

IRAQ INQUIRY: WITNESS STATEMENT
Air Chief Marshal Sir Joe French

1. The Inquiry has been given differing accounts about the purpose of the dossier published in September 2002.

Q. What did you understand the purpose of the dossier to be and how did you gain that understanding?

A. I understood the dossier to be a document placing on public record Government concerns over Saddam Hussein's regime's efforts to improve their WMD capabilities since the withdrawal of UNSCOM from Iraq in 1998. If there was a direct purpose for the dossier it was to set a case for possible inspection and disarmament of Iraqi WMD and certainly not a case for war. I gained that understanding from having worked in the DIS from March 1998 and involvement in JIC papers on the issue having been a member of the Committee from November 2000.

Q. What did you say to members of your senior team about the purpose of the dossier?

A. I cannot remember the dialogue from almost nine years ago, but it would have been along the lines of the answer above.

2. In mid-September 2002, SIS issued a particularly sensitive intelligence report from a 'new source on trial'. This is the report referred to in paragraphs 405 and 573 onwards of the Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Destruction by the Committee of Privy Counsellors chaired by Lord Butler.

Q. What were you briefed about this report and/or its source?

A. I read the report as part of the CX process and did not receive any further briefing on it. This was the normal SIS procedure where they would put particular intelligence into what they call a CX report and send it out to customers on the appropriate selective distribution list.

Q. By whom was this briefing provided?

A. There was no briefing.

Q. Did you see the report itself?

A. Yes.

Q. What advice or briefing did you receive on the report from DCDI, and/or DIS, Paul Roper?

A. I cannot remember receiving any advice or briefing from DCDI or DIST.

Q. What discussions did you have with either of these individuals or anyone else about the content of the report and its implications?

A. See the answer to the next question and those at paragraph 4.

Q. Was it discussed in the JIC?

A. JIC minutes from the period covering the compilation of the dossier suggest the issue was discussed although I do not remember detail of the discussion.

3. The report was issued to a particularly small distribution, which - as the Report of the Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Dr David Kelly CMG by Lord Hutton and the Review of Intelligence have made clear - did not include the relevant subject-matter experts within the DIS.

Q. Having heard about and/or seen the report, did you ask for it to be made available to the relevant experts within DIS their assessment?

A. No as reported in both the Hutton and Butler reports.

Q. What was the reason for that?

A. Given the way the compilation of the dossier was being handled with the involvement of the specialists/experts from across the intelligence community, including the DIS, I would have expected them to given the background to this intelligence if not access to the report itself. This was a regular occurrence where intelligence initially on limited distribution would be shared at the experts level to allow common understanding of issues for the drafting of cross intelligence community reports and studies commissioned by the JIC.

Q. Did you discuss the distribution of the report with either DCDI or DIST?

A. No.

4. The Butler Report noted (paragraph 405) that the report provided 'significant assurance to those drafting the Government's dossier that active, current production of chemical and biological agent was taking place'. Both the Report of the Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Dr David Kelly CMG by Lord Hutton and the Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction by the Committee of Privy Counsellors chaired by Lord Butler noted the concerns had been raised within the DIS about whether the language of the dossier was supported by the intelligence.

Q. What discussions did you have with either DCDI or DIST about the concerns raised by DIS staff?

A. I do not remember the specific discussion, but in the regular staffing of JIC papers, the dossier included, it was not unusual for subject matter experts to have differences of opinion over the emphasis given to specific strands of intelligence and those concerns would be raised with me for consideration before final clearance.

Q. What discussions did you have with either the JIC Chairman, Sir John Scarlett, the Chief of the Assessments staff, Julian Miller, or any member of the Assessments Staff about these concerns?

A. None.

Q, What was the basis on which you took the decision to give formal DIS endorsement to the judgements in the dossier given the advice of some members of the DIS that the final draft was, in some respects, stronger than the intelligence indicated?

A. The fact that individuals expressed concern was part of the usual process of debate and assessment which went on regularly within the DIS and within the wider intelligence community as a prelude to a consensus being reached by the JIC. My judgement was that the well tried due process had been followed and I was content with the final draft of the dossier.



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