every single defeatist, distorted or dishonest article about Iraq, Israel and the war on terror makes another barbaric atrocity more likely.

It is this weakness and moral confusion that comprise the great goal of terrorist strategy; it is this that has characterised the west's response to Islamic terror for many decades; it is this that has brought us to where we are today. In the war that has been declared upon the free world, the western media's abuse of power is perhaps the most lethal weapon of all.