Lies, damned lies and terror warnings

On November 7, the day before the United Nations Security Council voted on a resolution that made an American and British attack on Iraq more than likely, Downing Street began issuing warnings of imminent terrorist threats against the United Kingdom. Cross-Channel ferries, the London Underground and major public events were all said to be "targeted".

The anonymous Government sources described "emergency security measures" that included a "rapid reaction force of army reservists" and a squadron of fighter jets "on constant standby". Plans were being drawn up to "evacuate major cities and deal with large numbers of contaminated corpses". Police snipers were being trained "to kill suicide bombers" and anti-radiation pills were being distributed to hospitals. By November 11, Tony Blair himself was telling the British public to be "on guard" against an attack that could lead to "maximum carnage".

Curiously, the national state of alert for a likely attack, colour-coded amber, which such a grave warning would require, was never activated. It remains on "black special", which is just above normal. Why? That was more than two weeks ago, and urgent questions remain unanswered. Now health service teams are to have smallpox vaccinations to "meet the threat of a germ warfare attack"; and the Foreign Office has produced a remarkable video suggesting that Britain is about to attack Iraq because of its concern for that country's human rights record. (This must mean Britain will soon attack other countries because of their human rights records, such as China, Russia and the United States).

The absurdity of this is becoming grotesque, and the British public needs to ask urgent questions of its Government. Where is the evidence, any evidence, for a national "alert" that borders on such orchestrated hysteria? And what explains its uncanny timing with the latest American and British machinations at the UN on Iraq?

Lying as government strategy is known as black propaganda. The British invented its modern form. Josef Goebbels, the Nazis' propaganda chief, was full of admiration for the British model. Since September 11, 2001, every attempt by black propagandists in Whitehall and Washington to justify an unprovoked attack on Iraq by linking the regime in Baghdad with al-Qaeda terrorism has failed.

First, there was the charge that Iraq was responsible for last year's anthrax scare in the United States, then it was claimed that Mohamed Atta, one of the alleged September 11 hijackers, had made contact with Iraqi intelligence in Prague. Both claims have been proven false, along with stories planted in newspapers by American intelligence that Iraq has been training al-Qaeda terrorists at a secret base.

Surmounting the truth that the secular Iraqi regime actually fears and loathes Osama bin Laden and his Islamic militants has always been difficult for American and British propagandists - even though George W Bush currently babbles nonsense about "exporting this evil al-Qaeda threat to the world".

Blair is more careful; but his implied message is the same: that the "scourge" of world-wide terrorism is linked to Saddam Hussein, whose demonology must now rival that of the "baby-eating Boche" during the First World War, an early triumph of black propaganda.

These deceptions and outright lies are aimed at the great majority of the British people who, as the polls show, are opposed to attacking Iraq, a country that offers them no threat. However, if you frighten the public with apocalyptic warnings about evacuating cities and incessantly link Iraq, September 11 and the Bali bombing, then people may change their minds and be ready for war - or so the propagandists bargain. "It's a softening up process," says a former intelligence officer familiar with the black art, "a lying game on a huge scale".

It is also an indication of the Blair government's desperation. Blair knows that, however successful his enfeeblement of parliamentary democracy, public opinion matters and, at times, has unforeseen power.

So as an antidote to the "softening up" of public opinion, I offer this pocket guide to the current lying game:

What Bush and Blair want us to forget...

THE LOVE AFFAIR

The present Iraqi regime is a product of the Ba'athist Party, which the CIA helped bring to power. The CIA officer in charge of the operation described it as "my

favourite coup". During the 1980s, America and Britain supplied Saddam Hussein with every weapon he wanted, often secretly and illegally. The relationship was known cynically in Washington as "the love affair".

When Blair and Bush incessantly refer to Saddam "using chemical weapons against his own people", specifically the Kurdish village of Halabja in 1988, they never explain that Britain and America were accomplices.

Not only did both governments secretly and illegally approve the sale of chemical weapons' agents, officials in Washington and Whitehall tried to cover up the Halabja atrocity, with the Americans even faking a story that Iran was responsible.

And while the gassing was going on, Saddam Hussein was being congratulated on his wise leadership by David Mellor, a Foreign Office minister, whose turn it was to sit at the feet of the dictator. Almost as a reward, the Thatcher governments gave Saddam £340million of British taxpayers' money in export credits. When Bush and Blair call Saddam "a threat to his neighbours", they never mention that George Bush Senior, as head of the CIA and later President, pushed Iraq to attack Iran and supplied crucial intelligence to the Iraqi military that ensured the war went on for eight years. The result was millions of dollars in profits for American and British arms firms, and a million young men dead on both sides. A congressional investigation, long forgotten, described this as a "great crime".

On September 12, George W Bush appeared before the UN General Assembly and asked dramatically: "Are Security Council resolutions to be honoured or cast aside?"

The answer came a few weeks later when the Security Council passed Resolution 1435, which demanded that "Israel immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah including the destruction of Palestinian civilian and security infrastructure" and withdraw its "occupying forces from Palestinian cities towards the positions held prior to September 2000".

The resolution was passed 14-0 with one abstention, the United States. Israel dismissed it; and nothing happened. This was no surprise. The Israelis have defied at least 40 Security Council resolutions and scores of General Assembly resolutions: a record of dishonouring and "casting aside" the law (to quote Bush) unequalled by any nation since the UN was founded.

Like Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s, Israel's defiance is rewarded with all the weapons and fighter aircraft it wants. Just as Britain used to supply Saddam

with the means of making chemical bombs, so the Blair government currently supplies the Israeli regime of Ariel Sharon with chemical warfare technology. This includes "PCPs" which can easily be turned into lethal sarin nerve gas which, next to nuclear weapons, is the most feared weapon of mass destruction.

America burns a quarter of all the oil consumed by humanity. A study sponsored by the US Council on Foreign Relations says that "the American people continue to demand plentiful and cheap energy without sacrifice or inconvenience". Transport in the United States alone burns 66 per cent of America's petroleum.

One estimate is that the world's oil reserves will begin to decline within five to 10 years at the rate of about two million barrels a day. In the Middle East, the only country capable of significantly increasing its production is Iraq, once described by Vice President Cheney as "the great prize".

At present, America depends on Iraq's neighbour Saudi Arabia, not just for oil but for keeping the price of oil down. However, Saudi Arabia is the home of al-Qaeda, and Osama bin Laden and 15 of the alleged September 11 hijackers.

The grievance against the Americans for their imperial interventions in the Middle East is said to be deepest in the country that was invented by British imperialism and has since been maintained by the US as an oil colony.

If America installs a colonial regime in Baghdad, certainly its dependence on Saudi Arabia will be dramatically eased, and its grip on the world's greatest oil market will be tightened. The price, for the people of the region, for Americans and the rest of us, will be an enduring turmoil similar to that of Palestine, exemplified by last week's terror bombing of an Israeli hotel in Kenya.

This is the hidden agenda of the "war on terrorism" - a term that is no more than a euphemism for the Bush administration's exploitation of the September 11 attacks and America's accelerating imperial ambitions. In the past 14 months, on the pretext of "fighting terror", US military bases have been established at the gateways to the greatest oil and gas fields on earth, especially in Central Asia, which is also coveted as a "great prize".

In Afghanistan, the president, Hamid Karzai, guarded by 46 American special forces troops, was employed by a subsidiary of Unocal, the American oil company. The post-Taliban US ambassador is a senior executive of Unocal, and a pipeline to carry lucrative oil and gas across the country from the Caspian Sea will be built by Unocal.

The majority of Bush's cabinet are from the oil industry, which has made them

extremely rich. Bush's father is still a consultant for the huge oil services company, the Carlyle Group, and his personal clients include the family of Osama bin Laden. One of the reasons the Americans attacked Afghanistan was not to liberate women but to liberate the pipeline deal. As the BBC reported on September 18, 2001: "Niaz Niak, a former Pakistani foreign minister, was told by senior American officials in mid-July (2001) that military action against Afghanistan would go ahead by the middle of October. It was Naik's view that Washington would not drop its war against Afghanistan even if bin Laden were to be surrendered immediately by the Taliban. Remember, he said this before the attacks of September 11 had happened.

Only a pittance of the millions of dollars pledged to rebuild Afghanistan has arrived. As many as 20,000 people, estimates the Guardian, if you count those bombed to death and who starved during the bombing, died so that the West could reconquer Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden was no where to be seen.

While Saddam Hussein's crimes against his own people are well known, those of the West in Iraq are generally suppressed. The suffering of ordinary Iraqi people is never mentioned by Bush and Blair, and only rarely by the media. This is not surprising. Under a United Nations blockade that resembles a medieval siege, devised and controlled by the United States and Britain, Iraq is allowed to spend little more than £100 per person on sustaining the life of each of its citizens for one year. This is less than half the annual per capita income of Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It is less than the amount the UN spends on food for dogs used in Iraqi de-mining operations.

A recent comprehensive investigation by an American academic, Professor Joy Gordon, has revealed that the United States has placed "on hold" more than $5billion worth of humanitarian goods that should have gone to Iraq. All the goods were approved by the UN and financed from the sale of Iraqi oil. They include flour, medicines, medical equipment, milk production equipment, fire-fighting equipment, water tankers.

"Over the last three years," wrote Professor Gordon, "I have acquired many of the key confidential UN documents concerning the administration of Iraqi sanctions. What they show is that the United States has fought aggressively throughout the last decade to purposefully minimise the humanitarian goods that enter the country. And it has done so in the face of enormous human suffering, including massive increases in child mortality and widespread epidemics."

These are the people, more than half of them children, whom Bush and Blair are planning to attack once the UN's weapons inspectors have outlived their usefulness. (In the last three years, the Blair Government alone has spent £1billion illegally bombing Iraq - with America. Shepherds, fishermen, truck drivers are blown to bits with rarely a word in the media. Neither country has a UN mandate to do this; under international law, it is simply an act of piracy.

The one connection between international terrorism and Iraq will be the undoubted consequence of an Anglo-American attack. Nothing will do more to convert al-Qaeda from a relatively small gang to a fanatical international jihad, or network. Nothing will do more to create a generation of anti-Western bitterness and recruits for terrorism.

When Blair warns about the threat of terrorist "carnage" in Britain, the terrible irony of his predictions is that they are likely to be self-fulfilling if he involves the British people in a criminal foreign adventure.

For this irresponsible act, he will place at risk every British citizen at home and abroad. It will spread fear and foster ethnic division. Such is the true measure of his fawning devotion to great power. The people of Britain should not allow it. **JP**