

## **Iraq Inquiry: Statement of Lord Williams of Baglan**

1. I was appointed Special Adviser to the Foreign Secretary by the then Secretary of State Robin Cook in January 2000. Following Jack Straw's appointment as Foreign Secretary in June 2001 I was reappointed as Special Adviser by the new Secretary of State. I remained in this post until July 2005.

2. Prior to my appointment by Mr Cook I had worked for the United Nations for several years in Cambodia, Croatia and Bosnia as well as in New York and Geneva. The positions I occupied were in the Department of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping. I had also worked for Amnesty International, BBC World Service and the International Institute for Strategic Affairs. I left the government in 2005 to return to the UN as Director for Political Affairs for the Middle East and Asia. In September 2007 at the request of the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown I was appointed Special Envoy for the Middle East based in the FCO. In October 2008 I again returned to the UN as Special Coordinator of UN operations in Lebanon with the rank of Under Secretary General.

3. In my five and half years at the FCO I worked closely with Mr Cook and later with Jack Straw. I would always attend the Foreign Secretary's morning meeting with his Private Office and Ministers and many of his daily meetings with visiting guests and officials. I frequently accompanied both Mr Cook and Straw on foreign travels especially where it was relevant to my own background and the advice that I tried to give both Secretaries of State. For example, I always attended the UN General Assembly with the Secretary of State and usually accompanied Mr Cook and Mr Straw on visits to Asia, the Middle East and the Balkans. Sometimes I would be given specific assignments. For example, both Mr Cook and Mr Straw asked me to work closely with the Department on the FCO's annual human rights report and to co chair with the Director for Asia the human rights dialogue with China. In 2002 Jack Straw asked me to be his Personal Representative on an advisory body established by the EU Council of Foreign Ministers on Islamic extremism. I also visited Indonesia at his behest as his Personal Envoy.

4. In my written advice to the Secretary of State I tried at all times to be meticulous in copying relevant officials in the department as well as the Permanent Secretary and the Political Director. I have been given sight of a few of these minutes by the Iraq Inquiry Unit but many do not seem to have been found.

5. In my years at the FCO, and in my subsequent UN positions, I have enjoyed close relations with officials. Following clearance by the Security Service, I had access to intelligence materials produced by SIS and GCHQ. I also received JIC papers.

6. The Inquiry will be familiar with the role of Special Advisers, a subject of ill informed debate often in the popular media. Whatever the practice in other departments or in Downing Street, Foreign Secretaries of all political hues have abided by the Ministerial Code since the early 1970's and appointed only two Special Advisers. During Mr Straw's tenure in King Charles Street I worked closely with the other Special Adviser Ed Owen. The rough division of work between us was that I concentrated on policy issues, the United Nations and the developing world while Mr Owen handled liaison with the Labour Party, members of Parliament and EU matters. Obviously, there were often areas of overlap.

### *The Question of Iraq*

7. Prior to the 2003 invasion Iraq had been a major issue in British foreign policy for some twenty years or more. Even in a region of poor governance and grim records with regard to human rights, Iraq stood out with a record of appalling violations. As far back as the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, extraordinary acts of systematic violence were meted out on opponents of the regime and the general population. Following Saddam Hussein's assumption of power in the late 1970's this only got worse.

8. In the 1980's I worked for Amnesty International as Director for Asia and remember well the case of the Health minister Dr Riyadh Ibrahim, who had been critical of some policies and was subsequently arrested, killed and parts of his dismembered body sent to his wife.

9. The full scale of Iraqi human rights violations only became fully obvious in 1988 with the *Anfal campaign* against the Kurds. Of great notoriety was the use of substantial quantities of poison gas against the Kurds in the village of Halabja, perhaps the only known example of a regime deploying weapons of mass destruction against its own people. This incident led to no fewer than eight parliamentary motions being tabled in condemnation.

10. This record of depravity had an impact on the Labour Party as it did on others in British political life concerned with the international protection of human rights. One consistent defender of human rights was the MP Ann Clwyd. For her as for many others, years, if not decades, of work in defence of human rights in Iraq failed to make any impact on Saddam's regime. The Scott Inquiry of 1996 into alleged arms sales to Iraq under the Major government also drew considerable attention to Iraq within the Labour party, presenting Robin Cook with perhaps his greatest parliamentary triumph. Inevitably, these events were to affect the judgement of some in Parliament when in 2003 the British government supported the United States in the invasion of Iraq.

11. During the time I worked with Robin Cook at the FCO he remained troubled by the continuing problem of Iraq. While content that containment of Iraq was working, he was concerned at an apparently deteriorating humanitarian situation, by the dire human rights record and from January 2001 by concerns that the Bush Administration would argue for a tougher course of action. These fears seemed to be confirmed on February 16 when US and RAF jets attacked targets outside the no-fly zones in Iraq. I recall Mr Cook calling me from a Labour party conference in Glasgow that Friday evening concerned that the attack had not merited ministerial authorisation and fearing that it was the harbinger of a more assertive US stance on Iraq.

*The impact of 9/11 on the Iraq debate*

12. It was clear from the immediate moment of the attack on the Twin Towers that the terrorist attack would have profound influence on global strategic affairs and would inevitably reshape US priorities. At the time of the attack I was with the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in his office in a meeting with the Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon on Macedonia. The meeting was to discuss whether the army could maintain a presence there in addition to Kosovo to prevent ethnic strife. The Balkan problem was overshadowed in a moment by the tragedy in the US and the meeting was abruptly adjourned.

13. Of course there was no inevitability whatsoever that the attack on the United States would impact on US/UK strategy on Iraq unless there was some proven connection between Saddam and the perpetrators of the atrocities visited on the US. At the same time it was apparent that for the US the threshold of tolerance of strategic threats had inevitably been lowered. I recall that within days of the attack President Bush had mentioned Iraq to Prime Minister Blair in a telephone call. In a later conversation towards the end of the year I recall President Bush talking to the Prime Minister about

the threat from Saddam.

14. By the opening months of 2002 it was becoming clearer that the Bush Administration appeared intent on a more muscular approach on Iraq that did not rule out military action. At the Davos meeting in January 2002 a US Senator had told the NATO Secretary General George Robertson that President Bush was determined on a war with Iraq and that it was a 'cast-iron certainty within the year'. In reported remarks at the Munich security conference, *Wehrkunde*, in February the former NATO commander General Wesley Clarke told interlocutors that he believed war inevitable.

15. In my advice to the Foreign Secretary I strongly argued in favour of the UK adhering to tackling Iraq within the context of UN Security Council resolutions. I also strongly supported his initiative within weeks of 9/11 of engaging with Iran a course I

had earlier urged on Robin Cook but who felt that he did not enjoy the Prime Minister's support for this move. The Foreign Secretary was also intensely engaged with India and Pakistan following the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament, *Lok Sabha*, in December 2001, an attack which could have led to war between the two nuclear armed countries.

*The PLP briefing March 2002*

16. From time to time one of my responsibilities as a Special Adviser was preparing briefings for the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Examples that I recall from these years included briefings on the Kashmir dispute and on Israel/Palestine. In February 2002 the Foreign Secretary asked me to write a briefing for the PLP on Iraq. We discussed this and I put the case that a briefing should not deal solely with the question of weapons of mass destruction but should also cover other issues such as Human Rights, Oil for Food and Humanitarian Aid. On the latter I was always astonished that more was not made of the UK aid either donated directly or through the EU to vulnerable groups in Iraq. I also said to the Foreign Secretary that the briefing, while it had a section on "Iraq's Weapons" should be entitled simply "Iraq Briefing".

17. I wrote the briefing paper in as concise a manner as I could describing the Saddam regime as "a demonstrable threat to the stability of the region" in an opening sentence. Given its use of poison gas against its own people and ballistic missile attacks on Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Israel this did not seem to me exaggeration. I also catalogued the human rights abuses of the regime and the flagrant violations of multiple UN resolutions. In compiling the report I used open source materials including reports of the UN itself, Amnesty International and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). I did not want the report to be seen in any way as a rationale for military action. A draft of the paper was circulated to officials. The paper was issued on 5 March 2002.

18. The Foreign Secretary evidently thought the Briefing of some merit as the day after it was issued to the PLP he circulated it by minute of his Private Secretary Mark Sedwill to all members of the cabinet in advance of the Thursday Cabinet meeting of 7 March 2002.

19. For reasons I do not understand the briefing did not reach Tim Dowse, then head of the Non Proliferation Department, until 12 March. Although in his annotated Copy he writes this (the briefing) is ‘mercifully not too bad. We would quibble over some of the comments in Section 2’ i.e. on Saddam’s weaponry. In a subsequent minute to me on March 13 he said there was a difference which was “small, but significant” because of my assertion in the briefing that if the Iraq weapons programmes *remain unchecked* (my italics), Iraq could develop offensive weaponry within five years. However, while the sanctions regime was reasonably intact there had been no UN weapons inspectors in Iraq for three years at the time of writing in 2002 so that while I may have been incorrect in saying weapons programmes ‘remain unchecked’ they self evidently were not fully checked in the absence of an inspections regime. Moreover, it was a starting point for the rationale for Security Council Resolution 1441 that the existing sanctions regime was not watertight.

*Summer of 2002*

20. The week following the publication of the PLP briefing paper on Iraq Vice President Dick Cheney visited London en route to a Middle Eastern tour widely seen as a venture to canvass Arab support for strong action against Saddam Hussein. In April the Prime Minister visited President Bush at his ranch in Crawford, Texas for a widely trailed summit concentrating on Iraq.

21. As the summer months approached I felt increasingly that war was becoming unavoidable and the Bush Administration had made up its mind on this course of action. The only question remaining was whether the United Kingdom would join in the military assault.

22. I used part of my summer vacation to write a long historical note for the Foreign Secretary on US military actions since the Second World War. (no copy of this note appears to have been found in the FCO). By a curious coincidence the two most important US military engagements in Korea (1950-3) and in Vietnam (1965-73) had

occurred when Labour governments were in power and the coming war on Iraq was also likely to do so.

23. In my minute to the Foreign Secretary I contrasted the actions of Labour Prime Ministers Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson and their relevance to an invasion of Iraq. In June 1950 Attlee was in no doubt that the UK had to be with the United States in going to war given that it was clear that North Korea had invaded South Korea and the Security Council moved swiftly to authorise military action led by the United States under President Truman. Attlee also had the foresight to simultaneously recognise the new People's Republic of China before embarking on military action in Korea. In sharp contrast Harold Wilson in 1965 rejected the overtures of President Johnson for British participation in the US led war in Vietnam. He did so because of the unwillingness of the US to take Vietnam to the Security Council and because of existing British military commitments. But he was also acutely aware that there was not support for it in the UK parliament or public. In conclusion I suggested that if war in Iraq was to involve the UK it would be a strategic and political folly without UN authorisation.

#### *The Downing Street Dossier*

24. The Inquiry has asked me about the dossier on Iraq produced later in 2002 by 10 Downing Street. Fairly soon after the PLP Briefing Paper had been issued I began to hear some criticism from No 10 to the effect that it could have been more 'robust' and that it 'did not provide a rationale for action'. If what was meant by 'action' was a lead up to possible military action, I would have been horrified. It did however provide support for the idea of greater action by the Security Council which with the unanimous adoption of Security Council Resolution 1441 happened at the end of the year.

25. I played no role whatsoever in the preparation and subsequent publication of the Downing Street dossier on Iraq which was almost entirely a No 10 operation overseen as I recall by Alastair Campbell, the Director of Communications. I had the impression that FCO involvement was not as robust as I believe it should have been for such a critical exercise. I am not in a position to comment on the Prime Minister's preface and did not

see a draft. Curiously the document refers to the possibility of Iraq producing a nuclear weapon between one and two years not the more conservative five years I had suggested in the March PLP briefing.

#### *Resignation of Robin Cook*

26. Although Robin Cook had left the FCO in June 2001 and been appointed subsequently Leader of the House, I kept in touch with him with the knowledge of Jack Straw. We would meet occasionally and discuss affairs of the day. Inevitably our conversation often turned to Iraq as US preparations for military action increased in 2002. He expressed doubts about the evidence of WMD and I suggested in that respect that it might be worthwhile that he speak to John Scarlett, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee which I understood took place. It remained the case however that Robin Cook was not persuaded that the concerns regarding Iraq's holdings of WMD justified in any way military action, let alone full scale invasion.

27. On 12 March the reformist Prime Minister of Serbia Zoran Djindjic was assassinated in Belgrade. The question arose as to who should represent the British government at the funeral. I suggested to Jack Straw that Robin Cook should given his long standing connections with the Balkans. He agreed and I accompanied Mr Cook on his last ministerial act at the funeral in Belgrade on Saturday March 15. On the flight back from Belgrade he confirmed rumours that he intended to resign on Monday, March 17. I attempted to dissuade him from this step and argued that there might yet be an opportunity within Cabinet given the reservations of several other ministers with regard to war with Iraq but his mind was made up.

#### *Consequences of the Invasion*

28. Any assessment of the lessons for the future must start from a clinical assessment of the consequences of the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom. For the UK it was the second time since the Second World War that it had been involved in a large scale invasion of an Arab country. In 1956 the government of Anthony Eden invaded Egypt together with France. Within days the invasion was aborted



under pressure from the US and Eden paid the ultimate political price of resignation. Considerable damage was done to the reputation and standing of the UK and especially in the Middle East.

29. The consequences of the Iraq War are more severe. Unlike Iraq, Egypt was never occupied. It's existing political order was left intact and allied troops withdrew in weeks. Not only have occupation forces remained in Iraq for many years but the entire political regime, armed forces and social structure of Iraq were devastated by the 2003 invasion. Fissures and divisions in Iraqi society repressed for decades were ripped open in the wake of the invasion producing a maelstrom of violence that still shows no sign of abating nearly eight years after the invasion.

30. Plans for military campaigns are usually based on calculations of the risks involved but it is apparent that in the case of Iraq these were only done in the most narrow sense. Despite the UK's considerable commitment, at the outset of as many as 46,000 servicemen, we were unable to have any decisive impact on the Bush Administration's plans for post-war Iraq. Although there was considerable experience elsewhere in the Balkans, Africa and further back in post-war Germany and Japan no serious attempt was made to establish an interim international administration. On the contrary, the Bush Administration was at pains to keep UN involvement minimal. Inevitably, the short lived ORHA (Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid) led by Jay Garner and subsequently the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) led by Paul Bremer lacked meaningful international legitimacy but more importantly legitimacy in the eyes of the vast majority of Iraqis.

31. In the aftermath of war months of searches by British and American teams failed to find any significant evidence of WMD. In retrospect it is difficult not to argue that the UNMOVIC inspection process led by Hans Blix was working and had it been given enough time and resources could have continued to work and effectively prevent any new Iraqi efforts on weapons of mass destruction. At the same time it has to be recognised that this would have left Saddam Hussein in power.

32. In July 2003 I accompanied Jack Straw on one of his first visits to Iraq after the invasion. Our visit was confined to the Green Zone in itself a demonstration of the inadequacy of the invading forces and on the other of the hold of insurgent forces on most of the city. The Foreign Secretary met with Paul Bremer, the Head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), a former US Ambassador to the Netherlands and associate of Donald Rumsfeld. Ensconced bizarrely in one of Saddam's vast palaces Bremer had no experience of the of the Middle East, no experience of dealing with a country emerging from war and had never been involved in "nation-building". Bremer, who reported directly to Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld, had unilaterally in his first few weeks dissolved both the Iraqi Army and outlawed the Baath party. It was never clear to me that either of these moves were the subject of discussion with the UK government.

33. Later in the day the Foreign Secretary met with Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Representative to Iraq. De Mello had more post-war experience than any UN official having worked successively in Mozambique, Bosnia, the Great Lakes, Kosovo and East Timor. In Timor and Kosovo he actually headed post-war administrations that worked with all sectors and in Iraq had already begun a dialogue with the senior Shia cleric Ayatollah Sistani. In a sense the meetings that day represented two faces of dealing with post-war Iraq. Tragically, four weeks after the meeting with Jack Straw, de Mello together with 21 other colleagues from the UN were killed in the Canal Hotel bombing.

34. There are a number of other consequences of the war.

35. Firstly, the invasion and its aftermath have led to a greatly strengthened Iran. Even with 100, 000 US troops remaining in Iraq the dominant external political influence is Iran. This has been highlighted in recent days by the return from exile in Iran of the firebrand cleric Moqtada Al Sadr and by the political predominance of Iraqi Shia closely tied to Iran. The growing influence of Iran is also seen elsewhere in the region, for example, in Lebanon. In recent years Iran has strengthened its relationship with

Hizbullah, the Shia militia that has clashed many times with Israel, and a recent visit by President Ahmedinejad's underlines Iran's emergence as the dominant power in the region in the face of a devastated Iraq and weakened Sunni regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

36. Secondly, the WMD threat is unquestionably greater today than it was in 2003. North Korea and Iran are stronger than they were seven years ago in terms of their capabilities and critical time may have been lost in which headway could have been made. For his part the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made several visits to Iran to tackle this question but in the absence of meaningful support, and outright hostility from most quarters of the Bush Administration, headway was difficult.

37. Thirdly, the invasion of Iraq led to growth of extremism within the country and to a strengthening of Al Qaeda and related groups. The inability of the invading forces to guarantee security has meant that vulnerable groups such as the Iraqi Christians and professionals like doctors are now in significantly lower number than before the invasion. More than four million people are estimated to have been displaced as a consequence of the violence since 2003, the largest human displacement in the Middle East since 1948.

#### *The Lessons for the Future*

38. A cardinal lesson for the future must be that the UK should never again go to war except on the basis of self defence, compelling humanitarian emergency or authorisation of the UN Security Council. The Iraq experience has shown that without this the prosecution of war in our age is deeply divisive domestically and internationally.

39. While planning for post-war and post conflict situations progressed from the mid 90s in key government departments like FCO, DFID and the MOD most of this experience was not applied in Iraq. Post-war planning needs to be rooted in international institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank. In Iraq these were either reluctant to be involved or actively opposed by the Bush Administration.

40. Finally, the rush to war raised questions about intelligence assessment and capabilities. The UK agencies were under enormous pressure not because of an emerging threat to national security like Al Qaeda terrorism but because our closest ally had taken a political decision post 9/11 that Saddam Hussein had to be dealt with, if necessary by war. I believe the inquiry needs to assess whether the agencies have adequate protection from the political pressures of the day domestically and internationally.

41. I also believe the Iraq war revealed shortcomings in political intelligence. One example was the assessment of Turkey. Planners in the MOD had worked on the basis of the British Army entering Iraq in the north from Turkey. As a result of inadequate understanding of Turkey's intentions British forces were in the end forced to invade in the south from Kuwait. It was surprising that this caught the FCO napping. With regard to Iran it also seemed to me there were shortcomings in underestimating the way that Iran would seek to exploit the shortcomings of the invading Allied forces by stirring up extremism and placing its political allies in the vacuum created by the US destruction of the Saddam regime and the Baath party.

*Michael C. Williams,  
Beirut,  
9 January 2011.*