



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Tony Blair under fire from many fronts with calls for his resignation



Paul Bremer

Paul Bremer is the US official running Iraq. In a recent television interview on the Jonathan Dimbleby programme, a claim that Saddam Hussein had laboratories for developing weapons of mass destruction was put to him and he immediately responded by rubbishing the claim, before the interviewer could tell him that the one making the claim was British Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Tony Blair had said in a Christmas message to UK troops that the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) had unearthed “massive evidence” of clandestine labs. Paul Bremer in his response to the claims during the television interview said it sounded like a “red herring” made up by someone to upset the rebuilding effort. “It sounds like someone who doesn’t agree with the policy sets up a red herring then knocks it down.” “I don’t know where those words come from but that is not what (ISG chief) David Kay has said.” “I have read his reports so I don’t know who said that.”

The affair is one of the most amazing diplomatic shambles of recent times.

However, when it was pointed out the remarks had come from the leader of the US’s closest ally, Mr Bremer seemed to pull back from his original remarks. “There is actually a lot of evidence that had been made public,” he said.

Former chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix has also cast doubt on Mr Blair’s assertion. Dr Blix said it was “innuendo” to suggest laboratories were used for WMD. Echoing what Mr Bremer said, Dr Blix said that the ISG had failed to produce any concrete evidence that the laboratories they had found were working on WMD.

However, Downing Street was standing by the prime minister’s comments. A spokeswoman insisted he was referring to “already published material” in the interim report by the ISG.

Tony Blair was also under fire from two former Cabinet members, Robin Cook and Clare Short as well as two senior Church of England clerics.

Two Church of England leaders criticised him for his handling of the war in Iraq. Dr David Hope, the Archbishop of York, questioned the legitimacy of the war and warned that the prime minister would have to answer in the end to God. The Bishop of Durham, Dr Tom Wright, called Mr Blair a “vigilante”.

Dr Hope, Britain’s second most senior church leader, criticised Mr Blair for not listening to opponents during the war in Iraq. In an interview in *The Times*, he said: “We still have not found any weapons of mass destruction anywhere.” “Are we likely to find any? Does that alter the view as to whether we really ought to have mounted the invasion or not?” “Undoubtedly a very wicked leader has been removed but there are wicked leaders in other parts of the world.” Dr Hope warned him: “There is a higher authority before whom one day we all have to give an account.”



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Mr Blair has staunchly defended his decision to go to war and said he was ready to meet his Maker.

Dr Wright said he did not think Mr Blair and US President George W Bush had the credibility to deal with the problems in Iraq. "For Bush and Blair to go into Iraq together was like a bunch of white vigilantes going into Brixton to stop drug-dealing," he told the Independent. "This is not to deny there's a problem to be sorted, just that they are not credible people to deal with it."

Former Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook said it was time for the government to admit it had been wrong about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. It is undignified for the prime minister to continue to insist he was right when everyone can see he was wrong. Mr Cook warned Mr Blair he might never win back public trust after the Iraq war. Mr Cook said the ISG report had only reported laboratories which were suitable for chemical research. The prime minister had tried to turn that "innocuous" finding into a threat when everyone in Britain could see Saddam Hussein had not had weapons of mass destruction, he argued. "It really is time that the prime minister accepted that himself," Mr Cook told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

Rebel Labour MP, Clare Short has delivered her most devastating attack yet on Tony Blair. She is predicting the Prime Minister will resign early next year after the Hutton report into the death of Dr David Kelly is published. She told Sky News: "There are going to be a lot of blows and difficulties and then we'll see and he's not looking good. I think (for) the honour of the country, as well as the renewal of the Labour Government - I very much hope he steps down gracefully."