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Intelligence Inquiry

In early July 2003, the Association was invited to make a submission to the inquiry being conducted by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD into certain matters relating to intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We believe the Association was the only public body to be so invited. The Association submission was prepared by a team of retired intelligence specialists and other experts with extensive experience of working in, or with, all six intelligence and security agencies.

The 13-page submission addressed the wider problems facing these agencies rather than just concentrating on the Iraqi WMD issue. It may be downloaded from the parliamentary website at: <<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pjcaad/WMD/subs/sub11.pdf>>.

An uncorrected *Hansard* transcript of the Executive Director's subsequent oral testimony to the inquiry may be downloaded from the same website at: <<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pjcaad/WMD/proof.pdf>>.

Due to the very nature of intelligence work, staff from Australia's intelligence and security agencies often have difficulty in airing professional issues in a public domain. After the committee authorised the posting of the ADA submission on the parliamentary website, the Association received numerous telephone calls, emails and other contacts from staff within the agencies. We also had numerous contacts from retired staff, and from several senior 'customers' of intelligence over the last thirty years. All expressed strong support for the ADA submission.

The Association also strongly supports recent public comments by the Director-General of ASIO, Dennis Richardson, pointing out that additional funding alone will not increase the capacity of his agency as Australia cannot simply conjure up experienced intelligence officers overnight. DGASIO's comments mirror a key thrust of the ADA submission, which stresses the operational importance of respecting and nurturing career professionalism among intelligence and security agency staff. The Association notes that this means offering such professional staff viable career paths that include senior management at all levels of each agency.

The strong and supportive response from within the intelligence community to the ADA submission was somewhat unexpected. The submission attracted national and international media coverage, with both CNN and the BBC seeking interviews because of the parallels to the British House of Commons Inquiry into similar matters. ♦

Casting stones from our grimy glasshouse?

Is it hypocrisy or ignorance that leads so many Australians, from the prime minister to the cacophonous disputants on Iraq, to avoid any reference to Australia's ability to do much more than talk about the problem? As a community, we have become expert at pointing the finger of scorn at the United States in general, and President Bush in particular, but rather reluctant to look at ourselves, except perhaps to abuse Prime Minister Howard, usually for all the wrong reasons.

As a member of the coalition of the willing, Australia contributed some 2000 military personnel to the liberation of Iraq and has some 800 ADF personnel still in the region. That contribution to the liberation was particularly niggardly and certainly not reflective of the public relations balderdash that accompanied it. A contribution proportional to that of the British would have seen 15,000 Australians on the job.

That the United States misjudged the scale of the post-conflict security problem in Iraq is hardly surprising and the task remains a major challenge. Australia, however, true to its traditions of getting out before the job is finished, has all but walked away from Iraq.

For its part, the government denies that it has been asked for additional troops. This is probably true in the formal sense because it told the Americans it was no longer very willing. In public, it has suggested that its ongoing but diminishing commitment to East Timor (450 soldiers) and the new task in the Solomon Islands (2000 troops) leaves us unable to do more in Iraq.

To sustain indefinitely the combined commitment of 3250 personnel of all three Services would require around 10,000 personnel. However, the irreducible military infrastructure of administration, training, specialised units

and logistics should not account for the balance of 40,000 personnel in the regular ADF. Even if it does, Australia's resultant inability to deploy and sustain a tri-Service force of little more than 3000 personnel gives us not merely a very small self-defence capability, but also a serious lack of options for governments of any colour to use the ADF in support of its foreign policy.

Fulsome pats on the back from allies and boastful public-relations spin from our own government do not affect the hard-nosed judgements that both allies and potential adversaries will make about Australia in private. Nor should they be persuasive to the Australian electorate.

The real reason for our claimed inability to do any more is the refusal of the government to spend money on operations, which add considerably to the standing costs of the defence force. For all its rhetorical commitment to national security, the present government has cut personnel numbers by 11 per cent. Even now it is talking about capability cuts to a force that has been compelled to retain equipment that has long passed its use-by date while deferring new projects. Defence spending, which averaged 9.0 per cent of total federal outlays in the 1980s, has fallen to an average 7.3 per cent under the present government.

For its part, the Opposition's contribution to the national security debate has been virtually non-existent, at least in any substantial way. Apart from nit-picking criticism of administrative detail, there are no policies and no commitments. The Parliament's joint sub-committee on defence is increasingly restricted to references received from the government while its reports vanish into the archives. Attempts to debate the reports founder on a lack of cooperation from the government or an almost total lack of interest and knowledge by MPs.

What the community thinks of all this is difficult to discern. Public-opinion polls rarely ask about national security and even when they do, the studies lack any sort of context that would force a considered response. With very few exceptions, the mainstream media lacks both interest and expertise with reports and commentary generally lacking any strategic context. As a direct result, the ADF has become less of a national defence force than some sort of utilitarian organisation to be deployed for political aggrandisement rather than national security.

Alternatively, we have a community and a body politic that is unwilling to face up to the hard decisions demanded by contemporary security challenges. ♦

Whither the WMD?

Hectares of newsprint and hours of television and radio coverage have been devoted to the subject of Iraq's apparently undiscovered weapons of mass destruction. Much of this coverage would appear to be more motivated by seeking to embarrass the current US, British and Australian governments than by genuine interest in the whereabouts of the weapons.

The ADA submission to the parliamentary inquiry noted several key points in relation to the matter. The

first and most important of these is that Iraqi possession, development and use of such weapons is indisputable. When UNSCOM was finally forced out of Iraq in 1998 there were numerous unresolved matters. Most of these were taken up by Hans Blix and UNMOVIC in late 2002. The key to the mystery is what happened in the four-year hiatus between UNSCOM and UNMOVIC inspections.

From April 1991 until the collective intervention in April 2003, Iraq continually disregarded its responsibilities and obligations under international law to both disarm and to disarm in a verifiable manner. In a nutshell, Iraq was never able to prove to the UN's satisfaction that it had ceased its WMD programs as required by the international community. On the contrary, UNSCOM continually discovered active Iraqi measures to evade its disarmament obligations and continue some WMD programs, especially regarding prohibited chemical and biological weapons.

As the final head of UNSCOM from 1997–1999, Richard Butler, testified to the current Australian parliamentary inquiry into Iraqi WMD:

'It was expected that, following the invasion and occupation of Iraq, substantial quantities of remaining weapons would be found. But they have not been, and that, of course, is a problem, at least in logic. Why haven't they been found? I put it to you that positing the concept of these things being unaccounted for is not the same as positing the existence of these things there are four possible explanations for this in objective logic.

'The first explanation is that those weapons have been destroyed, and there is some evidence that some destruction has taken place. The second explanation is that they continue to exist, but up to the present point they have been successfully hidden and may one day be uncovered. We do not know yet. The third explanation is that they have been removed to another country or place; that they are not in Iraq. In the past, I saw some evidence of Iraq warehousing some of its material across the border in Syria from time to time, but I am making no accusation about that. The fourth logical possibility is that they have not been found because they actually do not, and did not, exist; that the posited quantities actually did not exist.

'I have already hinted that I think there has been some destruction but, if you want to ask me which of those four I think is the best explanation, the only honest answer I can give to you is that I do not know but I think we should try and find out.'

It's a big country to search and at least part of the problem is public expectations as to what would be found. Rather than Scud missiles on launchers buried in sand dunes, much of the unaccounted for WMD materials are drums of chemicals and bacteriological growth medium. The UN has the documents proving Iraq procured the material. Iraq has not been able to satisfactorily account for what happened to it.

The totalitarian nature of the previous Iraqi regime, and its sudden and violent end, may also be part of the