

BBC TODAY PROGRAMME
ANDREW GILLIGAN INTERVIEW : 24/09/02

JIM NAUGHTIE

.... has had a chance now for a quarter of an hour or more really to get into the fine detail Andrew, what are your conclusions about the dossier?

ANDREW GILLIGAN

MY conclusion are that frankly there is very very little new here, I've actually had the chance to read it for nearly half an hour and there is a great deal of flourishing of the word intelligence, again and again they stress this is from secret intelligence, they mention the Joint Intelligence Committee, there's even a little paragraph about it, a foreword by the PM heavily stresses the secrecy and intelligence basis of the information but in fact I haven't been able to discover, in my admittedly only thirty minute perusal, very many new facts at all. The tabloid headlines if you like and as Andy Marr mentioned, the fact that some weapons of mass destruction may be ready within forty five minutes, although that seems to be contradicted later on in the document when it says that they haven't actually weaponised some of it -

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JN These are chemical and biological weapons we're talking about now?

AG Yes indeed, and the other tabloid headline if you like is that Saddam has some missiles which might be capable of reaching British bases on Cyprus, but again we actually knew that.

JN What about the question of intention Andrew because one of the things that Andrew Marr was saying was that there's an indication in the document that Saddam has talked about options for using chemical and biological weapons, those weapons which exist, now if that is there in any detail, that's new isn't it?

AG Well what the document says is that quotes secret intelligence shows that Saddam Hussein attached great importance to WMD, weapons of mass destruction, and is ready to use them, and that you know argument that he is ready to use them is new but it's not really backed up by any evidence, it doesn't specify anything and there is an explanation that they can't really - the Prime Minister in fact says in his foreword, we cannot be specific about the sources. There's also something that he's preparing plans to conceal evidence of the weapons of mass destruction from renewed inspections, there's

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the quantities of uranium from Africa that we mentioned, that's new, and the fact that he has up to twenty extended range Scuds we thought - the previous estimate was twelve, so that's a slight increase.

JN Where is this uranium supposed to be coming from, the uranium that he's trying to get hold of?

AG Well the only - the most specific it gets it Africa, that's all we know, but as I say there's an extensive network of front companies, again but we did know that. One of the interesting things about the dossier is that actually on nuclear weapons he's actually slight more conservative even than the double I double S dossier, the one that we had about two weeks ago which as you remember said that the acquisition of a nuclear weapon was heavily dependant on acquisition of fissile material, highly enriched uranium principally, and the double I double S said that if he got hold of highly enriched uranium he could get a weapon within months, this dossier says that if he got hold of it somehow from a foreign source, although he hasn't done so, it will take a couple of years they say, although they say he's almost

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certainly seeking indigenous, indigenous, that's an Iraqi based ability to enrich uranium, and they list a range of equipment that he's sought to acquire. But on the whole I think essentially there's not a great deal new here which does raise the question you know if this information was not good enough for a war in 1998 or 2000 why is it now?

JN Andrew Gilligan in Whitehall, thank you very much indeed. Now I should say the dossier is being published, you can get access to it on our website and also as we mentioned earlier you can engage in a web chat through our website with the spokesman for the weapons inspectors in Vienna who are preparing to go they hope back into Iraq and undertake those inspections which of course are at the heart of the dossier, needless to say we're going to be coming back to that story a couple of times before the end of the programme.

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JN It's now five minutes to nine, back to the dossier. Incidentally people who are trying to access the dossier on Iraq on government websites are having difficulty, so many people

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are logging on apparently the sites are crashing. You can access it directly from our own Today programme website, bbc dot co dot slash today, if you click on the dossier, that's pretty obvious, and you'll get straight through to read it in full and our defence man, Andrew Gilligan, has been reading it for the last hour or so, we're also joined by Dr John Chipman, author of the International Institute for Strategic Studies report on Iraq weapons capability which came out quite recently. Andrew you gave us a preliminary feel for the document half an hour or so ago, anything new.

ANDREW GILLIGAN

No, my feeling is that it fleshes out what we already know to some extent and that there are some new interesting sort of spicy angles but it doesn't contain a killer fact that takes us on any further.

JN When you say the "spicy" angles you mean his attempt to buy uranium from Africa?

AG Yes, although actually it's quite careful I mean we don't know what kind of uranium, we presume it's low enriched uranium in fact, not the kind that could be used to make - directly to make a nuclear weapon although it could be enriched in

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Iraq if they develop the capability, so you know I'm not quite sure that's as significant as it sounds.

JN Right, let me bring in Dr John Chipman from the double I double S, what do you make of it Dr Chipman?

JOHN CHIPMAN

I think their net assessment so to speak of Iraq's currently capacity is extremely close to what our own was on September 9th, I think they've added three things, first they provide a lot of detail on Iraq's procurement network for nuclear materials, secondly they have given evidence of Iraq's continued desire to build ballistic missiles of a length greater than six hundred and fifty kilometres, and finally they've shown that Iraq is preparing for the possible return of inspectors by developing more sophisticated concealment strategies, some of which we included in our report, like mobile biological weapons laboratories.

JN What do you think it says about intention on the regime's part to use weapons?

JC Well it shows very clearly that weapons of mass destruction are very much at the heart of Saddam Hussein's military planning, and as we describe

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in our report the preparation for delegating authority to field commanders to use chemical or biological weapons is very much there, and he could use them within forty five minutes of a decision to do, so that the core of his military strategy is much more important than conventional weapons to him.

JN What is the answer to the point put by Tam Dalyell of course an implacable opponent of war, earlier on this programme, when he said look the Iraqis know that if they use a weapon of mass destruction, they will be flattened, therefore they will not do it. How do you respond to that?

JC I think the answer is that if he had a nuclear weapon or even more diverse weapons of mass destruction he would be able to expand his regional political ambitions and attempt perhaps again to invade Kuwait or Saudi Arabia and we might be deterred from defending him if he might be able to threaten the use of a nuclear weapon against Israel, and that's why it's important to stop his WMD programme before it fully matures.

JN Do you believe yourself, and taking into account what you've read in the dossier about his intentions and his efforts to conceal what's going on in Iraq, that the UN weapons

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inspectors, if indeed they are allowed back with unfettered access so called, will be able to do their job?

JC I think it would take at least a year for them to develop the inspection techniques and tradecraft to deal with the very sophisticated concealment strategies of Saddam Hussein.

JN Andrew Gilligan, just as we move towards the end of the programme, can you give us some bits of the report please.

AG Yes, certainly. The key contention is that intelligence confirms, this is a quote from the report, that despite sanctions and the policy of containment, Saddam has continued to make progress with his illicit weapons programmes and the Prime Minister in his foreword is absolutely explicit, he's very clear, he says that gathering intelligence is not easy but our judgement is that Saddam is a grave threat to the world.

JN If you were to choose a paragraph that's the most dramatic that you've read this morning, what is it?

AG Well to be honest it's not that kind of document, it's actually rather sensibly cautious and measured in tone on the whole, there are as

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I say a couple of sexy lines designed to make headlines for the tabloids like the fact that he can deploy within forty five minutes if the weapons were ready and that he could reach the British bases on Cyprus, both of which we actually knew.

JN How does the Prime Minister's introduction begin?

AG It talks very heavily about intelligence, the word intelligence is brandished around a lot, the document today is based in large part on the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

JN And will be discussed in Parliament later.
Andrew Gilligan, Dr Chipman, thank you very much.

END OF REPORT

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