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BODY:

THE British Government brought out a month or so ago a damning dossier on Iraq's so-called knavery in producing and hiding weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Besides being distributed widely, it was also put on the website of the British PM's Office (PMO) and touted as a signal triumph of the infallible surveillance capabilities of that nation's intelligence set up. The US Secretary of State, Mr Colin Powell, was so taken in by its virtuosity that, while presenting the US' own string of indictments against Iraq to the UN Security Council on February 5, he showered fulsome praise on the "fine" document which showed such "exquisite" mastery of detail. In fact, British and American media at the time of the publication of the dossier indulged in a good deal of puffery about the "irrefutable and unimpeachable" nature of its contents in much the same way as they did following Mr Powell's presentation. The same media are now heaping ridicule on the UK Government, particularly the office of the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, for their childish attempt at verbatim copying, to the point of leaving intact mistakes in spelling and punctuation, of material contained in open and published articles, some of them as old as six years purveying obsolete information. For instance, the fabricators of the dossier had merrily transplanted without a word of acknowledgement three articles from Jane's Intelligence Review, two of them published in the summer of 1997 and one in November 2002.

If there was a Pulitzer Prize for false claims made with utter effrontery in an official publication, that surely would go to the section of the dossier described as a compendium of "up-to-date details of Iraq's network of intelligence and security". The whole of it is now found to have been lifted, word for word, again without acknowledgement, from "Iraq's Security and Intelligence Network: a Guide," an article written for the Middle East Review of International Affairs last September by a postgraduate student at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California about the activities of Iraqi intelligence in Kuwait in 1990 and 1991.

The worst part of it is that the spooks, or whoever spawned the goof-up landing the UK Government in an unsavoury credibility crisis, while sticking to the tell-tale spelling and punctuation mistakes, mischievously twisted some words to mean things which the authors never intended. A contributor to The New York Times gives two examples detected by Dr Glen Rangwala, a lecturer in politics at Cambridge University: In the part dealing with the Mukhabarat, the Iraqi directorate of general intelligence, the article the dossier stole from mentions its responsibilities to include "monitoring foreign embassies in Iraq," while the British oeuvre makes it "spying on foreign embassies in Iraq." Similarly, the description of the Mukhabarat's role in "aiding opposition groups in hostile regimes" becomes "supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes."

Who would have thought that the UK Government, in its desperateness to make out a case for war on Iraq by hook or crook, would sink to such depths of what the media have aptly dubbed "official dishonesty"?

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◀ [prev](#) Document 5 of 19 [next](#) ▶

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