

# Australian intelligence analyst resigns, declaring Iraq war “unjustified”

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13 March 2003

The resignation on Tuesday of senior Australian intelligence analyst Andrew Wilkie has exposed a deep schism in the intelligence, military and foreign affairs establishment over the Howard government’s support for a US-led invasion of Iraq. In a series of media interviews, Wilkie directly challenged the claim that Iraq posed a threat to the US, Britain or Australia and declared that there was no justification for war.

Wilkie, 41, a former army lieutenant colonel, worked for the Office of National Assessments (ONA), which provides assessments directly to the prime minister based on intelligence drawn from Australian and international agencies. His access to top-level classified data makes his statements particularly damaging to the Howard government’s propaganda for a war of aggression against Iraq.

The ONA immediately distanced itself from its former employee and sought to undermine his credibility. ONA Director General Kim Jones told the press that the analyst had been working on “illegal immigration issues” in a section that “does not deal with issues related to Iraq.” In response, Wilkie politely dismissed the remarks as an exercise in “damage control”.

As one of the few ex-military officers at ONA, Wilkie kept abreast of military problems and “was called to work in the national intelligence watch when those crises blow up.” He had worked on Kosovo and Afghanistan. Prior to resigning, he was on standby to join a full-time intelligence assessment team to monitor the war against Iraq. As part of the transnational issues branch, he closely followed high-level intelligence on terrorism.

Wilkie bluntly told the ABC *Lateline* program: “I’m convinced a war against Iraq at this time would be wrong. For a start, Iraq does not pose a security threat

to the US, or to the UK or to Australia, or to any other country, at this point in time. I just don’t believe that a war at this time would be worth the risk... I believe it’s the course of action that is most likely to cause him to lash out recklessly, to use weapons of mass destruction and to possibly play a terrorist card.”

Speaking to the *Bulletin* magazine, Wilkie explained why Iraq posed no threat. “Their military is very weak. It’s a fraction of the size it was when it invaded Kuwait in 1990. Most of what remains is poorly trained, poorly equipped and of questionable loyalty to the regime. Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program is, I believe, genuinely contained.”

Wilkie’s remarks directly undermine recent attempts by Prime Minister Howard to link support for a war against Iraq to last year’s terrorist bombing in Bali. “I am not convinced that Iraq is actively co-operating with Al Qaeda. The bottom line is that this war against Iraq is totally unrelated to the war on terror,” he told the *Bulletin*.

Wilkie again emphasised the point on the ABC’s *7.30 Report* program, explaining that US Secretary of State Colin Powell’s address to the UN particularly annoyed him. “Colin Powell presented evidence to the Security Council some weeks ago now about links between Al Qaeda and Iraq. As far as I’m aware there was no hard evidence and there is still no hard evidence that there is any active cooperation between Iraq and Al Qaeda.”

Challenged by ABC presenter Kerry O’Brien over the extent of his knowledge, Wilkie declared: “Yes, we are obviously privy to a substantial flow of intelligence, of hard intelligence from the US. We haven’t seen anything to prove that there is a link between the two organisations. And, in fact, if you just approach it from first principles, there’s a lot of good reasons why there

wouldn't be a link.”

Late last year Wilkie was responsible for drawing up an intelligence assessment of the humanitarian consequences of a war on Iraq. “I was disturbed during my research when I came to realise what a high likelihood there is of a humanitarian disaster,” he told the *7.30 Report*. He again warned that a war could force Hussein to take desperate measures that would compound the humanitarian crisis.

Accused by O'Brien of giving succour to Hussein, Wilkie stuck to his guns. “I don't believe I could stand by any longer and take no action as this coalition marches to war. I think the interests of the thousands of people, perhaps tens of thousands of people or even more who could be injured, displaced or killed in a war, I think their interests are more important,” he stated.

Wilkie's stand reflects broad unease and opposition in ruling circles over the Howard government's unflinching support for the Bush administration and its consequences for Australian capitalism. While Howard believes that a firm US alliance is the only means of securing Washington's support for trade concessions and Australia's own ambitions in East Asia and the Pacific, his opponents fear that support for a unilateral US war will leave Australia isolated, damage its diplomatic and economic relations in Asia and increase the danger of becoming a target for terrorist attack. John Hewson, a former leader of Howard's Liberal Party, launched a withering attack on Tuesday night on the government's commitment to the war.

“I think he [Howard] feels we need to be there and we need to do this for the alliance with the United States. But I've got to tell you I don't think the US alliance is worth this. I think we would still have a very strong alliance if we weren't there. And so being a lapdog to the United States, or as he says deputy sheriff to the United States I think is an outrageous concept. But that's where we are unfortunately,” he said.

Hewson warned that Howard's role in the “coalition of the willing” was putting Australians in danger. “We've made ourselves a terrorist target. Like it or not, we are a terrorist target now. We are one of the top two or three in this thing, the US, the UK and us. And to make us a terrorist target in a region that is full of terrorism is dumb,” he said. And in what amounted to a thinly-veiled appeal for a party revolt, he added: “I know there are a lot of people in the party and the

cabinet and ministry that are opposed to this. They are more or less intimidated by John Howard and the way he runs the place.”

These sharp divisions are finding their reflection in an increasingly open contempt for Howard's justifications for war among military, intelligence and foreign affairs circles. Another former ONA analyst, Dr David Wright Neville told the ABC's *Lateline* program: “Speaking to former colleagues, former contacts both in ONA and other elements of the intelligence community, but also in defence and foreign affairs [there] is widespread concerns that are similar to Andrew's [Wilkie] about the direction in which the government is taking us.”

Wright Neville was asked whether he thought US agencies were “playing fast and loose with the facts” to justify an invasion of Iraq. “I don't think that this war is being driven by the American intelligence community. It's being driven by the White House. I think there's a concern in the Australian intelligence community that intelligence is being used to justify what to them appears like a political agenda rather than a concrete, logical military agenda,” he declared.

Speaking on the same program, Brian Toohey, a journalist with numerous contacts in the intelligence establishment, underscored the extent of the unease. “There certainly is amongst the officer core of the military. And you would know just from the whole background of foreign affairs that many people would be uncomfortable about the whole thrust of this radical new American foreign policy, basically pieced on neo-imperialism, saying we believe in pre-emptive strikes, we won't let China equal us in military power and so forth,” he said.

There is no question but that Wilkie's resignation is just the tip of the iceberg. And while the government presses ahead with its public campaign of lies and falsifications, the entire establishment is well aware that the imminent US war has nothing whatsoever to do with Saddam Hussein, his alleged weapons of destruction or the concocted Iraq-Al Qaeda connection.



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