

Another warning for the movement from the June poll: 'The issue of whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction is only being raised again now because people who opposed the war throughout are trying to find a new reason for saying it wasn't the right thing to do.' Disagree 29%. Agree 68%. This was in June, but this underlying attitude may persist.

PRESIDENT BUSH SUFFERS

A 12 July poll in the US found President Bush's overall job approval rating dropped to 59 percent, down nine points in the past 18 days. That decline exactly mirrored the slide in public support for Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq, which slid to 58 percent. Seventy per cent believed the US should continue to keep troops in Iraq, even if it means additional casualties. 57 per cent still thought the war with Iraq was worth the sacrifice, down 7 points from late June, and 13 points since the war ended.

Fifty percent on 12 July said Bush intentionally exaggerated evidence suggesting Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, while nearly as many—46 percent—disagreed. 'Taken together, the latest survey findings suggest that the mix of euphoria and relief that followed the quick U.S. victory in Iraq continues to dissipate, creating an uncertain and volatile political environment.' (*Washington Post*, 12 July, p. A01)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION

Noam Chomsky once wrote, 'one who is seriously opposed to the use of force to control the empire—the "integrated world economy" dominated by American capital, to use the technical euphemism—must pay careful attention to the actual state of American opinion', and work to alter its condition. The level of culture that can be achieved in the United States 'is a life-and-death matter for large masses of suffering humanity'.

With Britain's significance as a 'legitimater' of US violence (in the eyes of US public opinion at least), much the same can be said of British public opinion. Whether the 'soft bloc' of British anti-war opinion can be won back by persuasion and information, and that sector of opinion can be 'hardened' into principled opposition to war, will have enormous significance.

Some members of ARROW are taking the work of the group onto a new level, with a new group 'JUSTICE NOT VENGEANCE' (JNV), which is offering to be the hub of a new network.

JNV will be producing Anti-War Briefings and developing the ARROW website.

More briefings can be downloaded from the JNV WEBSITE <www.j-n-v.org>

JNV BOOK *Regime Unchanged: Why The War Was Wrong* by Milan Rai (Pluto, 2003)

PLEASE SUPPORT JNV (Justice Not Vengeance) 0845 458 9571

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CRUMBLING VICTORY

Blair And Bush Lose 'Trust'

ARROW Anti-War Briefing 46 (18 July 2003) REGIME UNCHANGED Update Number 1

'I thought it was gangster capitalism, nothing to do with morality at all. Did Tony Blair mislead the country? I suspect he did.'

John Peel, radio presenter (*Independent*, 4 June 2003, p. 1)

THE UNPERSUADED PUBLIC

British public support for the war on Iraq was shallow and brittle. A review of the polls in the *Guardian* at the end of April noted, 'The war against Iraq saw one of the most dramatic shifts in British public opinion in recent political history'—but this was not because the British people were persuaded by the arguments. It seems they felt but to 'support the troops' by supporting the war, despite its illegitimacy.

The *Guardian*/ICM war tracker poll saw Tony Blair's personal poll rating plunge over 15 months from plus 42 in November 2001 to minus 20 in February—his worst personal rating in six years in Downing Street. 'Polls also show that it was the prime minister's reputation which took the hit while Labour's standing in the country escaped without suffering serious damage. Labour's lead in the polls was cut from 13 points in January to six points in March but the party was never in the kind of trouble Mr Blair faced.' (Alan Travis, 'Voters alienated by prospects of conflict finally swung behind military action', *Guardian*, 26 Apr. 2003, online version)

Public opinion was anti-war from Aug. 2002 until mid-Mar. 2003 (with one exception: a poll taken in the aftermath of the Bali bombing). 'From November anti-war feeling grew progressively stronger and peaked over the February weekend of the mass demonstration in London, when a majority of British voters—52%—said they opposed the war.' (*Guardian*, 26 Apr. 2003)

We know now that the 15 February demonstrations in London and Glasgow put enormous pressure on the Government. On that day Tony

Blair was in Glasgow to sell his strategy to the Scottish Labour Party. 'This really was the moment of maximum pressure on him,' said one of his closest aides. 'As he travelled up there, we just didn't know whether the event would turn into a fiasco.' (*FT*, 29 May 2003, p. 17)

However, by 23 Mar.—four days after the first bombs had begun to fall—'opposition had slumped to just 30% and support for military action soared to 54%.' The *Guardian* comments, 'Once it became clear that British troops were going into action anyway, those who had been calling for a second resolution as a condition of their support had to make a choice—and the polling evidence appears to be that most, including Labour voters, chose to support the war.' (*Guardian*, 26 Apr. 2003)

THE SECOND RESOLUTION: TONY BLAIR LIED

At the beginning of the year, 68 per cent people questioned for Channel 4's Powerhouse programme opposed war without a new UN resolution. 'The figure is up 11 points on when the question was asked in September.' (*Mirror*, 7 Jan. 2003, p. 11) On the other hand, most people supported war in the event of a new UN resolution authorising it. By 20 Feb., 59 per cent of people held this position, but this was down from 72 per cent a month earlier. Without UN endorsement, only 21 per cent supported war. (*Sunday Times*, 23 Feb. 2003, p. 13)

There was a large bloc of 'anti-war' opinion willing to be swung by the passing of a Resolution which could be presented as authorising the war. (The draft Resolution proposed by Britain did not actually do this—see *Anti-War Briefings* 36, 37, 38 and *Regime Unchanged* by Milan Rai.)

This soft bloc crumbled and supported the war despite the fact that Tony Blair had promised not to go to war without a second Resolution, unless the inspectors reported Iraqi non-co-operation (they didn't), a majority of Security Council members were in favour of the Resolution (they weren't) and there was an 'unreasonable veto' by one or more of the permanent members of the Security Council (no such veto ever needed to be cast because the British withdrew the Resolution before it came to a vote). The Prime Minister made his fateful promise in a press conference on 13 January, and on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme on 7 February 2003:

The only qualification we have added . . . is if you did have a breach, went back to the UN but someone put an unreasonable or unilateral block down on action, now in those circumstances we have said we can't be in a position where we are confined in that way.

If the inspectors do report that they can't do their work properly because Iraq is not co-operating there's no doubt that under the terms of the existing United Nations Resolution that that's a breach of the Resolution. In those circumstances there should be a further Resolution. If, however, a country were to issue a veto . . . If a country unreasonably in those circumstances put down a veto then I would consider action outside

of that . . . Firstly you can't just do it with America, you have to get a majority in the security council . . . because the issue of a veto doesn't even arise unless you get a majority in the security council. (13 Jan. <<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3005.asp>>; and 'Tony Blair on *Newsnight*—part one', 7 Feb., search *Guardian* online version).

In the debate about Tony Blair's 'trustworthiness', the betrayal of this pledge should be playing a central role.

On the eve of war, a poll found that most people in Britain favoured giving Iraq a deadline for completing the inspection process. 29 per cent said, 'The UN inspectors are making progress and need more time'. 65 per cent said, 'Progress is limited—a deadline is needed for military action'. (*Sunday Times*, 16 Mar. 2003, p. 2) Iraq was not given a deadline for co-operation. Saddam Hussein and his sons were given a 48-hour ultimatum to leave Iraq.

This same poll found that, 'Nearly half, 49%, say that to go to war without a second resolution would be against the will of the British people and that Tony Blair should not continue in office in these circumstances.' (*Sunday Times*, 16 Mar. 2003, p. 2)

THE SOFT CENTRE CRUMBLES AGAIN

It seems that the soft central bloc of anti-war opinion—around 40 per cent of British public opinion—fell in behind the Government not because of any new evidence or any new arguments, but because British soldiers were in the firing line, and they had to be 'supported'. The danger for the Government is that this same bloc of unpersuaded and coerced support is (again) shallow and brittle. Hence the recent swing against the war.

'Thinking about the build-up to the war in Iraq and everything that has happened since, do you think that taking military action was the right or wrong thing to do?' Wrong thing to do June 2003: 34% (up from April 24%) Right thing to do June 2003: 58% (down from April 64%). (Peter Riddell, 'Trust for Blair slumps over Iraq war handling,' *Times*, 14 June 2003, p. 2)

Same poll: 'Britain and America deliberately exaggerated the evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in order to win support for going to war.' Yes 58%. No 39%. This was before the current round of revelations.

WARNING FOR THE MOVEMENT

'Regardless of whether Iraq actually did have weapons of mass destruction, the war was justified because it got rid of Saddam Hussein.' Disagree 27%. Agree 70%. Labour voters: 84% agreed. Liberal Democrats: 54% agreed. The argument about the war cannot be won simply by arguments about the weapons issue. We have to take on the 'regime change' argument. See previous *Anti-War Briefings*, and *Regime Unchanged: Why The War Was Wrong*, by Milan Rai (Pluto, September, available at a discount via the JNV website).