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Imperial Arrogance: Tony Blair, Qaddafi and Torture

By John Wight
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Tony Blair and Jack Straw.

That former British prime minister Tony Blair is a poster boy for corruption, mendacity, opportunism, and ruthless ambition is by now a received truth. The man who took Britain into the war in Iraq on the coattails of the Bush administration in 2003, did so imbued with a messianic desire to become a major international figure, basking in the embrace of a political establishment in Washington whose support and endorsement he valued more than that of the people in the UK who elected him and whose interests he was supposed to represent.

As he and others involved in engineering the facts to make the case of crashing into Iraq on the back of cruise missiles currently await the findings of the Chilcot Inquiry into the war, legal proceedings are underway in the UK Supreme Court to sue both Blair's former foreign secretary

Jack Straw and British intelligence agencies over their role in the rendition to Libya from London of anti-Gaddafi Libyan dissidents, where they were subsequently tortured.

Prime among those Libyan dissidents who are involved in the legal action is Abdel Hakim Belhaj, who went on to assume a key role as a military commander and official in the post Gaddafi Islamist regime based in Tripoli. Belhaj alleges that both he and his wife were rendered to Libya from the UK in 2004 and tortured in the presence of British MI6 operatives.

In the process the extent of the cooperation that existed between Blair and Gaddafi over the course of a relationship which officially began after Blair visited the Libyan leader, soon after he publicly renounced and ended Libya's WMD program at the end of 2003 in the wake of the destruction of Iraq, has come to light.

Back in January *The Guardian* carried a story alleging that Blair in 2007 had written to Colonel Gaddafi 'to thank him for the "excellent cooperation" between their countries' counter-terrorism agencies following a period during which the UK and Libya worked together to arrange for Libyan dissidents to be kidnapped and flown to Tripoli, along with their families.'

The current British Government's attempt to block the case from proceeding, based on a political firewall within British law otherwise known as 'foreign state immunity', has been rejected, which means that the extent of Tony Blair, Jack Straw, and MI6's collusion in torture is set to be revealed in all its grim and ignominious detail over the coming weeks and months.

It will come as yet another damning indictment of Blair and his government in the lead up to and aftermath of the war in Iraq – a disastrous military adventure embarked upon using 9/11 as a pretext, and which only succeeded in destabilizing Iraq and the wider region, leading to the emergence of AQI (al-Qaeda in Iraq), the forerunner of ISIS. Since the war Tony Blair is thought to have amassed a personal fortune of somewhere around £60 million, earned via speaking engagements, various business deals, and through acting as an adviser to various multinational corporations, financial institutions and governments.

He has yet to face any legal investigation or proceedings over his role in the war in Iraq, for which *prima facie* evidence of illegality on the grounds that it was a 'war of aggression' in contravention of the UN Charter undoubtedly exists.

Many people in Britain will no doubt be shocked to learn of British collusion in torture, what with the received truth they have imbued of the country's reputation and history as a bastion of human rights, democracy, and decency. But such illusions only serve to illustrate how successful British propaganda has been.

In actual fact torture and the British state have long walked hand in hand. The entire history of the British Empire is replete with torture and the slaughter of innocents, carried out in the name of civilization and the Enlightenment but in truth motivated by the super exploitation of human and natural resources in the name of profit.

Since the Second World War torture and atrocities have been committed by British military and security forces in Kenya, Malaya, Ireland, Iraq, and more places in between. It amounts to a shameful history, one documented in detail in Iain Cobain's 2013 book – 'Cruel Britannia: A Secret History of Torture'.

Atrocities and torture are a by-product of colonialism and imperialism, which are rooted in the racist dehumanization of the people unfortunate enough to find themselves living in those countries selected for invasion and occupation.

The imperial hubris and arrogance of a man such as Tony Blair knew no bounds when he was Britain's prime minister, just as his personal greed and avarice knows no bounds today. However it would be a mistake to consider him an exception to the rule where the British political class is concerned. For all the pomp and ceremony for which the UK is famed, for all the grand monuments, statues, palaces and grand buildings that dominate central London, the British state and its institutions have long been mired in the kind of corruption, hypocrisy, and double dealing that would make the devil himself blush in shame.

The unraveling of the UK's relations with Gaddafi, a leader it abandoned to the wolves of regime change in 2011, when it joined forces with France and other NATO members in supporting a 'revolution' that led inexorably to Libya's present status as a failed state, is testament to the rampant dishonor with which Britain has long conducted its foreign policy.

Only when the likes of Tony Blair and Jack Straw are standing in the dock of the International Criminal Court in The Hague to answer for their crimes will justice be done.