

Witness Statement by Jim Drummond

I am providing this witness statement in response to a letter dated 1 February from the Secretary to the Inquiry. Due to a visit abroad I did not see the letter until 12 March. I have read Cabinet Office files and checks have been made of relevant FCO and Ministry of Defence files.

I joined the Overseas and Defence Secretariat in the Cabinet Office as Assistant Head in November 2000 working to the then Head of the Secretariat on a range of subjects including the Balkans and aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. In September 2001 the posts of Head of the Secretariat, Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser and senior No.10 Private Secretary for foreign affairs were merged and Sir David Manning took the job. At that stage I moved within the Secretariat to cover foreign affairs issues outside Europe and recruited two new Band A staff to join me. This coincided with 9/11 and a very substantial increase in the workload of the Secretariat. Around the end of 2001 the Deputy Head of the Secretariat handed over responsibility for coordination of policy on Iraq to me. From 9/11 until February 2002 Afghanistan and other post 9/11 counter terrorism issues took a higher priority than Iraq in the Secretariat's work.

It was becoming clear during 2001 that the containment policy was losing support from countries which wanted to trade with Iraq and those which wanted to take a tougher line. Efforts to toughen the containment policy had faltered. Other witnesses have described 9/11 as a 'Pearl Harbour Moment' in US history and the willingness to tolerate possible threats from states thought to have WMD, and from where WMD might leak to terrorist groups had substantially diminished. The debate was moving from containment to whether regime change was the only way to remove this perceived threat from Iraq.

By mid February 2002 in the Secretariat we knew that the Prime Minister planned to hold discussions with President Bush. We thought that Afghanistan would be the main topic, but President Bush had recently delivered his State of the Union Address on 29 January 2002, also known as his 'Axis of Evil' speech, and so Iraq was likely to be covered. We expected this to be a preliminary discussion. So, as I recall, the Secretariat offered to produce an options paper as background for the visit alongside a range of other papers. Tom Dodd was the main drafter of the paper working to me.

The paper had to be prepared quickly in time for the Prime Minister's return from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia which ended on 5 March 2002. But its preparation followed the usual pattern where the Cabinet Office commissioned contributions, then prepared a draft paper, circulated it for comment and held a meeting to discuss it. Cabinet Office files show that an initial meeting was held on 21 February with FCO, MOD and SIS. Drafts were commissioned from them with a deadline of 25 February. FCO was asked to draft on policy objectives towards Iraq and the wider region, a tightened policy of

containment, and legal advice on regime change; MOD on the military options for regime change and SIS on possible successor regimes. A draft paper was circulated on 28 February for discussion on 1 March, and a further draft was circulated on 5 March for discussion the same day. Those who contributed to the draft and the Assessment Staff were invited to the meetings, which I chaired.

The files do not contain records of the contributions made by each Department or what was said at each meeting and, 11 years on, I do not recall them in any detail. Tom Dodd has been asked separately for a statement. But the paper clearly drew on JIC and Assessment Staff judgements about the likelihood of Saddam having WMD and that his regime was unlikely to be removed by internal opposition. It also reported legal advice. There was debate about continuing containment and that is recorded in the paper as an option, before considering regime change and the options for how that could be achieved. As a background paper no recommendations were made and the files record that it was submitted as being produced in close consultation with FCO, MOD, SIS and the Assessment Staff rather than agreed word for word with them.

The paper was seen by the Deputy Head, Tom McKane, and submitted by him to Sir David Manning on 6 March and copied to senior staff in MOD, FCO and SIS along with other papers commissioned as part of the same exercise. That submission referred to a meeting with Sir David Manning on 7 March. On 8 March following a meeting, I wrote to Sir David Manning recording having made some changes to the paper after further consultation with FCO, MOD and SIS. These covered the difficulty of identifying successor regimes, that it was unlikely Iraq would disintegrate and some changes from FCO Legal Advisers clarifying their advice. No.10 subsequently sent the paper to the Treasury. Sir David Manning asked shortly before Crawford whether the paper needed updating and was told that it remained current, but we did update him on progress on UN negotiations since the paper was drafted.

I do not recall receiving feedback on the paper in the weeks following its circulation, and the files do not record comments from others disagreeing with it. At the time of drafting we expected this paper to be the first of several that would help ministers to reach conclusions on policy towards Iraq and hoped that there would be discussion with them.

Jim Drummond
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