

Britain: Parliamentary probe exposes lies on Iraqi weapons

Part 2—Andrew Wilkie and Dr Ibrahim al-Marashi

Robert Stevens
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The following is the second of a series of articles. “Part 1: Clare Short, Robin Cook and Andrew Gilligan” was posted July 3.

The Foreign Affairs Select Committee investigation into whether Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Labour government distorted intelligence material to justify its planned war against Iraq is to publish its verdict on July 8. There is every reason to suppose that the Labour-dominated committee in Parliament will make criticisms of the government that stop short of accusing it of lying—a classic fudge. But some of the testimony given to the inquiry makes this difficult. It stands as a damning indictment of the way the government set out to sell a previously determined decision to go to war by claiming that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. In order that this information does not remain buried amidst thousands of pages of undigested transcripts, the World Socialist Web Site is publishing a précis of the most important testimony given.

Andrew Wilkie

On June 19, the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FASC) took oral evidence from Andrew Wilkie a former Australian senior intelligence analyst. Wilkie resigned his position at the Office of National Assessments (ONA) on March 11 because of his disagreements with the Australian government’s participation in the so-called “coalition of the willing” supporting a US-led war against Iraq.

The ONA is the most senior intelligence agency at the disposal of the Australian government and the central conduit in providing intelligence and security assessments to the prime minister, other senior ministers and members of the National Security Committee at Cabinet.

Prior to giving his evidence to the committee, Wilkie was interviewed by the *Today* programme on BBC Radio on June 4. He stated, “I am satisfied that governments have exaggerated Iraq’s [weapons of mass destruction] WMD capability. Governments in all three capitals [Australian, US and British] have exaggerated Iraq’s links with Al-Qaeda. The governments in all three capitals have exaggerated both the general risk of WMD terrorism as well as the specific risks of Iraq passing WMD to Al-Qaeda. The governments have exaggerated what their intelligence communities have offered them.”

Despite Wilkie’s departure from the ONA, Prime Minister John Howard has so far refused to accede to demands for an investigation into the matter.

FASC Chairman Donald Anderson asked Wilkie, “What are your credentials in respect of Iraq?”

He replied that during the course of his employment he had recourse to follow events in Iraq and in particular the issue of weapons of mass destruction. The ONA has attempted to downplay Wilkie’s knowledge of Iraq and WMD by publishing a letter after his departure stating, “those with access to that material did not include all those on the watch office roster and did not include Mr Wilkie”.

Wilkie said in reply, “I was employed as a military strategic analyst effectively in the strategic analysis branch, not the transnational issues branch. Hence, it was in that role that I was on standby to work on Iraq. I have also worked specifically on weapons of mass destruction, which I think is a very important point that has been omitted from that letter.”

He continued, “Specifically, in 1998 I prepared the ONA assessment for government on WMD in terrorism and I attended the Quadripartite Working Group on WMD held in the UK at Cheltenham, at [Britain’s spy headquarters] GCHQ. More recently, I represented ONA at the Annual Australian Intelligence Agency’s WMD Working Group held at the Australian Secret Intelligence Service’s training facility. Finally, in my role as the senior transnational issues analyst I had access to virtually all of the Iraq database because my work involving global terrorism and people movements was very related to Iraq. I would not wish that single report I wrote to be underestimated. That was the benchmark report for the Australian government on the potential humanitarian implications of a war in Iraq, which required me to explore in some detail Saddam’s regime and what his capabilities were, including his weapons of mass destruction capability. It was not just talking about refugee flows, it was talking about how the war might be fought and, hence, what the humanitarian consequences might be as it played out”

During questioning by Sir John Stanley he invited Wilkie to look at the first September dossier issued by the Blair government. At this point Wilkie stated that he wanted to make it clear he felt that what was at issue was not just the content of “dossiers”. He stated, “I just want to remind us all that there was an awful lot more to the three governments trying to justify this war than just this dossier. In fact, I think the most emotive statements were probably oral statements in our parliaments and so on, people standing up and saying what they said.”

Commenting on the contents of the dossier, Wilkie said in his testimony, “The proof is in the pudding, so to speak. These systems came up with an assessment on Iraq that we should expect a certain WMD programme on a certain scale and it is not there. We can talk about a whole lot of stuff but at the end of the day it is not there, it has

not been found. Is this a good document in retrospect? No, in retrospect it is a lousy document because this document led us to expect that the troops would go into Iraq and encounter and uncover a huge WMD programme.”

Wilkie was continuously subject to a line of questioning focusing on the assertion that he was calling into question the finding of Britain’s intelligence and security services. He replied, “I am not accusing the British intelligence and security services, or anything, I am accusing the British government, along with the US and Australian governments, of exaggerating the Iraq WMD threat and the associated terrorism threat.”

He was asked by Andrew Mackinlay of FASC, “What is your evidence of that exaggeration?”

He replied, “What is my evidence? The evidence is that what has been found in Iraq is nowhere near what is described in this book, that is my evidence. I think that is the clearest evidence anyone could produce to this Committee.”

Mackinlay replied, “You and I do not know what has or has not been found in Iraq yet, do we?”

Wilkie answered, “What I do know is that whatever has been found in Iraq so far is short. You are asking me to present the evidence and that is the easiest challenge anyone can throw at me. The evidence is that we were promised a war on the basis of this big WMD threat but it has not been found and whatever is likely to be found now is going to be miles short of what the war was sold to us on.”

Ibrahim al-Marashi

Ibrahim al-Marashi is a Research Associate at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies. As a student he had written a PHD thesis which was the basis for an article on the history of the Iraqi security services using “open source” material available to all. His article, *Iraq’s Security and Intelligence Network: a guide and analysis*, was published by the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* and made available on the Internet. It was famously plagiarised by the British government who copied and then altered it without any permission in order to beat the drums of war ever louder.

The so-called “dodgy dossier” that including the bastardised version of al-Marashi’s text was released by the British government on February 3 entitled *Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*.

In response to the question, “Has the Government made any expression of regret or apology to you for the plagiarism of your thesis?” Al-Marashi replied. “I have never been contacted directly, either by phone call nor in writing, since February 2003 up to the present”.

Al-Marashi was questioned regarding the main changes that took place to his article. He replied, “The key modification made was in the second section, ‘Its external activities include ... supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes’, where I believe I used, ‘aiding opposition groups in hostile regimes’. There is a big difference between ‘opposition groups’ and ‘terrorist organisations’. I was always one to believe that the link between Iraqi intelligence and terrorist organisations may have been quite active in the past but links between Iraq’s security apparatus and terrorist organisations—there has not been evidence that there has been strong cooperation in the last decade, nor has there been strong evidence of Iraqi cooperation with Al-Qaeda.

“By changing it to this word you are kind of distorting the intent, that is, ‘supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes’ makes

one infer that they could be supporting, let us say, groups like Al-Qaeda.”

In summarising al-Marashi comments, Greg Pope of FASC stated, “Just to recap, they pinched your work off the internet, they took it without asking you, they used it without your permission and they altered some sections of it to change the emphasis and in other areas they incompetently got it completely wrong.”

One of the spurious claims made by the Blair coterie in attempting to justify war against Iraq was that Saddam Hussein was prepared to give weapons of mass destruction to terrorist organisations in order to use them against the populations of western nations.

This issue was put to al-Marashi by FASC member Bill Olnier.

Al-Marashi debunked such a claim in his reply: “No, I do not think that is a valid argument. Saddam would not even give them to his own military, never mind to a terrorist organisation. The control of these weapons was only trusted to the Special Security Organisation, which is not even a military unit; it is a political security intelligence organisation.

“It was only this organisation that could have deployed chemical weapons. The regular military could not, or did not have the authority to, deploy them. The command and control of these weapons was very tightly controlled.... If he did not even trust his own military it is highly doubtful that he would give it to an organisation where he would have no control over it and that he would suffer the repercussions if the link was found. The argument that Iraq would have given these munitions to terrorist organisations I think is very hard to prove.”

Al-Marashi went on to state, “The fact of the matter though is that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction had never been used outside of Iraqi borders. There may have been a few cases of these weapons of mass destruction reaching outside Iraq’s borders, but for the most part Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction were a threat to Iraq’s people. They were a threat to the Kurds, they were a threat to the Shia of Iraq, they were used against the Iranians once they crossed over their border. Definitely Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which were a threat to the Iraqi people and to the region. Whether they were a threat to the security of Europe or to the world is another issue.”



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