

[Select Committee on Foreign Affairs](#) [Written Evidence](#)**Memorandum from Andrew Wilkie**

RELEVANCE

1. For most of the last four and a half years I've been employed as a Senior Intelligence Analyst at the Australian Office of National Assessments, initially as a Senior Strategic Analyst, more recently as the Senior Transnational Issues Analyst. Prior to that I was a Lieutenant Colonel of infantry in the Army.

2. ONA is the senior Australian intelligence agency responsible for providing assessments to the Prime Minister and senior ministers on any offshore issue of importance to Australia.

3. I resigned on 11 March this year out of concern for the Australian government's support for an invasion of Iraq.

4. There has been some suggestion by the Australian government since I resigned that I was not involved in the Iraq issue. This assertion is inaccurate.

5. For a start, because of my military background I was required to be familiar with any issue likely to lead to war, and I was routinely employed as a military analyst. Hence I'd covered the Kosovo and Afghanistan conflicts, and was on standby to cover Iraq once the war began. In fact only half an hour before I resigned I was involved in an Iraq National Intelligence Watch Office planning meeting.

6. I've also worked specifically on Weapons of Mass Destruction. For instance, in 1998 I prepared the formal ONA assessment on WMD and terrorism, and represented ONA at the annual quadripartite working group on WMD held that year here at GCHQ in Cheltenham. More recently, in December 2001 I represented ONA at the annual Australian intelligence agencies WMD working group held at the Australian Secret Intelligence Service training facility.

7. My public observations about Iraq's links with al Qaida are also I believe reasonably well informed. During 1999 I was the only ONA analyst covering global terrorism, while more recently I've been involved in the issue to a lesser degree but including responsibility during 2002 for briefing on two occasions the peak Australian Federal-

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State coordinating body for politically motivated violence, known as SAC-PAV.

8. Finally, in my former core role as the Senior ONA Transnational Issues Analyst I was involved routinely in matters relating to Iraq. This provided me with virtually unrestricted access to the intelligence database on that country, a privilege not accorded to many other people in ONA given the careful compartmentalisation of intelligence in force there. In particular, my formal December 2002 assessment on the possible humanitarian implications of a war in Iraq required me to research in detail the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, including his WMD programme.

RESIGNATION

9. I resigned from ONA because of my strong believe that an invasion of Iraq at that time would be wrong. It had nothing to do with whether or not the war would be quick and successful or slow and disastrous, but everything to do with my assessment that invading Iraq would not be the most sensible and ethical way to solve the Iraq issue.

10. At the time I resigned I put on the public record three fundamental concerns. Firstly, that I believed Iraq did not pose a serious enough security threat to other countries to justify starting a war. Secondly, that the risks of a war were not justified. And thirdly that supporting a war would be dumb policy given that options short of war were yet to be exhausted.

11. Obviously my first concern is the most relevant today, and it's useful to understand that I put on the public record at the time I resigned my assessment that Iraq's conventional armed forces were weak and no threat to anyone, that Iraq's WMD programme was disjointed and contained, and that there was no hard evidence of any active cooperation between Iraq and al Qaida. I believe that any lingering questions about my understanding of the Iraq issue should be silenced by the accuracy of my pre-war assessments.

12. I've been asked since I resigned why I chose not to express my concerns in ONA itself. My answer is that, just as I came to understand my personal concerns, so too I came to understand that my position was too radical for ONA's politically correct position on Iraq. So I either had to shut-up and put-up, or do something about it. I obviously chose the latter, knowing that I'd have only one shot at it so I'd better make it count. By doing what I did I hoped to stay true to my personal beliefs while at the same time re-energising the political and public debate in Australia about the war.

13. Most recently, I've travelled to London for this enquiry out of a genuine interest in helping the UK public to get to the bottom of the

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mess, and also out of hope that by doing so I might help to unlock the political and public debate in Australia about the misleading justification for the war.

14. Frankly, I'm not going to let go of this. Too many people are dying in Iraq, too much damage has been done, too dangerous a precedent has been set, too many brave soldiers have been put at risk, too much money has been spent, and there is now too much extra risk of terrorism. Some Australians have I fear become desensitised to habitual government dishonesty. I'm not one of them.

CONCERNS

15. So what was it about the UK's approach to the Iraq war in particular that concerned me? Well it's important that I point out that there was no single issue, or shocking secret report, or classified intelligence assessment, that I can refer to in order to prove my assertion that the Iraq WMD threat was blatantly exaggerated for political purposes. It's not that simple or dramatic. Rather, I believe that the British government, like its American and Australian counterparts, was guilty of playing out the exaggeration over many months in sometimes bold but often more subtle ways.

16. I want to make it very clear that my opposition to this war was in no way intended as an endorsement of Saddam Hussein. He is clearly a horrid person and one who had to be dealt with eventually. His demise is a good thing, though I strongly object to the notion that his removal has somehow justified any government dishonesty before the war.

17. And I am not saying that Iraq did not have a WMD programme. The accumulated evidence on this is so extensive that the existence of some programme was almost a certainty. In all probability at least some evidence of it will probably be found eventually in Iraq.

18. Nor am I saying that British, American and Australian intelligence agencies did not over-estimate to some degree the Iraq WMD threat. This is an important aspect of the matter and one that I'm sure will be considered in the various capitals in due course.

19. What I am saying, quite simply, is that the British, American and Australian governments grossly exaggerated the threat posed by Iraq's WMD programme in order to justify the war. Each government of course had its own reasons for doing this; though for all their position had clearly been contaminated by years of building frustration with Saddam Hussein, a strong sense of unfinished business after the 1991 Gulf War, and the costs and risks of the grinding containment operations. London and Canberra in particular were driven by their strong desire to stay in step with Washington, at any cost.

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20. In the UK the exaggeration of the Iraq WMD threat was achieved through a string of public statements, nowhere more apparent than in the September 2002 Dossier entitled "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction—The Assessment of the British Government."

21. I found this document to be fundamentally flawed because of the way in which it filled the significant intelligent gaps that existed on Iraq with piles of arguable information based on worst-case assumptions finely tuned to the UK government's pre-determined commitment to support a US invasion of Iraq.

22. Two key intelligence gaps are especially important here; the pre-1991 Gulf War WMD which to this day remain unaccounted for, and the question mark over exactly what mischief Iraq got up to between the withdrawal of UNSCOM in 1998 and the arrival of UNMOVIC in November 2002.

23. In regard to the WMD unaccounted for, the Dossier implies that Iraq could have still had up to 360 tonnes of bulk chemical agent, up to 3,000 tonnes of pre-cursor chemicals, enough growth media to produce tens of thousands of litres of biological agent, and over 30,000 special munitions suitable for delivery of chemical and biological agents.

24. This list appears to me to be simply ridiculous, not least because no-one, not even the Iraqis themselves, seem to know exactly how much chemical and biological agent was ever produced by Iraq, exactly how much was used during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, or exactly how much was destroyed outside of UNSCOM control.

25. The list of unaccounted for material also seems to me to be absurd because it fails to properly consider the critical issues of agent purity and degradation over time. The simple fact of the matter is that most chemical and biological agents soon break down unless produced to a very high level of purity and then effectively stabilised. But Iraq always had great difficulties achieving high levels of agent purity, and British claims about Iraq having the knowledge and capability to add stabiliser is, in my opinion, unsubstantiated by hard intelligence.

26. The exception to all this is of course mustard gas, which can remain potent for many years. But this is a pretty crude agent that needs to be used in vast quantities, in ideal conditions, to be effective as a WMD. The limited quantities identified in the list of agents unaccounted for do not satisfy this criterion. In fact, the 550 shells mentioned by Colin Powell during his address to the UN Security Council on 5 February 2003 would between them amount to no more than a couple of tonnes of agent capable only of attacking one small military target.

27. In my opinion, the importance of this whole pre-1991 weapons

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issue has been a gross exaggeration. It could never have been a key component of some more recent massive WMD programme posing an imminent threat to us all.

28. Which brings me to the matter of what Iraq could have got up to between 1998 and 2002. And this is where I find the British statements particularly unconvincing.

29. Much of the basis for the claims about Iraq recommencing the production of chemical and biological agents relate to the rebuilding of facilities previously associated in some way with Iraq's WMD programme as well as the building of new facilities.

30. But the British material fails to include any hard evidence that such facilities were again involved in the actual production of WMD. In fact the September Dossier sometimes suggests quite the opposite. For instance, it refers to the Tarmiyah chemical research centre, but notes that it undertook research, development and production of the chemicals needed for Iraq's civil industry, which could not be imported because of international sanctions.

31. An important issue here is the technical and practical difficulties of rebuilding, hiding, supplying and operating chemical and biological facilities on such a scale as to constitute a genuine national WMD programme. The governments in London, Washington and Canberra would have you think this is not too difficult for an evil dictator with lots of oil money. But this is downright misleading. For the Iraqis to rebuild their WMD programme since 1998, virtually from scratch, would have been an enormous undertaking. Remember that even the United States never perfected the weaponisation of anthrax.

32. Not helping the UK government's case here is the inaccuracy of some of its material. For example, the September Dossier singles out the Amariyah Serum and Vaccine Plant west of Baghdad as a facility of concern; despite reports that journalists were allowed into the buildings at the plant within hours of the Dossier's release, only to find empty fridges.

33. Of course the issue of accuracy is especially relevant to the by now well-known and discredited claim that Iraq was seeking to procure uranium from Niger. My understanding of this matter is that the CIA knew as far back as early 2002 that the uranium purchase story was false.

34. Not that this stopped the African uranium story from helping to underpin the case for war in London, Washington and Canberra. Just like how the story about the thousands of aluminium tubes was given a central role, despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency had serious concerns about the whole story since December 2001. Or the fact that the gas centrifuge that might just have been

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made with the tubes would have sucked up enormous quantities of uranium and electricity, and required a vast and obvious industrial complex. Mind you the story was just too attractive to leave out of the case for war. Plus it was a rare opportunity for the Australian Prime Minister to be a player given the involvement of Australian intelligence agencies in this particular matter.

35. These matters are not recounted with the benefit of hindsight. Rather, these are the sorts of issues which contributed to my decision before the war to resign. And I was not alone. The sorts of doubts I had were shared by others, so much so that the strong, unambiguous language contained in the September Dossier, and other statements, seems to have been more the work of salespeople than professional intelligence officers.

36. The claim that the Dossier and other statements reflect accurately the view of the UK Joint Intelligence Committee just doesn't ring true to me. I saw countless JIC assessments whilst at ONA, in fact ONA is routinely invited to comment on them when they are in draft form, but never did I see such a string of unqualified and strong judgments as was contained in the September Dossier. Remember that the JIC process, by design, produces a compromise intelligence assessment. So its output is full of terms like "probably" and "could". Contentious issues are either dropped or heavily qualified. But all of this had been cut from the Dossier, like it was always dropped from the public statements made by the political leadership in London, Washington and Canberra.

37. This issue isn't particularly headline grabbing, but it goes to the heart of the deception over Iraq. I emphasise that the intelligence agencies were producing measured assessments. All it took to completely distort their work was for the politicians to drop a few words like "uncorroborated evidence suggests", and to insert a word or two like "massive" to create an entirely new threat.

38. A troubling aspect of the Coalition's case for war is the misleading way in which Iraqi dual-use facilities and materials were invariably referred to during the lead up to the war. Such sites and materials fill all countries; why there would be dozens and dozens of facilities within a few miles of the House of Commons that are capable of producing deadly chemical and bacteriological agents. And in numerous places in the United Kingdom there would be stored many of the potential ingredients for such brews. This situation is repeated throughout the United States and in Australia.

39. So I think it was preposterous how the governments in London, Washington and Canberra made such a big deal over Iraq dual-use sites and materials, often in the absence of any corroborating intelligence. The reports were sometimes just plain wrong. For

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instance, the British and American governments made much of the Fallujah II chlorine and phenol plant, despite the fact that UNMOVIC had found it to be inoperative.

40. Of course one of the reasons for such inaccuracies was the flood of disinformation that came out of Iraq in recent years from opponents of the regime desperate for US intervention. Such poor human intelligence would once have been discarded by competent intelligence agencies. But the apparent direct political interference with intelligence agencies in the US, and more subtle political pressure apparently applied in London and Canberra, meant that the rules were different with Iraq. Intelligence that once would have been discarded was now usable, with qualification. The problem was that the juicy bits of intelligence most in accord with the governments' positions were being latched onto and the qualifications were being dropped.

41. I think a big problem for the British and Australian governments now is the fact that their intelligence agencies were making it very clear before the war that the US was intent on invading Iraq for many strategic and domestic reasons, not just because of WMD and terrorism.

42. If you superimpose this insight over the case for war being made in London and Canberra, you come up with a very interesting situation indeed. Now the repeated justifications for the war look much more hollow. No longer could it appear that we all got the WMD issue terribly wrong. Much more likely is the proposition that the British and Australian governments were deliberately intent on using WMD to exaggerate the Iraq threat so as to stay in step with the US.

43. Of course there's a danger of getting so close to the detail and fancy language that you lose sight of the obvious. Please remember that we were all sold this war on the basis of an imminent threat from Iraq's massive WMD programme. This has not been found, and whatever might still be found can now not match the pre-war description. So the issue is not whether the pre-war assessments and rhetoric were right or wrong. They were wrong. It's as simple as that. The issue now is why they were so wrong. It was either an intelligence failure or a policy failure. I think it was the latter.

44. Against this backdrop I'm sure you'd understand my position that the British claim of Iraq getting WMD away in 45 minutes is absurd.

Andrew Wilkie

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