

RABBLE ROUSER

DECEMBER 2003

NO. 62

> Opening Remarks to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), and Defence Signals Directorate (DSD), 22 August 2003

> Andrew Wilkie

> Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to appear before the Committee.

> You would be well aware that I resigned from the Office of National Assessments, before the Iraq war, because I assessed that invading Iraq would not be the most sensible and ethical way to resolve the Iraq issue. I chose resignation, specifically, because compromise or seeking to create change from within ONA were not realistic options.

> At the time I resigned I put on the public record three fundamental concerns. Firstly, that Iraq did not pose a serious enough security threat to justify a war. Secondly, that too many things could go wrong. And, thirdly, that war was still totally unnecessary because options short of war were yet to be exhausted.

> My first concern is especially relevant today. It was based on my assessment that Iraq's conventional armed forces were weak, that Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction programme was disjointed and contained, and that there was no hard evidence of any active cooperation between Iraq and al Qaida.

> Now the government has claimed repeatedly I was not close enough to the Iraq issue to know what I'm talking about. Such statements have misled the public and have been exceptionally hurtful to me.

> I was a Senior Analyst with a top secret positive vet security clearance. I'd been awarded a Superior rating in my last performance appraisal, and not long before I resigned I'd been informed by the Deputy Director-General that thought was being given to my being promoted.

> Because of my military background (I had been a regular army infantry Lieutenant Colonel), I was required to be familiar with war-related issues and was on standby to cover Iraq once the war began.

> I've also worked specifically on WMD issues. In 1999 I prepared the assessment on WMD and terrorism, and represented ONA at the WMD working group held in the UK. In 2001 I helped prepare the update on my 1998 assessment, and I represented ONA at the Australian WMD working group.

> I was involved also in covering global terrorism issues. In fact, on two occasions I provided the relevant brief for the Standing Advisory Committee for the Protection Against Violence.

> Finally, as the Senior ONA Transnational Issues Analyst, I was involved routinely in matters relating to Iraq. This provided me with almost unrestricted access to intelligence on that country. In particular, my December 2002 assessment on the possible humanitarian implications of a war required me to research in detail the strategic threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

> If I could now turn more directly to the Committee's Terms of Reference. When I said that Iraq's WMD programme was 'disjointed and contained', I was describing a limited chemical and biological programme focussed on developing a break-out capability, in part by reliance on dual-use facilities. Weapons production was possible, though only on a small scale. My view was broadly consistent with ONA's position, maybe a little more moderate. I still believe evidence of such a programme may be found eventually, if not already.

> Now, in fairness to Australian and Allied intelligence agencies, Iraq was a tough target. From time to time there were shortages of human intelligence on the country. At other times the preponderance of anti-Saddam sources desperate for US intervention ensured a flood of disinformation. Collecting technical intelligence was equally challenging.

> A problem for Australian agencies was their reliance on Allies. We had virtually no influence on foreign intelligence collection planning, and the raw intelligence seldom arrived with adequate notes on sources or reliability. More problematic was the way in which Australia's tiny agencies needed to rely on the sometimes weak and skewed views contained in the assessments prepared in Washington.

> A few problems were inevitable. For instance, intelligence gaps were sometimes back-filled with the disinformation. Worst-case sometimes took primacy over most-likely. The threat was sometimes overestimated as a result of the fairy tales coming out of the US. And sometimes Government pressure, as well as politically correct intelligence officers themselves, resulted in its own bias.

> But, overall, Australian agencies did, I believe, an acceptable job reporting on the existence of, the capacity and willingness to use, and immediacy of the threat, posed by Iraq. Assessments were OK, not least because they were always heavily qualified to reflect the ambiguous intelligence picture.

> How then to explain the big gap between the Government's pre-war claims about Iraq possessing a massive arsenal of WMD and cooperating actively with al Qaida and the reality that no arsenal of weapons or

> evidence of substantive links have yet been found?

> Well, most often the Government deliberately skewed the truth by taking the ambiguity out of the issue. Key intelligence assessment qualifications like 'probably', 'could' and 'uncorroborated evidence suggests' were frequently dropped. Much more useful words like 'massive' and 'mammoth' were included, even though such words had not been offered to the government by the intelligence agencies. Before we knew it, the Government had created a mythical Iraq, one where every factory was up to no good and weaponisation was continuing apace.

> Equally misleading was the way in which the Government misrepresented the truth. For example, when the Government spoke of Iraq having form (being up to no good), it cited pre-1991 Gulf War examples, like the use of chemical weapons against Iran and the Kurds. Mind you, the Government needed to be creative, because 12 years of sanctions, inspections and air strikes had virtually disarmed modern Iraq.

> The Government also chose to use the truth selectively. For instance, much was said about the risk of WMD terrorism. But what was not made clear was that the risk of WMD terrorism is low, that leakage of weapons from a state arsenal is unlikely, and that the weapon most likely to be used will be crude. That is, the chemical, biological or radiological device most likely to be used will not be a WMD.

> The Government even went so far as to fabricate the truth. The claims about Iraq cooperating actively with al Qaida were obviously nonsense. As was the Government's reference to Iraq seeking uranium in Africa, despite the fact that ONA, the Department of Defence, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, all knew the Niger story was fraudulent. This was critical information. It beggars belief that ONA knew it was discredited but didn't advise the Prime Minister, Defence knew but didn't tell the Defence Minister, and Foreign Affairs knew but didn't tell the Foreign Minister.

> Please remember the Government was also receiving detailed assessments on the US in which it was made very clear the US was intent on invading Iraq for more important reasons than WMD and terrorism. Hence all this talk about WMD and terrorism was hollow. Much more likely is the proposition the Government deliberately exaggerated the Iraq WMD threat so as to stay in step with the US.

> In closing, I wish to make it clear that I do not apologise for, or withdraw from, my accusation that the Howard government misled the Australian public over Iraq, both through its own public statements, as well as through its endorsement of Allied statements.

> The government lied every time it said or implied that I was not
 > senior enough or appropriately placed in ONA to know what I was talking
 > about. And the government lied every time it skewed, misrepresented, used

> selectively and fabricated the Iraq story.

> But these examples are just the tip of the iceberg. For instance,
 > the government lied when the Prime Minister's Office told the media I was
 > mentally unstable. The government lied when it associated Iraq with the
 > Bali bombing. And the government lied every time it linked Iraq to the War
 > on Terror.

> The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister in particular have a lot
 > to answer for. After all, they were the chief cheerleaders for the invasion
 > of another country, without UN endorsement, for reasons that have now been
 > discredited.

> Mr. Chairman, I've skimmed over a lot of important issues here. Of
 > course I'd now welcome the opportunity to discuss any particular aspect in
 > more detail.

'IT IS RIGHT TO REBEL'

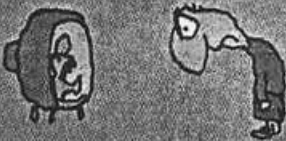


"ALMOST half of the 100 soldiers
 drug-tested after a raid on
 Darwin's Robertson Barracks in
 October tested positive for 'party
 drugs' such as cannabis and
 amphetamines, army chief Peter
 Leahy told a parliamentary
 committee last night."
 The Australian, November 6

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TODAY'S Q. + A.

Q. Why are so many Australian children cracking up?



A. NOT THIS AGAIN! YOU'RE BEING NEGATIVE.

Q. YES, O.K. but why are the children cracking up?



A. NEGATIVITY IS A DARK, UN-AUSTRALIAN EVIL. THIS IS THE LAND OF SUNSHINE AND OPPORTUNITY... AND YOU'RE A BORING LOSER.

Q. Yes but why are so many children cracking up?



A. AUSTRALIA IS A RELAXED, SPORTING NATION OF POSITIVE, FRIENDLY WINNERS SO JUST CHILL OUT!

Q. ALRIGHT. O.K., but why are the children cracking up?



A. WE HAVE A WORLD CLASS, AWARD WINNING, DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY WITH A BOOMING ECONOMY AND GREAT GOLDEN BEACHES. Leninig

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