

# JustComment

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A joint publication of Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education & The School of Education, Australian Catholic University

## Don't Mention the *Reasons for War!*

Following the devastating attack of September 11 the United States has led a worldwide 'war on terror'. The campaign has seen the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and more recently the demise of Saddam Hussein during the war on Iraq.

It was argued that both Wars were aimed at increasing international security by reducing the threat of rogue states with presumed links to terrorist networks. Both wars promised to replace dictatorships with democracy. However, while democracy is far from being established in Afghanistan or Iraq, global security is now more uncertain than ever. This is particularly the case concerning the war on Iraq where world opinion was divided, UN approval was not explicitly granted and the evidence upon which the basis for war was justified has now come under increasing question.

### According to Prime Minister John Howard:

"Not only is it inherently dangerous for a country such as Iraq with its appalling track record to have these weapons but if Iraq is allowed to get away with it other rogue States will believe they can do the same... And as these dangerous weapons spread so the risk that they may fall into the hands of terrorists will multiply"

National Press Club Address,  
March 2003

### Justification for War

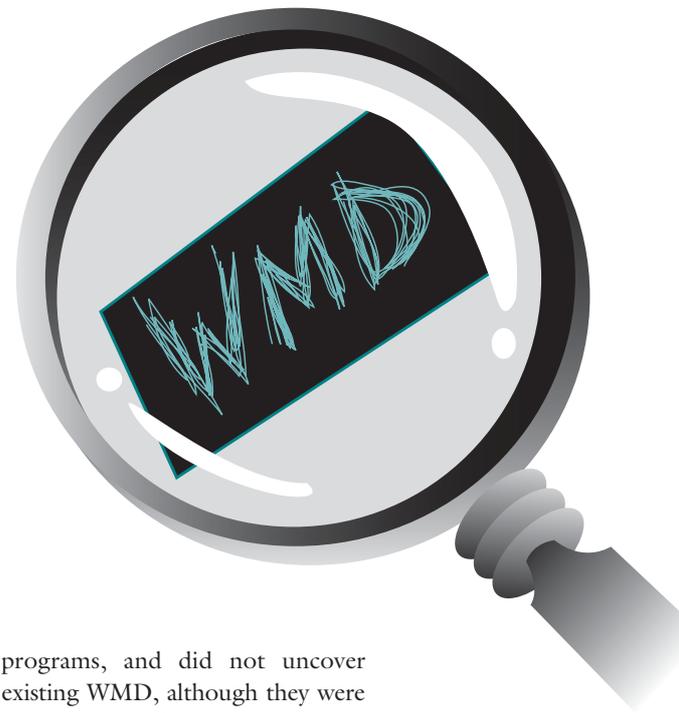
The debate over military intervention in Iraq involved a number of different arguments including security, strategic interests and humanitarian concerns. However, as the deadline for weapons inspectors neared, the Australian Government focused its attention on the dangers presented by Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The Prime Minister also claimed that overthrowing Saddam Hussein would serve a humanitarian purpose by liberating the people of Iraq. However, Howard was equally clear that this was not the ultimate justification for military intervention, stating: "I would have to accept that if Iraq had genuinely disarmed, I couldn't justify on its own a military invasion of Iraq to change the regime. I've never advocated that."

Revelations that claims of Iraq's possession of WMD were either incorrect or exaggerated not only call into question the wisdom of the attack, but also the independence and integrity of intelligence agencies here and abroad and have given rise to inquiries in America, Britain and now Australia.

### Finding the Weapons

Doubts over the extent of Iraq's possession of WMD were raised prior to war. In 1991 the US claimed to have destroyed 80% of Iraq's military capacity. In 1998 UN weapons inspectors had dismantled 90% of Iraq's post-1991 capacity to develop WMD. Scott Ritter UN chief Weapons Inspector, said that Iraq had been "disarmed to a level unprecedented in modern history". The weapons inspections immediately prior to the war were not able to find evidence of any new



programs, and did not uncover existing WMD, although they were unable to verify that all previous weapons had been destroyed.

No evidence of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons has yet been uncovered in Iraq months after the fall of Baghdad. Nor has there surfaced any evidence of links between Iraq and known terrorist groups. Two trailers, thought to have been mobile germ labs, have since been found by a British Inquiry "to produce hydrogen for artillery balloons" (*Riley, SMH, June 16, 2003*).

Instead, the quality of American, British and Australian intelligence generated in the lead up to the war has been questioned. This includes revelations that:

- Evidence in a British dossier that Iraq could mobilise weapons within 45 minutes and was seeking nuclear material has since been dismissed as forged (*Wilkinson, SMH, 21/6/03*).

- The most extravagant claims of biological weapons came from a

defector managed by Iraq's leading opposition group, and could not be corroborated by UN inspectors (*Wilkinson, SMH, 21/6/03*).

- The British dossier included large parts of an American student's PhD thesis (*AM, 18/6/03*).

- President George Bush misrepresented intelligence reporting links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda by selectively quoting reports and failing to state where claims had not yet been confirmed (*Pincus, SMH, 23/6/03*).

Following the conflict, Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix has revealed that information provided by Britain and America was of little assistance in uncovering any evidence of WMD.

"...in none of these cases were there any weapons of mass destruction.

And that shook me a bit... because we had been told that they would give us the best intelligence they had. So I thought, my God, if this the best intelligence they have and we find nothing what about the rest?" (*AM, 7 June, 2003*).

It now appears unlikely that any future discoveries of WMD will constitute the "mammoth" threat claimed by John Howard in the lead up to war. Doubt is also being cast on the indirect threats caused by Iraq's alleged WMD. According to American reports the absence of WMD in Iraq might be because weapons were smuggled out of Iraq to Syria shortly before or during the invasion. If true, this would undermine one of the key justifications for the war – preventing WMD from being passed on. Instead of preventing such a situation, the war may have caused it.

The success of the war in deterring other states from pursuing WMD programs is also under attack. A number of other countries were already known to be in possession of WMDs prior to the war, including Pakistan, India and Israel. Apparently undeterred, North Korea has since publicly declared it is pursuing a "nuclear deterrent force" (*AM, 10 June 2003*).

In the absence of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, speculation about the real reason for war on Iraq increasing-

ly concerns other issues such as oil and American imperialism. The desire to overthrow Saddam predates September 11.

In 1998 the recently formed Project for the New American Century, wrote to President Clinton, calling for regime change in Iraq. In a letter to House Speaker Newt Gingrich, they wrote that "we should establish and maintain a strong US military presence in the region, and be prepared to use that force to protect our vital interests [sic] in the Gulf – and, if necessary, to help remove Saddam from power".

Signatories to the letter included current US Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, his current deputy Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, now under-secretary of state for arms control, Richard Armitage, deputy to Secretary of State Colin Powell; Richard Perle, a former assistant secretary of defence and now senior advisor to President Bush, and Zalmay Khalilzad, a former oil industry consultant. Khalilzad was the US special envoy to Afghanistan who negotiated with the Taliban for a gas pipeline across Afghan territory and was appointed President Bush's special envoy for Iraq.

Controlling the regime in Baghdad means access to "112 billion barrels of oil" (*Fisk, The Independent, 18/1/03*). The US Department of Energy announced that by 2025, US oil imports would account for perhaps 70% of total US domestic demand. However, the bulk of future supplies will have to come from the Gulf region as US oil deposits are increasingly depleted. The ratio of reserves to oil production in the US is 10:1, while in Iraq it is 526:1.

### Aftermath of Warfare

At least 187 Americans, 37 Britons have been killed in the war on Iraq (*Sandalow 15/6/03*). According to Associated Press, at least 3,240 Iraqi civilians have also been killed (*SMH, 12/6/03*). The US was not able to capture Osama Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein and this situation more than likely poses a future international terrorist threat as the forces of those the US has disenfranchised possibly unite against a common enemy.

War is still going on in Afghanistan and Iraq. There have been more than 30 US soldiers killed in Iraq since the fall of Bagdad. Elections in Iraq have now been postponed. Looting, disease and resentment of the US have overtaken the daily lives of the Iraqi people. It is not just that people have no money and no jobs, in Basra there has been an outbreak of cholera due to unclean drinking water – a humanitarian emergency of major proportions.

The death toll in Afghanistan is still increasing despite the presence in Kabul of 5,500 UN soldiers. The US backed Karzai government has little influence outside of the capital and even here 3 German peacekeepers were recently killed (*Age, 8/6/03*). The recent death of a western aid worker has raised concerns that reconstruction undertaken by US troops has made other westerners attempting reconstruction a target (*Dateline, 16/4/03*). The Afghan Administration is now reportedly in talks with the Taliban in an effort to restore order (*Ridley, Information Clearing House, 26/5/03*). A larger threat to Afghanistan comes not from so-called terrorists but from the very warlords who helped the US overthrow the Taliban, warlords who are now in conflict with this US backed government. There are no signs of sustainable democracy in Afghanistan despite President Karzai's links with the US. Only 8% of UN aid requirements for Afghanistan have been received while billions are still needed for reconstruction. The country now faces being forgotten by the world as the focus is on Iraq.

### Just Action

In a modern democracy like Australia freedom of speech is very important. Find out more from different websites that examine the war on Iraq. Think about all the evidence concerning issues such as our involvement in war – write to members of Parliament, write to newspapers, talk with your friends and neighbours, and don't be afraid to stand up and speak out!

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