

Iraq and intelligence

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I found this on my computer. It was obviously written around 2004 and, as far as I can see, was never used.

Michael Moore's film 'Fahrenheit 9/11' is great propaganda but, like all propaganda, it isn't about the truth. In a section mocking the so-called 'coalition of the willing' which supported the US invasion of Iraq, Moore listed several very small countries – but omitted Australia and the UK. For Australia and the UK the *political* decision to support the USA caused major ructions within their intelligence systems. As is now admitted, and was known by most independent analysts before the invasion, there was no threat from Iraq and they had no WMDs. As we now know, most of the intelligence analysts of those countries also knew that; and they, along with sections of their countries' foreign and diplomatic services, resisted the drive to invasion and their political masters' desire for 'intelligence' with which to justify it. This resistance manifested itself in an unprecedented series of leaks of official information, anonymous briefings to journalists, and public protest by retired diplomats and intelligence personnel.

In the United States, the reluctance of the CIA to produce the required 'intelligence' led the neo-conservatives who were leading the push to attack Iraq to create the Office of Special Plans (OSP), a little unit within the Pentagon, which was conceived by Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense. OSP's role was to find or manufacture intelligence which would provide the pretext for invasion. The OSP's existence is a testimony to the resistance of the CIA's intelligence analysts.

In the UK the estimates from the two main agencies, the

Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) and MI6 (or SIS) are fed into the Joint Intelligence Committee which produces the final version. That, at least, is the theory. In practice, in this instance, the cautious, heavily conditional estimates produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee were strengthened by the Prime Minister's assistants in the Cabinet Office, Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell, who had the final editing rights on the notorious 'dodgy dossier'. Hence the great row about 'sexing-up' which led to the upheaval at the BBC and the big fight with the government – a fight in which, as Lord Hutton showed us, the claim that the estimates had been 'sexed-up' was true.

Above the intelligence analysts in the UK intelligence bureaucracy were the senior officers of the DIS and MI6, who had to take political factors into consideration: in this instance, were they willing to oppose the Prime Minister in his desire to support the Americans?

In the USA, UK and Australia the senior intelligence personnel ultimately capitulated to the political pressure in different ways. The British and American systems' senior intelligence personnel used last-minute information which purported to show that Iraq was a threat. In Britain, at the eleventh hour MI6 and the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) used a human source who claimed – falsely, of course – that Iraq had been developing chemical and biological warfare capacities. But to use this new 'source's' intelligence in this way, *the* expert in the field, the late Dr Brian Jones, of the Defence Intelligence Staff, was simply not told about the source or his 'intelligence'.¹ As Lord Butler commented dryly in his report :

'It would have been more appropriate for senior managers in the DIS and SIS [MI6] to have made arrangements for the intelligence to be shown to DIS experts rather than making their own judgements on its significance'.²

¹ On the late Brian Jones, see <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A36903-2004Aug26.html>.

² *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, HC 898, July 2004, p. 137

In the USA the Director of the CIA and Secretary of State Colin Powell, used the now notorious 'uranium from Niger' scam – based on forged documents which had come via MI6 – to get support for the war from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and thus ensure that the President got a mandate from Congress for the attack on Iraq.

In Australia a different system produced the same result. The Australians have two units producing intelligence estimates, one civilian, one military. It was the civilian version, the Office of National Assessments (ONA), which finally buckled under American pressure to come up with the goods: the military analysts in the Defence Intelligence Organisation, never did. The Australian ONA, attached to the Prime Minister's office, changed its estimates of 'the threat' posed by Iraq shortly after President Bush, in an address to the United Nations, said that the UN could support the invasion or be 'irrelevant'.

In short, the USA was going to invade Iraq and, as it has done many times in its history, fabricated a pretext to justify the attack. The price of joining the 'coalition of the willing' was to swallow the pretext, eat shit and swear it was ice-cream. Intelligence *analysts* in Australia and the UK baulked at this; but the politicians and the senior intelligence *bureaucrats*, those who had the contact with the political system, managed to force it down. One of the Australian analysts said of his period:

'We had strong reservations about the evidence that was being provided to us, but that was never carried forward because *the deputy director at the time thought that the intelligence relationship [with the US] was more important.*'³ (emphasis added)

Our intelligence bureaucrats would say the same; *and they always will.*

The unimaginable

'If they could not find a case for war that would win a

3 <www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2004/s1046367.htm>

majority in the House of Commons, and be (just about) acceptable in international law, Britain would face the unimaginable: leaving America in the lurch.’⁴

Thus Timothy Garton-Ash, a man never far from the line of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, showing the level of delusion still operating among some of our foreign policy intellectuals. They think the US cares about HMG’s views. You might have thought that the US invading Grenada, a member of the Commonwealth, against the wishes of HMG, would have been enough of a lesson. Apparently not. The reality is that Britain could leave the US ‘in the lurch’ the way a flea might leave an elephant in the lurch. And why is it ‘unimaginable’ not to support the US? It used not to be ‘unimaginable’. Edward Heath declined to support the US in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Harold Wilson refused to send troops to fight with the US in Vietnam.

There are two major conclusions to be drawn from these events. The first is that the senior intelligence personnel of America’s junior allies, in this case most notably Australia and the UK (but also Spain) showed, yet again, that they are unwilling to oppose the US because of the threat of being cut-off from US intelligence sources. (Though what these countries can do with that intelligence is unclear to me.)

The second conclusion, for students of the British political system, is that real political power in the UK rests with the Prime Minister. When I became interested in the relationship between the intelligence and security services and the British political system in the late 1970s, it was believed on the Labour left that the intelligence and security services were all-powerful and unaccountable. They are still unaccountable in any real sense (their accountability to Parliament is notional) but the events of the past two years show that it is ‘The Prime Minister wishes....’ which still commands absolute authority.

⁴ Timothy Garton-Ash, ‘We were duped’, the *Guardian*, 4 March 2004
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/mar/04/iraq.iraq>>