



Select Committee on Foreign Affairs Written Evidence

Memorandum from Rt Hon Robin Cook MP

1. In my resignation speech I said, "Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in the commonly understood sense of the term—namely, a credible device capable of being delivered against a strategic city target". This would now appear to be correct. Such weapons require substantial industrial plant and a large workforce. It is inconceivable that both could have been kept concealed for the two months we have been in occupation of Iraq.

2. I have never ruled out the possibility that we may unearth some old stocks of biological toxins or chemical agents and it is possible that we may yet find some battlefield chemical shells. Nevertheless, this would not constitute Weapons of Mass Destruction and would not justify the claim before the war that Iraq posed what the Prime Minister described as "a current and serious threat" (Foreword to the September dossier).

3. There arise from the present position on the ground five clusters of questions which I hope your inquiry will be able to resolve:

4. *Why is there such a difference between the claims made before the war and the reality established after the war?*

5. The following claims are now unlikely to be substantiated, however much longer time is given.

— "Iraq continues to produce chemical agents for chemical weapons; has rebuilt previously destroyed production plants across Iraq" (The Prime Minister, (Hansard) 24 September, at Column three). If we have not yet identified any of these "rebuilt production plants" it is unlikely that we ever will. A chemical production facility is a substantial enterprise and there is probably no country that has been more mapped by aerial surveillance than Iraq.

— "Saddam continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons" (The Prime Minister's Foreword to the September dossier.) Again it is unlikely that we will now find a nuclear programme capable of producing a nuclear weapon on a timescale that would justify urgent action. A nuclear weapons programme requires substantial industrial sites and will often release identifiable radiation signals.

The Prime Minister further added on 24 September "We know that Saddam has been trying to buy significant quantities of uranium from Africa". Since the February presentation by the IAEA to the Security Council we know that the

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documents which provided the primary evidence for this claim were crude forgeries.

— "Saddam has existing and active plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which could be activated within 45 minutes" (The Prime Minister, (Hansard) 24 September, Column 3). We have now inspected every munitions storage facility in Iraq and have found no chemical or biological weapon and none within a 45 minute radius of artillery deployments. I note that the Government no longer predicts that they will find actual weapons but that they will produce evidence of programmes. As this Committee shadows the Foreign Office, it is only fair to note that the Foreign Office, and Jack Straw, were notably more cautious in their claims.

6. *Did the Government itself come to doubt these claims before the war?*

7. It is now admitted by the State Department that Colin Powell had serious doubts about the intelligence material and spent four days challenging it before his presentation to the Security Council in February. His presentation was more cautious than the September dossier and the uranium from Africa claim was rejected by him.

8. Given the close relationship between State and Foreign Office did they share with us their doubts? If they did not, are we not concerned that they concealed those doubts from us?

9. None of the above claims from the September debate were repeated by the Government in the March debate. This is curious given the pressure they were under to secure a majority for military action. Had the Government itself come to doubt the reliability of the September claims? If so, should Ministers not have corrected the record before asking the House to vote on war?

10. *Could biological or chemical agents have fallen into the hands of terrorists since the war?*

11. In his speech on 18 March, the Prime Minister laid great stress on the danger that a capability for Weapons of Mass Destruction might pass from rogue states to terrorist organisations. "The possibility of the two coming together—of terrorist groups in possession of weapons of mass destruction or even of a so-called dirty radiological bomb—is now, in my judgment, a real and present danger to Britain and its national security." (Hansard, 18 March, column 788)

12. Government statements have repeatedly quantified the volume of chemical and biological agents in Iraq which remain unaccounted for. Most frequently they quote 10,000 litres of anthrax. Until the war any such stocks would be securely guarded by the inner core of Saddam's elaborate security forces. However, since the war and the collapse of the security apparatus, they presumably have been left unguarded and unsecured.

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13. Does the Government really believe that such stocks of chemical and biological agents existed at the time of the war? If so, what assurances can they offer that they have not since become accessible to any of the terrorist organisations in the region? Instead of eliminating the risk of transfer of Weapons of Mass Destruction to terrorist organisations, could the war have opened potential access to such material by terrorists? In particular, could the looting of the Al Tuwaitta nuclear plant not have provided precisely the radiological material for a dirty bomb about which the Prime Minister expressed specific concern?

14. *Why do we not allow the UN Weapon Inspectors back into Iraq?*

15. The war was justified by Saddam's failure to show sufficient compliance with the UN Weapons Inspectors. Ironically, it is now we who are refusing any compliance with the same inspectors.

16. I can understand that in view of their longstanding hostility to the UN Inspectors the US may not be willing to admit them into their sector. Presumably, though, it would still be open to British forces to admit the UN Weapons Inspectors to the territory they occupy.

17. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the primary reason for keeping out the United Nations Weapons Inspectors is that they would confirm there was no immediate threat from a credible Weapons of Mass Destruction.

18. *Does the absence of Weapons of Mass Destruction undermine the legal basis of the war?*

19. Throughout the build-up to war the Government studiously avoided justifying invasion on the grounds that it would remove Saddam. "I have never put the justification for action as regime change." (The Prime Minister, (Hansard) 18 March, column 772). Undoubtedly, the principal reason for such caution was the legal advice that there was no basis in international law for an attack to remove Saddam.

20. The Attorney General's legal advice is founded entirely on the failure of Saddam to comply with the "obligations on Iraq to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction". I am no lawyer, but it does appear arguable that if Iraq had no Weapons of Mass Destruction there could in logic be no legal basis for a war to eliminate them.

21. In present circumstances the Attorney General's opinion would appear to be sound in theory but unsound in fact. As Menzies Campbell observed in the recent debate, it must be doubtful if the Attorney General would have given the same opinion if he had known then that it would prove so difficult to find any prohibited weapons.

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22. I fully understand why the Foreign Affairs Committee has chosen to focus the present inquiry on the justification for the war. However, there has been a much wider impact on our international relations from Britain's participation in the unilateral decision of the United States to launch a pre-emptive strike. The Iraq war has divided us from our principle partners in Europe. It has removed us from the inside track which we had built up with Russia under Putin. It has undermined the authority of the Security Council as the forum for multilateral decisions on peace and security. It has reduced our standing throughout the Third World, where few countries supported US intervention. It has broken up the impressive global coalition against world terrorism, which came into being in response to the attack on the twin towers.

23. These consequences represent damage to our national interests greater than any gain for Britain from its part in the war. I hope that in longer time the Foreign Affairs may be able to review the impact of the war on Britain's foreign relations.

Robin Cook MP

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