

NEWSNIGHT TRANSCRIPT
2nd June 2003

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION
Susan Watts

INTRO:

Good evening. Tony Blair is flying back from the Evian summit into heavy turbulence. His angry denial Clare Short's allegation that the public was duped over the question of WMD has not reduced the temperature. Robin Cook has called for an independent inquiry. 73 MPs including 50 Labour backbenchers have signed a motion deploring the failure of the coalition to find any weapons of mass destruction, and the Opposition is threatening to drop its support for the Government. Now we've spoken to a senior figure, intimately involved in the drawing up of the Blair weapons dossier, who says the intelligence community was uneasy at the way some of its information was handled. Here's Susan Watts.

"could"
(see
on Blair
speech)

CLAIRE SHORT:

They weren't saying there was a link to Al-Qaeda and they weren't saying it was weaponised and threatening us in 45 minutes. That's where the spin came in.

UNNAMED MAN:

It is beginning to look as if the Government's committed a monumental blunder.

SUSAN WATTS:

Over the weekend, the storm over the missing weapons of mass destruction focused down on one key point. Was the British public duped over the urgency of dealing with Iraq's banned weapons? The Government's claim that Saddam could mobilise these within 45 minutes is already look shaky. But Jack Straw has suggested

it had never been a key part of the argument.

JACK STRAW:

If you look at, for example, the key speech that the Prime Minister made on the 18 March before the House of Commons, from my quick rereading of it this morning, I can for example, find no reference to this now famous 45 minutes.

WATTS:

But the reference to 45 minutes was there in the Prime Minister's speech to the Commons on the day he published his famous weapons dossier.

TONY BLAIR:

It concludes that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons, that Saddam has continued to produce them, that he has existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which being be activated within 45 minutes, including against his own Shia population.

WATTS:

And it features in the dossier itself four times. Notably in the Prime Minister's foreword and the executive summary. Today at the G8 summit in Evian, Tony Blair found himself in rebuttal mode.

BLAIR:

The idea that we doctored such intelligence is completely is totally false. Every piece of intelligence we presented was cleared properly by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

WATTS:

It's a surprising claim to make, given that it encompasses the other dossier which was plagiarised. In any case, today Tony Blair appeared irritated that the weapons issue won't go away.

BLAIR:

ROBIN COOK!

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