

Australian defence adviser sacked for refusing to write WMD lies

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28 April 2004

Former Australian defence adviser Jane Errey has provided further evidence of the Howard government's manipulation of intelligence in order to manufacture a case for the US-led invasion of Iraq and of the resentment its actions have provoked inside the defence establishment.

Errey spoke out publicly in mid-April, declaring that she had been dismissed for refusing to write briefs backing the government's claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At the time of the Iraq invasion, she was employed as a senior adviser to the Chief Defence Scientist in the Defence, Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO)—the body responsible for supplying Australian weapons inspectors for the UN teams in Iraq.

She explained on Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) radio on April 12 that she had taken leave last year when asked to write briefing notes for Defence Minister Robert Hill about alleged WMDs in Iraq. "What I felt I was being asked to do was to reflect lies that didn't accord with what I was seeing from intelligence reports.... I believe I was being asked, as was the rest of the [defence] department at that time, to perpetuate the lie that the government was putting forward in so far as the weapons of mass destruction existed and that they were a grave threat to the rest of the world."

Errey, an electrical engineer and intelligence analyst, had access to classified data from the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) and the Office of National Assessment (ONA). She told ABC radio that her opinions were shared at the time by others in the defence establishment.

"I believe my view was shared by a significant number of people within the Defence Department, and I think Andrew Wilkie coming out and making the

claims that he made right at the time is evidence of that.... I think there were a number of people in the Defence Department that were quite fed up with being used in this way, that this was yet another example of how the government was using the public service for their own means," she said.

Senior ONA intelligence analyst Andrew Wilkie resigned prior to the invasion of Iraq and publicly criticised the Howard government's case for the US war.

As the war continued, Errey took sick leave and when that ran out, made a request for leave without pay. That application was turned down, providing the government with the opportunity to retaliate against her.

Defence Minister Hill denied that Errey had been sacked for refusing to write briefing papers on Iraq. He asserted that her sacking was merely the result of "management differences" that had "nothing to do with the work she may have done in the past".

Acting Secretary of the Defence Department Alan Henderson also claimed that Errey's sacking was unrelated to her views on the invasion of Iraq. He claimed that the department had accommodated her opposition to the war by granting her leave, and then by placing her "in a job in which she had no direct dealings on matters concerning the Iraq war".

Errey, however, has insisted that was not the case. "The reality is that I wouldn't have even started to take leave if I hadn't felt that the government was lying to the public." She has since lodged an unfair dismissal claim with the Industrial Relations Commission.

Errey is a former member of the Australian Democrats. While voicing no fundamental opposition to the US-led invasion of Iraq, the party was critical of the Howard's government complete support for the Bush administration and called for UN endorsement of

any military action.

Errey is one of a number of defence and intelligence officials who have publicly criticised the Howard government over its political manipulation of intelligence. Just days after Errey's statement, the *Bulletin* magazine leaked a letter from a senior defence intelligence officer Lieutenant Colonel Lance Collins to the prime minister calling for a royal commission into the intelligence agencies over a range of issues from the Australian-led military intervention of East Timor in 1999 to the Iraq war.

The continuing scandal has visibly shaken the Howard government, which is desperate to bury the lies it told to justify Australian involvement in the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq.



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