

The Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction

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**PRESS CONFERENCE: OPENING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN, THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD BUTLER OF BROCKWELL KG GCB CVO**

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Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Thank you for coming to this press conference on the Report of the Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction which I have chaired and which the Government has published today. May I introduce my colleagues ...

2. We were appointed as a Committee of Privy Counsellors on 3 February and were asked to report by the Parliamentary Summer Recess which we have managed to do. This is a period of just under 6 months. We were asked to follow, in terms of procedures, the precedent of the Falkland Islands Review under Lord Franks in 1982. That Review was completed in an almost identical period.

3. When we were appointed there was much comment on the supposed narrowness of our terms of reference compared with Franks, in particular that our terms of reference did not cover the reasons for going to war. It seems to have been forgotten that Lord Franks was not asked to consider, and did not consider, whether it was right to go to war to recover the Falklands.

4. It is true that, unlike Franks, our terms of reference covered only one aspect of events leading up to the Iraq war, and that is the collection, assessment and use of intelligence. In another respect, our terms of reference went much wider since we were asked to consider the general issue of intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in countries of concern and on the global trade in such weapons.

5. This wider context not only enabled us to look at the issue in the round but also enabled us to examine, and to some extent tell the story of, the activities of our intelligence agencies in countries where things have gone better than they did in Iraq.

6. We welcomed this because all members of the Review Committee, through our different backgrounds, know a good deal about the work of our intelligence community and we admire it very much. When attacks on UK interests are not foreseen, intelligence gets the blame. When there are successes in countering such attacks – as there very frequently are – nobody gets to hear about them. We have great admiration for the bravery and professionalism of the people who serve in British intelligence, and for the degree of teamwork in the British system which is the envy of many other countries. There has probably never been a period in peacetime when intelligence work has been more difficult and more important to all our safety than it is at present.

7. As it happens there have been recent developments in counter-proliferation in respect of countries of concern, and to some extent in counter-terrorism, when what was previously hidden has come to light. We tell at least some of the story of the contribution of intelligence to these successes in Chapters 2 and 3 of our Report. There is more we could have told if doing so would not have damaged continuing operations.

8. Now to the Report itself. We hope that the table of contents will enable you to find your way round it easily. For those of you who have to read it quickly there is a final Summary of Conclusions which brings together the main conclusions in (I hope) a coherent way. But I emphasise that these conclusions should be read in the context of the sections to which they relate. They should be treated as signposts not substitutes for reading the earlier sections.

9. Before describing the main chapters and our conclusions I highlight one or two points in the introduction. First, it has been the job of the Iraq Survey Group in Iraq, not ours, to discover whether there are Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. The ISG has not reported yet. We have been in touch with them informally and we have given [para 474] our broad judgement of what the outcome is likely to be, but it is they, not we, who are the authority on this.

10. The second is that we have not commented on the performance of the intelligence machinery in other countries. In the United States there is a parallel Commission, as well as the Congressional Intelligence Committees.

11. Third, while there is much material which we have not been able to include, we have prepared a Report which is published in full, including an unprecedented amount of intelligence material. There are no asterisks. Moreover, we believe that what we have been able to publish gives Parliament and the public a fair view of the issues we were asked to cover.

12. Fourth, we think that a lot of confusion arises from the language used on this subject, and from the term “Weapons of Mass Destruction” in particular. So we have tried to avoid this phrase in the body of our Report, referring instead to the type of weapon by its name in each case. I will now try to stick to that in the rest of this presentation.

13. Chapter 1 of the Report describes the nature and use of intelligence, including its pitfalls. We hope that readers will find this interesting. We feel that the character and limitations of intelligence need to be better understood and this is essential background for what is said in the rest of the Report.

14. Chapters 2 and 3 are an account of the material we are able to publish on the role of intelligence in respect of the AQ Khan network, Libya, Iran, the proliferation activities of North Korea, and counter-terrorism; and the conclusions we draw from those. As I have said, we believe that these are creditable and impressive stories. We hope that they will give readers a glimpse of just a fraction of the work intelligence does in trying to make the world a safer place.

15. Now Iraq. We have two chapters on Iraq – one dealing with the role of intelligence in the period leading up to the Iraq war and the second with specific issues which have been the subject of public attention.

16. In the general chapter on Iraq we start from the end of the first Gulf war and look at intelligence between then and the departure of the UN inspectors in 1998. We do so in order to examine how that intelligence influenced the assessments in the later period and our conclusions are set out in paras 207-9.

17. On the period up to 1998 we draw four main conclusions – first of effective work carried out by IAEA and UNSCOM, which was however not complete because of inability to account for all Iraq’s previously estimated stocks. Secondly, a progressive reduction in JIC estimates of Iraq’s capabilities up to 1994/95. Thirdly, following the defection of Saddam Hussein’s son-in-law, Hussein Kamil, which prompted Iraqi declarations of programmes previously concealed, growing suspicions between 1995 and 1998 of what Iraq might be continuing to conceal. And fourthly more assured JIC assessments of Iraq’s nuclear capabilities than of its chemical and biological capabilities. The latter are, of course, easier to conceal.

18. In the period 1998-2002, the weapons inspectors were no longer in Iraq and intelligence sources were sparse, particularly on Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons programmes. Following the inspectors’ departure, some of Iraq’s suspected remaining facilities were attacked through the bombing operation, Desert Fox. The policy was one of containment of Saddam, against a background of continuing suspicion and fears on the part of the Government that the international will to retain sanctions was weakening [paras 213-217].

19. There was limited intelligence suggesting Iraqi attempts to expand its missile programme, to lay the foundations of a revived nuclear programme, and to develop facilities which could be used for chemical and biological programmes. In the background, there was the well-established history of Iraq's weapons programmes from well before the first Gulf war and their use in action both against Iran and Iraq's own people. More immediately, there was growing intelligence and consequent concern about proliferation in other countries as well, for example the expanding information about the extent of the AQ Khan network. This led to fears of what one witness called a "creeping tide" of proliferation [paras 255-257].

20. Then 9/11 happened, followed by coalition action in Afghanistan, President Bush's axis of evil speech, and growing evidence of United States focus on Iraq. This led to reassessment of the British Government's policy towards Iraq in early 2002 and to the conclusion that stronger action (not necessarily military action) needed to be taken to enforce Iraqi disarmament [paras 259-269].

21. This conclusion was not based on any new development in the intelligence picture on Iraq [paras 284-285]. At that stage there was no recent intelligence that by itself would have given rise to a conclusion that Iraq was of more immediate concern than the activities of some other countries. The British Government, as well as being influenced by the concerns of the US Government, saw a need for immediate action on Iraq because of the wider historical and international context, especially Iraq's perceived continuing challenge to the authority of the United Nations. The breach of UN Resolutions also provided a basis for action but, if it were to take the form of offensive military action, it was recognised, first, that the United Nations Security Council would need to be convinced that Iraq was in breach of its obligations; second, that such proof would need to be incontrovertible and of large-scale activity; and, third, that the intelligence then available was insufficiently robust to meet that criterion. This was in March 2002.

22. During the spring and summer of 2002 [paras 270-281, 289-306], further intelligence came in and the tone of JIC judgements became firmer but successive JIC assessments warned that intelligence remained limited, particularly on Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programmes. A dossier began to be prepared, first covering four countries of concern and then concentrating solely on Iraq. Other issues occupying the intelligence agencies, the JIC and the Departments during this period included terrorism, the activities of the AQ Khan network and the tension between India and Pakistan.

23. In response to Parliamentary and public concern that there was a growing prospect of military action against Iraq, the Prime Minister announced on 3rd September 2002 that the Government would publish what subsequently became known as the dossier [paras 313-314]. This was published on 24th September in time for a debate on Iraq for which Parliament had been recalled. The dossier

broke new ground in three ways: the JIC had never previously produced a public document; no Government case for any international action had previously been made through explicitly drawing on a JIC publication; and the JIC had never been used in such a public way. The immediate response to this dossier was that it was cautious, even dull. It gained attention through later events, and particularly from the fact that, contrary to the expectation reflected in it, military forces entering Iraq did not find significant stocks of chemical or biological weapons or evidence of recent production of such weapons.

24. We have examined the dossier very carefully. In our Report we take the unprecedented step of publishing as an Annex the relevant sections of the three key JIC assessments preceding the dossier, alongside the dossier itself and the Prime Minister's accompanying statement in the House of Commons so that comparisons can be drawn about whether the dossier fairly represented the intelligence. Our own conclusions [paras 460-469] are:-

- The Government wanted the dossier as a document on which it could draw in its advocacy, not necessarily of military action, but of the general direction in which its policy had been moving away from containment to a more pro-active approach to enforcing Iraqi disarmament.
- The JIC, with commendable motives, took responsibility for the dossier, in order that its content should properly reflect the judgements of the intelligence community. They did their utmost to ensure this standard was met. But this will have put a strain on them in seeking to maintain their normal standards of neutral and objective assessment.
- In translating material to the dossier, warnings in the JIC assessments were lost about the limited intelligence base on which some aspects of these assessments were being made. Language in the dossier, and used by the Prime Minister, may have left readers with the impression that there was fuller and firmer intelligence than was the case. It was a serious weakness that the JIC's warnings on the limitations of the intelligence were not made sufficiently clear in the dossier.
- With the benefit of hindsight, making public that the JIC had authorship of the dossier was a mistaken judgement. In the particular circumstances, the publication of such a document in the name and with the authority of the JIC had the result that more weight was placed on the intelligence than it could bear. It also put the JIC and its Chairman into an area of public controversy. Arrangements must be made for the future to avoid this and we discuss a number of options for doing so.
- We realise that our conclusions may provoke calls for the Chairman of the JIC, Mr Scarlett, to withdraw from his appointment as the next Chief of SIS. We greatly hope that he will not do so. We have a high regard for his abilities and his record. It was a mistaken judgement for the dossier to be so closely

associated with the JIC but it was a collective one for which Mr Scarlett should not bear personal responsibility.

25. Between September 2002 and the outbreak of war, the intelligence community turned their attention to Iraqi plans for deception and concealment and to providing information to UNMOVIC in their searches for hidden programmes and weapons; and also to contingency planning for war. We were surprised that, as the generally negative results of UNMOVIC inspections became apparent in early 2003, there was no re-evaluation of the quality of UK intelligence.

26. We examined the extent to which intelligence played a part in the Attorney General's opinion of 7 March 2003 on the legality of the war [paras 374-379], which we have read. That opinion turned predominantly on legal argument. The only relevance of intelligence is that the Attorney General advised that, in the absence of a further United Nations Resolution, the Prime Minister needed to be satisfied that there were strong factual grounds for concluding that Iraq had failed to take the final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations under relevant resolutions of the Security Council and that it was possible to demonstrate hard evidence of non-compliance and non-co-operation with Resolution 1441. The Prime Minister, in reaching his view, took account of false statements and omissions in the declarations submitted by Iraq pursuant to Resolution 1441 and Iraq's failure to comply with, and co-operate fully in, its implementation. He also took account of the intelligence picture and information from other sources, including UNMOVIC [paras 384-385].

27. It is not for us to comment on the legal merits of the Attorney General's opinion. We took evidence from Ms Elizabeth Wilmshurst, a former deputy legal adviser in the Foreign Office, who resigned over this issue, and satisfied ourselves that her disagreement related to the legal arguments and not to intelligence [paras 376].

28. Following the war, and of course unknown to those concerned at the time, doubts have arisen about a high proportion of human sources whose intelligence helped to underpin the Joint Intelligence Committee assessments and the Government's September 2002 dossier. The details are set out in paragraphs 410-412 of our Report. We have considered why these problems have arisen.

29. The overall problem was of course that Iraq was a very difficult target. Not only was it a closed and highly secretive society but Saddam had effective and ruthless counter-intelligence and ghastly punishments for those suspected of collaborating. Nevertheless, the difficulties which have emerged were not, in the UK's case, the result of over-reliance on dissident and emigré sources which SIS have a policy of avoiding. One reason may have been the length of some of the reporting chains – the “Chinese whispers” problem. Another may have been that otherwise reliable agents were reporting on areas outside their usual territory. A third reason may have been that, because of the scarcity of sources and the

urgent requirement for intelligence, more reliance was placed on untried agents than would normally be the case.

30. However, even taking these factors into account, we conclude that part of the problem arose from weaknesses in the effective application by SIS of its validation procedures and in their proper resourcing [paras 413-423]. The Chief of SIS acknowledged, that one problem may have been a shortage of experienced case officers following the budget reductions in the SIS in the 1990s. Another reason may be organisation changes which reduced the independence of those within SIS who validate human sources. At all events this problem needs to be given attention in the light of experience in Iraq and we hope that the Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee will monitor progress.

31. As regards assessment of intelligence, we detected a tendency for judgements to be too influenced by past underestimates as well as by Iraq's previous record, and its programme of deceit and concealment. But we found no evidence of deliberate distortion or of culpable negligence nor for that matter of assessments being influenced by the policy concerns of senior members of the JIC.

32. The Report then covers a number of specific issues in relation to intelligence on Iraq on which our conclusions can be summed up as follows:-

- The JIC found no evidence of co-operation between the Iraqi regime and Al Qaida [para 484].
- Assessments that Iraq sought uranium from Africa were well-founded on intelligence [para 503].
- The report that Saddam could deploy chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes, in the form in which it appeared in the JIC assessment and then in the Government dossier, was unclear and the JIC should not have included it in this form. Since the war the validity of the reporting chain which produced this report has become doubtful [para 511].
- Mobile laboratories have been found in Iraq but do not match the ones in the intelligence reports which were relied on for evidence of Iraq's production of biological agent. Moreover, we now know the one described by the source would not have been capable of producing stocks of such agent [para 530].
- The aluminium tubes which Iraq sought to acquire were almost certainly intended for rockets rather than evidence of an attempt to re-constitute a nuclear programme. Nevertheless, the JIC were right to take seriously the possibility of their nuclear use [para 545].

- The JIC retained in its assessments for longer than the current evidence justified references to Iraq's possible possession of plague agent [paras 562-565].
- The specific concerns raised by Dr Brian Jones and his staff about the September 2002 dossier were justified and the intelligence report on which his seniors relied in overruling them should have been shown to the experts [paras 570, 572, 576-577].
- We found no evidence that a motive of the British Government in initiating military action was security of oil supplies [para 579].

33. Chapter 7 of the Report then draws out general conclusions about counter-proliferation policy and the implications of what we have found for the UK machinery of Government.

34. We have so far identified one error in the Report. As the text indicates, we received evidence from Mr Scott Ritter, the former weapons inspector, but he is not included in the list of formal witnesses in Annex A. I apologise for that.

35. I hope that the Report speaks for itself and that these comments have been helpful in leading you through it. We have all agreed that we will be giving no media interviews after this Conference. So if there are questions, I will take them now.