

Pat Barrie

From: Andrew Gilligan-INTERNET [andrew.gilligan@bbc.co.uk]
Sent: Friday, June 06, 2003 2:07 AM
To: 'pat.barrie@fco.gov.uk'
Subject: RE Letter from John Williams, FCO Press Secretary

John,

It is possible, of course, that Saddam decided to disperse the weaponry at the last minute. What went on in his head does seem to have been stranger than we all dreamed. But my feeling is that dispersion in the face of imminent military action would defy all logic. Surely the imminence of invasion would have made Saddam more determined to have weapons ready to use, not less? What leader on earth would react to the prospect of his overthrow and death by abandoning what was effectively his sole means of defence? He might not have been able to win the war with it, but he could have raised the price we had to pay for victory, and increased the already substantial controversy the war caused around the world.

I always believed that Saddam had WMD, and I've said so many times, including this week. To me, most persuasive argument was the simple question "If he didn't have them, why did he defy the UN and put his country through so much agony in the process?"

In the light of the failure to discover WMD in Iraq, I can see two possible answers to this question. The first, which you may not like, is that Saddam did indeed have a substantial WMD programme, and did indeed disperse or abandon it - but because of the arrival of the UN inspectors, not because of the threat of military action. In other words, the Blix process worked and the war, at least on the grounds given by the British government, was unnecessary.

The second, which I and more important my sources think more likely, is that sanctions and surveillance did partly work, keeping the WMD programme relatively small, obliging it to be quite heavily concealed, maybe not even weaponised, and also therefore minimising the level of threat to ourselves. However, Saddam deliberately cultivated a strategic ambiguity about the size of his programme, hence the defiance of the UN, in the belief that this would deter his enemies at home and abroad from attacking him. That it ended up having exactly the opposite effect turned out, of course, to be the latest and last in his long series of misjudgments. He had all the manoeuvrability of an oil-tanker when it came to adjusting to a changing political climate.

As you might know, I reluctantly supported the war - I've written this more than once - but not for the British Government's reasons. I approached it on an actuarial basis. I thought that a war would probably kill fewer Iraqis than another 12 years of Saddam and sanctions combined. I thought it would be easy and quick and I said so before the war (see for instance the Guardian feature about me sometime in Feb.) But actually the numbers balance in 2003 is not quite as compelling as we might both like. Saddam was responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths in the Eighties and early Nineties - perhaps millions if you count his crazy war on Iran. Sanctions killed hundreds of thousands in the early Nineties. But by 2003 the devastating effect of sanctions on the Iraqi people had been substantially mitigated, and so too, like it or not, had Saddam's brutality. He was still a monster and a murderer, but he carried off hundreds a year, not thousands. He knew another Anfal would have resulted in an invasion. I still think the balance tips in favour of a short war, but not by as much as it would have done say 15 years ago.

Unequivocally in the debit column is the damage the war's caused to international institutions, which we don't really know yet but could be considerable, and the degree of chaos in Iraq, which so far shows no sign at all of lessening. I stand by what I said on April 11th - for the ordinary

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