

Transcript of extracts from
Radio 4 Today programme on 29 May 2003

6 am

News headlines read by John Humphrys ("JH") and Corrie Corfield ("CC")

- JH *[first headline]* Tony Blair is going to Iraq today. There have been new accusations over the reasons for fighting the war.
- CC *[top story]* Tony Blair will set foot on Iraqi soil today – just seven weeks after Saddam Hussein was swept from power. His visit comes amid continuing controversy about the likelihood of weapons of mass destruction being found. The US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has suggested that the weapons might have been destroyed before the fighting began. This report is from our political correspondent, John Pienaar ("JP"), who's travelling with the Prime Minister.
- JP This morning, Tony Blair becomes the first Western leader to land in Iraq since the war, a symbolic appearance and one that will test his political skills as well as his flair for presentation. The visit is about thanking the troops and weighing up the task of reconstruction, according to Mr Blair, not triumphalism. Even so, he and his team will want to cultivate the images that will tell the tale of a liberated people. The problems and bitterness of the aftermath of war will be discussed behind the scenes in talks with British officials, Iraq civilians and the military. Today's visit will be brief. The business of rebuilding Iraq, politically and economically, and the search for the elusive weapons of mass destruction, looks like continuing perhaps for rather longer than Mr Blair might have hoped.
- CC A senior official involved in preparing the Government's dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction has told this programme that the document was rewritten just before publication – to make it more exciting. An assertion that some of the weapons could be activated within 45 minutes was among the claims added at a late stage. The official claimed that the intelligence services were unhappy with the changes, which he said were ordered by Downing Street.

6.07am

- JH The government is facing more questions this morning over its claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Our defence correspondent is Andrew Gilligan. This in particular Andy is Tony Blair saying, they'd be ready to go within forty five minutes.
- AG That's right, that was the central claim in his dossier which he published in September, the main erm, case if you like against er, against Iraq and the main statement of the British government's belief of what it thought Iraq was up to and what we've been told by one of the senior officials in charge of drawing up that dossier was that, actually the government probably erm, knew that that forty five minute figure was wrong, even before it decided to put it in. What this person says, is that a week before the publication date of the dossier, it was actually rather erm, a bland production. It didn't, the, the draft prepared for Mr Blair by the Intelligence Agencies actually didn't say very much more than was public knowledge already and erm, Downing Street. our