

## Introduction

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- 1 The decision to commit armed forces to war is the most momentous any leader can take. The Prime Minister took such a decision in relation to Iraq, and United Kingdom forces joined those of the other coalition partners in military action there. However, unlike previous conflicts, the war in Iraq took place only after a substantive vote in Parliament, a development which we welcome.
2. We had before us in March 2003 a number of sources of information on the situation in Iraq. Foremost among these were papers provided by the Government, in which they set out their assessment of the Iraqi regime, its human rights abuses and its weapons programmes. Much of this evidence was based on intelligence information—another welcome innovation by the present Government—and it was frequently cited by those who contributed to the debate, both inside and outside Parliament.
3. The main military phase of the conflict was over remarkably quickly, although the situation remains dangerous and the death toll continues to rise. Few would dispute that Saddam Hussein was an evil dictator and that the Iraqi people are well rid of him. But the war was fought not to effect regime change, but to enforce unanimous Resolutions of the UN Security Council. However, in addition to requiring the removal of what the British Government claimed was a “current and serious threat” from Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD),<sup>1</sup> it should be reiterated that the reasons that Parliament granted the Government authority to embark on the conflict included a number of other important considerations. Most important among these was Iraq’s persistent failure to comply with the ceasefire conditions it entered into at the end of the Gulf War and the fact that Iraq continued to refuse active co-operation “unconditionally and immediately” with the UN weapons inspectors. Questions have since been asked about the basis of the Government’s claim. If those who cast doubt upon it are correct, and the claim was not well-founded, the war was fought on a false premise. And if the claim was exaggerated or embellished, as some have suggested, Parliament was misled.
4. This Report seeks to establish whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, within the Government as a whole, presented accurate and complete information to Parliament in the period leading up to military action in Iraq, particularly in respect of weapons of mass destruction. The focus on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction is because their removal was the Government’s prime objective. As the Government stated in the opening paragraph of its paper “Iraq: Military Campaign Objectives”, published in March 2003, “The prime objective remains to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and their associated programmes and means of delivery, including prohibited ballistic missiles, as set out in the relevant United Nations Security Resolutions (UNSCRs).”<sup>2</sup>
5. We heard oral evidence from the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw (twice); the Permanent Under Secretary FCO, Sir Michael Jay; former Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House, Robin Cook MP; former International Development Secretary Clare Short MP; the Prime

<sup>1</sup> Forword by the Prime Minister to *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*, also Q 735

<sup>2</sup> Iraq: the Military Campaign Objectives, available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3318.asp>

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