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**Member of Parliament for The Wrekin**



21 July 2003

**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**LONDON SW1A 0AA**

Lord Hutton  
The Hutton Inquiry  
Secretariat  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
81 Chancery Lane  
London  
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Dear Lord Hutton

I hope that the information set out in this letter will make a helpful contribution to your current Inquiry.

It is not intended in any way to diminish the seriousness of the issues which it covers. However, I do wish to challenge the assumption which forms the basis for the very serious charge that the Government led this country into war on a false premise which lies at the heart of the matters which you are investigating.

The assumption, which has been widely and repeatedly featured in the press and media, is that the claim in *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction - The Assessment of the British Government* that Iraq had the capacity to launch weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes played a crucial role in shaping both public opinion and, in particular, the decision made by Members of Parliament on 18 March this year to authorise this country's participation in the Iraq war.

In my view the dossier's claim, whatever its accuracy or probity, had no such significance. Indeed, according to my research, little attention was paid to it at all until Andrew Gilligan's broadcast on the *Today* programme of 29 May.

In early June, following Andrew Gilligan's report, I asked the House of Commons Library to undertake research which might establish, in quantifiable terms, the importance of the intelligence about Iraq's WMD launch capacity in the minds of MPs, both in the critical period between 24 September and 18 March and in the subsequent two months before 29 May.

The enclosed memorandum prepared for me by Greg Howard of the House of Commons Library confirms that, in the eight month period following the Prime Minister's statement on 24 September, despite there being over 70 formal opportunities in which MPs could have raised the issue in the House of Commons, just one made reference to it, in passing, in a debate on 25 November.

PEB/1/0001



No Minister or backbencher of any party at any other time cited the intelligence. Though some 50 MPs, including myself, contributed to the long and crucial debate of 18 March, not one referred to what is now considered to have been a critically persuasive piece of evidence.

Moreover, the Library's research reveals that of the 38,429 Written Parliamentary Questions answered during that period, only two on that subject were tabled by Members of Parliament, on 21 October 2002 and 19 May 2003. Not one of the 4,667 Oral Questions (including supplementaries) put in those eight months made reference to the issue.

I should like to add a little more anecdotal evidence based on my own assessment of the Government's dossier last September simply because I believe that it is broadly representative of that of many of my colleagues at the time.

From late Summer 2002 to mid March 2003, I was "open-minded but sceptical" about the case for war – open-minded because I believed that Iraq had WMD, sceptical because I could see no convincing evidence that those weapons posed an imminent danger such as would justify military intervention.

But while the dossier's claim that Iraq could launch WMD within 45 minutes was certainly noteworthy, it had a very limited significance for me, and I would suggest, for others, because it did not establish that Iraq had an *intention* to deploy WMD either within that or some other time-frame. Indeed, it did not address that issue.

In an article I wrote for a local newspaper shortly after 24 September, I expressed the view that

*The dossier which the Prime Minister published answered many questions but for the most part simply confirmed what many already knew... The key issue for me is not whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, nor that Saddam has been prepared in the past to use them, but whether he is actually planning to use them now... The dossier, as compelling as it is, provides no answer to that central question.*

In short, whether or not the claim about Iraq's WMD launch capacity was accurate, it had far less impact than has recently been claimed for it.

Indeed, it is worth noting a further finding of the House of Commons Library, that in the eight months from 24 September 2002 to 29 May 2003, the intelligence about Iraq's WMD launch capacity featured in 109 items in the national press. But, in contrast, in the three months from Andrew Gilligan's controversial broadcast on 29 May to today's date, it has been cited on no fewer than 1,026 occasions.

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I do not suggest that the evidence I offer provides a comprehensive assessment of the significance of the dossier's intelligence or how it came to be included.

But I hope that it provides a useful context for and insight into the relevance of that intelligence in Parliament's decision-making process and whether it has been the dossier itself or rather the press and media attention which it has subsequently received which played the greater part in the matters which you are now investigating.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. H.', written in a cursive style. There are two large black dots on the left side of the page, one above and one below the signature.