

Blair's 45-minute WMD claim refuted by Iraqi group that supplied the intelligence

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The pro-Western Iraqi National Accord (INA) has admitted that it supplied intelligence to Britain's Labour government that became the basis for Prime Minister Tony Blair's claim that Saddam Hussein could launch weapons of mass destruction (WMD) within 45 minutes, and it also admitted that the intelligence was false.

The January 12 edition of *Newsweek* and the January 27 edition of the *Guardian* carried comments based on admissions by the INA, a rival of the Iraqi National Congress of Ahmed Chalabi. The INA has longstanding connections to the CIA and MI6, and is led by Iyad Alawi, who is now a member of the Iraqi governing council in Baghdad.

The 45-minute claim was the centrepiece of Britain's September 2002 intelligence dossier that was meant to legitimise Blair's predetermined decision to support the Bush administration's plans to launch an illegal war of aggression against Iraq. The intelligence came from only one uncorroborated source, a former Iraqi air-defence officer, Lieutenant Colonel al-Dabbagh. The officer first claimed to be the source of the intelligence in the December 7 edition of Britain's *Sunday Telegraph*.

He claimed that crates containing chemical and biological weapons were delivered to frontline Iraqi military units in 2002.

The report by Lord Hutton into the death of whistleblower Dr. David Kelly exonerates the government of the charge that it inserted the 45-minute claim in order to "sex up" the September dossier, on the grounds that it originated with and was accepted as good coin by the intelligence services—and that neither MI6 nor the government had any reason to doubt its accuracy. The 45-minute claim was the central issue noted by Dr. Kelly in his interview with the BBC's

Andrew Gilligan in which he spoke of the disquiet within the security services over the weaknesses in the government's intelligence dossier. It is by now clear that both the government and MI6 had ample reason to question the provenance of intelligence supplied by the politically motivated INA. One can only assume that they ran with it because it fitted with their own political aim of strengthening the case for war.

Newsweek reports that the INA—a group with a vested interest in seeing the downfall of the Baathist regime—has confirmed that it originated the leak about alleged pre-war WMD deployments by Iraq. It also supplied the equally flimsy and uncorroborated evidence supposedly linking Saddam to 9/11 hijacker Muhammad Atta.

INA leader Allawi's representative in Washington, Nick Theros, told *Newsweek* that Lieutenant Colonel al-Dabbagh was a member of the group. He admitted that al-Dabbagh never saw what was in the supposed weapons crates, and that the claim now "looks like it could have been a crock of s—t."

In an article published almost two weeks later in the *Guardian*, Theros used the same colourful but accurate expression to describe al-Dabbagh's claims, adding, "Clearly we have not found WMD."

He describes the claims made by al-Dabbagh as raw intelligence from a single source, part of a large amount of information passed on by the INA to MI6. "We were passing it on in good faith. It was for the intelligence services to verify it," he told the *Guardian*.

The admission that al-Dabbagh was an INA spy who was making up his claims from whole cloth confirms once again that the Blair government dragged Britain to war based on a tissue of lies.

Tellingly, *Newsweek* reports that "Officials close to the CIA and MI6 say that while the agencies *believe the*

INA's tales are unfounded, they still regard the group as a reliable ally" (emphasis added).

During the Hutton inquiry, MI6 head Sir Richard Dearlove said that the information relating to the 45-minute claim had come from a single source in the Iraqi armed forces, but insisted that the source was "established and reliable." This has been proved to be false by the INA's statements. But even if the intelligence had been accurate, it was misused by the government. The claims by al-Dabbagh were supposed to relate only to battlefield weapons, yet Blair had intimated that he was speaking of weapons that could strike at British bases in Cyprus.

When al-Dabbagh's claims were first published by the *Telegraph*, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted that this only added to its difficulties arising from the inquiry by Lord Hutton into the death of weapons inspector Dr. Kelly. We concluded:

"In al-Dabbagh's case the presumption should be that his evidence is not to be believed, given that he is a man with a definite political agenda. His aim is not only to support Blair's claims that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, but also to insist that they are a continued threat that can be employed by remnants of the old regime. In this way he hopes to justify further repression by the occupation forces and their puppet government, for which he functions as an advisor.

"As was so often the case, if al-Dabbagh's claim of origin is to be believed, then the intelligence cited in the September dossier came from forces anxious to bolster the case for war against Iraq and with a vested interest in the Bush administration's plans for regime change."



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