

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Informal minutes of the meeting on Tuesday 15 July at 2.30 pm,
in Committee Room 15

Members present: Chairman, Mr David Chidgey, Mr Fabian Hamilton, Mr Andrew Mackinlay, Mr John Maples, Mr Bill O'ner, Mr Richard Ottaway, Mr Greg Pope, Sir John Stanley, and Gisela Stuart.

Committee Staff

1. The Committee discussed the situation regarding the interview board to recruit a second Committee Specialist due to be held on Wednesday 16th July. With the Chairman unavailable to sit on the board the Committee agreed to allow the board to proceed without the participation of Members.

The Decision to go to War in Iraq

2. The Committee discussed the Foreign Secretary's letter to the Committee (July 11) regarding uranium from Africa. The Committee agreed to put further questions to the Foreign Secretary. It was further agreed that this letter should be placed in the public domain in the form of a press release. [Press Notice 31]

3. The Committee heard evidence from Dr David Kelly, Special Adviser to the Director, Counter-proliferation and arms control, Ministry of Defence.

4. After hearing Dr Kelly's evidence the Committee deliberated whether to ask Andrew Gilligan to reappear before the Committee. Gisela Stuart proposed that the Committee invite Mr Gilligan to give oral evidence in private on Thursday 17th July at 3pm

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 3

Noes, 2

Greg Pope

Fabian Hamilton

Sir John Stanley

Richard Ottaway

Gisela Stuart

It was agreed that Mr Gilligan would be invited to give oral evidence.

5. The Committee further agreed that the Chairman send a letter to the Foreign Secretary expressing their view that Dr Kelly was unlikely to be the prime source of Mr Gilligan's allegations. The letter would also mention that the Committee believe that Dr Kelly has been poorly treated by the Government in this matter.

6. The Committee agreed that the uncorrected transcript from the private oral evidence session held on 27th June with the Foreign Secretary, and further confidential memoranda received from the FCO in the Decision to go to War in Iraq inquiry, be passed to the Chairman of the ISC subject to Ministerial authorisation.

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Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism

7 The Committee considered the Chairman's draft Report. The Committee agreed the Report, with amendments. It further agreed that this, the Tenth Report of the Committee, should be published, together with oral evidence heard and written evidence received, at 11.30 am on Thursday 31st July, with embargoed copies available at 11.30 am on Wednesday 30th July

Gibraltar

8 The Committee considered the Chairman's draft Report. The Committee agreed the Report, with amendments. It further agreed that this, the Eleventh Report of the Committee, should be published, together with written evidence, at 11.30 am on Thursday 31st July, with embargoed copies available at 11.30 am on Wednesday 30th July.

9. The Committee agreed to launch the Committee's Tenth and Eleventh Reports with a press conference on Thursday 31st July at 11.30 am [The press conference will take place in Committee Room 8]

Inquiry into South Africa

10. The Committee considered the terms of reference for the inquiry into South Africa. The Committee agreed in principle to appoint a specialist adviser in this inquiry and further agreed to approach Professor Jack Spence on this matter.

11. The Committee agreed to delay the decision on oral evidence sessions to a later date.

Committee travel

12. The Committee considered FCO travel advice relating to the Committee's proposed visit to the Middle East in September. It was agreed, given the current security situation, that the proposed Baghdad leg of the visit be cancelled and replaced by a visit to Damascus. Sir John Stanley proposed that a sub-group of the Committee (of no more than three Members) visit Afghanistan instead of the Middle East. The Committee agreed to circulate a pro-forma for Members to indicate preferences in this matter.

13. The Committee further agreed to send a letter to the Rt Hon Alan Williams, Chairman of the Liaison Committee, to seek approval for these changes.

The Inter-Governmental Conference

14. The Committee discussed the letter from the Foreign Secretary to the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee regarding the Standing Committee on the Convention becoming the Standing Committee on the IGC. The Committee agreed to respond, in the form of a letter to the Foreign Secretary, agreeing in principle but making it clear that the Standing Committee on the IGC should in no way obstruct the Committee's work on European matters.

The Speaker Abbot Award

15. The Committee considered the letter to the Chairman from the Parliamentary Press Gallery regarding the Speaker Abbot award. The Clerks were invited to send a letter to

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Members giving further information regarding the award and seeking volunteers and nominations. It was further agreed to place this matter on the agenda for a future Committee meeting.

Any other business

16 The Committee discussed the work conditions for the staff at the Villa Wolkonsky, the British ambassadorial residency in Rome, and agreed to write to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State noting how shocked the Members were by the lack of ventilation for the kitchen staff.

Andrew Boyd
16 July 2003

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