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# Report X Marks the Spot: The British Government's Deceptive Dossier on Iraq and WMD

ERIC HERRING  
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THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT PUBLISHED A DOSSIER on 24 September 2002 setting out its claims regarding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).<sup>1</sup> Parliament was recalled for an emergency session on the same day to hear Prime Minister Tony Blair's presentation of it. The dossier stated that Iraq had WMD and was producing more. After the invasion in March 2003, no WMD were found. Ever since, there has been controversy as to whether the dossier reported accurately intelligence which turned out to be wrong, as Blair has claimed consistently, or whether the dossier deliberately deceived by intentionally giving the impression of greater Iraqi WMD capability and threat than the intelligence suggested. Despite a great deal of attention to the September dossier, there has not been any

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<sup>1</sup>UK Government, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*, 24 September 2002, accessed at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/1/shared/spl/hi/middle\\_east/02/uk\\_dossier\\_on\\_iraq/pdf/iraqdossier.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/1/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/uk_dossier_on_iraq/pdf/iraqdossier.pdf), 19 April 2013.

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analysis conceptually well developed enough, or sufficiently grounded in the empirical evidence, to make much headway in resolving this disagreement. This article assesses the extent to which the dossier was part of a campaign of organized political persuasion and whether that campaign involved demonstrable deception. It shows that the dossier did not accurately represent the content and strength of intelligence that turned out to be wrong. Instead, the dossier portrayed a misleading picture of greater capability and greater certainty than the intelligence warranted. The misleading nature of the dossier was not an accident. There was a concerted effort by many of those involved in producing the dossier to push the claims about the intelligence as far as possible. The phrase “dodgy dossier” was originally used to describe this September dossier.<sup>2</sup> The British government published another dossier on 3 February 2003 which was exposed as being mostly plagiarized.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, the term “dodgy dossier” has tended to be applied mainly to this second dossier. In view of the arguments in this article, the September dossier ought to be known as the *deceptive dossier*.

The argument in this article is structured in four sections. The first section surveys official claims regarding the dossier, the results of four successive inquiries (the fifth has not yet reported), and the scholarly literature to date. Here the article shows that, despite some discussion of the dossier in numerous publications, there has still not been an in-depth analysis of its contents and production which is conceptually well developed and which draws on vital information that has become available in the last few years. The second section sets out the conceptual framework, while the third applies it to the empirical record. The article shows that the dossier was fundamentally misleading about the intelligence and that deliberate deception through omission and distortion was involved. The conclusion considers the significance of the deceptive dossier.

## CONTROVERSIES: OFFICIAL LINES, OFFICIAL INQUIRIES, AND ACADEMIC ANALYSIS

Those directly involved in the September dossier’s production have asserted that it was an accurate and objective document, written by the intelligence services, and designed to inform a public demanding to know why the UK

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<sup>2</sup>Brendan O’Neill, “Blair’s Dodgy Dossier,” *Spiked Online*, 24 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/4905#.VHRA0IusWS0>, 25 November 2014.

<sup>3</sup>UK Government, *Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*, 3 February 2003, accessed at <http://web.archive.org/web/20040619112534/http://www.number-10.gov.uk/files/pdf/iraq.pdf>, 19 April 2013; Glen Rangwala, “Intelligence? The British Dossier on Iraq’s Security Infrastructure,” Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq Discussion List, 5 February 2003, accessed at <http://www.casi.org.uk/discuss/2003/msg00457.html>, 19 April 2013.

sought action against Iraq. For example, in 2010, Blair stated that “we came under pressure in the lead-up to the publication of the September dossier. We came under enormous pressure to say what it was our intelligence was actually telling us.”<sup>4</sup> Alastair Campbell, Blair’s Strategy and Communications Chief, emphasized the role of the dossier as a way of showing the intelligence that had increased government concerns: “The dossier was seen to be necessary because the Prime Minister had been growing more and more concerned, in part because of the intelligence that he was seeing over a period of time ... it was an exercise in openness ... so that they [the public] can be informed about all the factors.”<sup>5</sup> Campbell described Sir John Scarlett, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) as the “person, if you like, [who] had the single pen.”<sup>6</sup> The JIC functions to direct the key components of the intelligence services, including the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6), Security Service (MI5), Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS), and to communicate advice to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. At least to an extent, the involvement of government officials, civil servants, and intelligence officials means that the JIC fuzes policy and intelligence in a way that does not occur in the United States.

A series of official investigations in Britain has, generally speaking, agreed with these official positions. In a report published in 2003, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FASC) criticized some aspects of the dossier and the strength with which some claims were made. However, it concluded that Campbell “did not exert or seek to exert improper influence” on its drafting and that the claims in the dossier “were in all probability well founded on the basis of the intelligence then available”<sup>7</sup> In the same year, the British government-appointed Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) concluded similarly that, although the dossier should have reported levels of uncertainty over the intelligence, no political pressure was put on the JIC and the JIC’s impartiality was not compromised.<sup>8</sup> The Hutton inquiry in 2004 agreed with its predecessors that the dossier had

<sup>4</sup>Blair, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 29 January 2010, 73, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/45139/20100129-blair-final.pdf>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>5</sup>Campbell, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 January 2010, morning session, 64, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/42384/20100112am-campbell-final.pdf>, 1 June 2013

<sup>6</sup>Campbell, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 January 2010, morning session, 79.

<sup>7</sup>UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FASC), *The Decision to Go to War in Iraq* [FASC Report], Ninth Report of Session 2002–03, volume 1, HC 813-1, 7 July 2003, 4, accessed at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmcaff/813/813.pdf>, 20 April 2013.

<sup>8</sup>UK Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), *Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction–Intelligence and Assessments*, Cm 5972, 31, September 2003, accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/cy9ys3p>, 20 April 2013.

the full approval of the JIC, made the case against Iraq as strongly as possible but contained only material that was consistent with the intelligence, did not contain material “known or believed to be false or unreliable,” and was drafted in a proper manner.<sup>9</sup> The *Butler Report* in July 2004, in contrast, presented a somewhat more critical stance and has provided the most thorough review to date. It concluded that the way in which the material was presented in the dossier, and Blair’s 24 September 2002 Commons statement introducing the dossier, could have created the impression of greater intelligence certainty than was the case and went further than the previous reports in calling this “a serious weakness.”<sup>10</sup> One particular issue that Butler examined was the role of what has become known as Report X and how this influenced the dossier. However, while acknowledging that Report X “resulted in a stronger assessment in the dossier in relation to Iraqi chemical weapons production than was justified by the available intelligence,”<sup>11</sup> the *Butler Report* contradicted itself in concluding that “judgements in the dossier went to (although not beyond) the outer limits of the intelligence available.”<sup>12</sup> The crucial intelligence report, Report X, is discussed at length later on this article because it is central to our refutation of the position that the dossier did not go beyond the assessed intelligence. Generally speaking, by rejecting the notion that deliberate deception played a major role, all the inquiries emphasize intelligence failure, that is, the mistaken belief among the intelligence services that Iraq had WMD.

The academic literature contains a wider spread of positions than the official reports. Some of it shares their relatively benign view. James Humphreys argues that the dossier was produced in a legitimate way for the legitimate purpose of communicating the government’s intelligence-based view of Iraqi WMD policy.<sup>13</sup> He makes general observations about the endemic nature of spin making outright lies usually unnecessary and regards the use of spin in the case of the dossier as not exceptional or particularly problematic. As a result, his article does not tease out and apply distinctions that this article develops in its conceptual framework

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<sup>9</sup>*Report of the Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Dr David Kelly C.M.G. by Lord Hutton*, [*Hutton Report*], House of Commons HC 247, 28 January 2004, chap. 12 para. 467(1), accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/huttoninquiry>, 25 November 2014.

<sup>10</sup>*Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors*, [*Butler Report*], House of Commons HC 898, 76, 14 July 2004, accessed at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14\\_07\\_04\\_butler.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14_07_04_butler.pdf), 25 November 2014.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>13</sup>James Humphreys, “The Iraq Dossier and the Meaning of Spin,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 58 (January 2005), 156–170, at 167.

between informing, persuading, and deceiving. Similarly, although Richard Aldrich concludes that omissions, misrepresentations, oversimplifications, and exaggerations occurred in the dossier's presentation of the intelligence, he does not analyze these issues extensively. Instead, he focuses on what he sees as the main issue, namely the error of most Western intelligence agencies in believing that Iraq had WMD.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars such as Ian Davis and Andreas Persbo explain the belief that Iraq had WMD in terms of the collective psychological phenomenon of "group-think," in which political actors are collectively biased toward a particular view and interpret the available intelligence to support that view.<sup>15</sup> Even if this occurred, it does not address or account for the fact that those producing the dossier knew there was a gap between what they wanted to claim and what the intelligence said. For Anthony Glees, the publication of intelligence to support policy on Iraq resulted in a politicization of the intelligence so that claims of certainty were made that were not warranted by the intelligence.<sup>16</sup> However, he does not have much to say about this, as his focus is on the inadvisability of publishing secret intelligence to justify policy. Some of the academic literature emphasizes the abuse of intelligence for political purposes. Alex Danchev argues that the dossier involved deception and misrepresentation in order to make the case for war, with Scarlett's ownership of the dossier a sham and with Scarlett simply doing what Campbell wanted.<sup>17</sup> This piece is more a scathing presentation of a particular interpretation than a detailed sorting through of competing interpretations. Andrew Doig and Mark Phythian claim that Blair "knowingly exaggerated" the intelligence to make the case for war.<sup>18</sup> In a brief analysis, their method is to draw on Butler to show the gaps between what Blair and the dossier claimed on the one hand and what the intelligence showed on the other and to infer from those gaps deliberate exaggeration. In contrast, this article traces the processes involved to show directly what happened rather than merely inferring it. Glen Rangwala and Dan Plesch wrote a booklet that made the strongest case

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<sup>14</sup>Richard J. Aldrich, "Whitehall and the Iraq War: The UK's Four Intelligence Enquiries," *Irish Studies on International Affairs* 16 (2005): 1–16.

<sup>15</sup>Ian Davis and Andreas Persbo, "After the Butler Report: Time to Take on the Group Think in Washington and London," BASIC Papers, 1 July 2004, accessed at <http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/PUB010704.pdf>, 26 May 2013.

<sup>16</sup>Anthony Glees, "Evidence-based Policy, or Policy-based Evidence: Hutton and the Government's Use of Secret Intelligence," *Parliamentary Affairs* 58 (January 2005): 138–155, at 148.

<sup>17</sup>Alex Danchev, "The Reckoning: Official Inquiries and the Iraq War," *Intelligence and National Security* 19 (Autumn 2004): 436–466.

<sup>18</sup>Andrew Doig and Mark Phythian, "The National Interest and the Politics of Threat Exaggeration: The Blair Government's Case for War Against Iraq," *The Political Quarterly* 76 (July 2005): 368–376, at 375.

using the material then available that Blair deliberately misled the public and Parliament.<sup>19</sup> However, this item and all the others referred to above were published in 2004 or 2005 in relation to the FASC, ISC, Hutton and Butler reports. Hence they were written without benefiting from the crucial information which has emerged subsequently.

More recent publications have still not filled the conceptual or empirical gap regarding the dossier. Steven Kettel agrees with those who see the dossier as involving exaggeration of intelligence material to advance the campaign to overthrow Saddam Hussein.<sup>20</sup> However, he does not systematically identify those exaggerations, and his analysis devotes only one sentence to Report X and misses its vital importance. Although providing little detailed evidence and analysis, John Morrison blames the intelligence services for having “unconsciously exaggerated” Iraq’s WMD capabilities, but mainly blames Blair for “active” misuse of the exaggerated intelligence.<sup>21</sup> Joshua Rovner argues that the September dossier involved the politicization of intelligence, but, as his focus is on the United States, he examines the dossier only briefly.<sup>22</sup> Deploying a typology of lying, spinning, and truth-telling, John Mearsheimer argues that the George W. Bush administration lied—that is, made claims that it knew or suspected were false—when it asserted that it knew for certain that Iraq had WMD.<sup>23</sup> He does not apply his framework to Britain’s handling of intelligence on Iraq other than in passing. His method is essentially the same as that of Doig and Phythian—comparing the gap between public certainty and private uncertainty—but Mearsheimer concludes lying, whereas Doig and Phythian conclude knowing exaggeration, and the difference between them is unclear. Brian Jones, Head of the Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Technical Intelligence Branch of the DIS, published an important book on British intelligence and Iraqi WMD in 2010.<sup>24</sup> In the British intelligence system, the DIS are considered the key experts whose task it is to evaluate and assess all incoming intelligence.<sup>25</sup> The subtitle of his book, published in 2010, referred to being “fooled” into war, but in the text of the book, he concentrated on setting out what happened

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<sup>19</sup>Glen Rangwala and Daniel Plesch, *A Case to Answer* (London: Spokesman Books, 2004).

<sup>20</sup>Steven Kettel, “Who’s Afraid of Saddam Hussein? Re-examining the ‘September Dossier’ Affair,” *Contemporary British History* 22 (September 2008): 407–426.

<sup>21</sup>John N.L. Morrison, “British Intelligence Failures in Iraq,” *Intelligence and National Security* 26 (August 2011): 508–520.

<sup>22</sup>Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup>John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–5, 16, 50–52.

<sup>24</sup>Brian Jones, *Failing Intelligence: The True Story of How We Were Fooled into Going to War in Iraq* (London: Biteback, 2010).

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

and the gap between what the dossier said and what the intelligence he was aware of said. His discussion of the dossier and these interpretations is brief and insufficient to clarify and demonstrate these claims.

In sum, the literature on the September dossier has three limitations: it lacks a clear conceptual framework to distinguish between informing, persuading, and deceiving; an in-depth application of such a framework to the production and presentation of the dossier; and an engagement with the significant new information that has become available in the last three years. This article provides that conceptual framework and applies it to an in-depth case study of the dossier using that new information. This approach makes it possible to draw important conclusions about whether the dossier was part of a campaign of organized political persuasion and whether that campaign involved deliberate deception.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study, then, addresses two interrelated questions. The first concerns whether the September dossier was an objective and accurate reflection of the intelligence as part of an attempt to inform the British public; or, alternatively, whether it involved a crafted presentation of the intelligence in order to influence public opinion. In other words, is the dossier most accurately understood as the product of *organized political persuasion*? The second research question concerns the extent to which the dossier involved *intentional deception* and, if so, what form that took. *Organized political persuasion* and *deceptive organized political persuasion* are defined as follows.

### *Organized Political Persuasion*

Organized political persuasion, a phrase coined in this article, refers to a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions in order to gain support for a policy. Other terms in more common usage include propaganda, political marketing, public affairs, public relations, spin, information campaign, and public relations. In military circles, commonly employed terms are perception management, public diplomacy, strategic communication, global engagement, and psychological operations.<sup>26</sup> All of these

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<sup>26</sup>For example, John Corner, "Mediated Politics, Promotional Culture and the Idea of 'Propaganda'," *Media, Culture & Society* 29 (July 2007): 669–677; D.H. Dearth, "Shaping the 'Information Space,'" *Journal of Information Warfare* 1(May 2002): 1–15; Garth S. Jowett and Victoria J. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 6th edn. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2014); David Miller and William Dinan, *A Century of Spin: how public relations became the cutting edge of corporate power* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).



activities have two features in common: the intention to persuade people to think in a particular way about a policy, and the existence of an organized and systematic approach to achieving this goal. At the core of our definition is the distinction between the communication of information understood as only an attempt to inform, but which does not involve the intention to persuade, and communication that is aimed at persuading an audience to think in a particular way about an issue. Informing and persuading are different. One might inform another person as to why one is pursuing a particular policy, but without wishing to persuade them to support one's actions. The phrase "organized political persuasion" captures the essence of the various terms mentioned above (propaganda, spin, and so on). It does so in a clear and concise fashion while avoiding the value-laden, context-specific, or euphemistic character of many of them. It also avoids necessarily associating all acts of organized political persuasion with deception.

### *Deceptive Organized Political Persuasion*

Our definition of organized political persuasion includes the sub-categories of *non-deceptive* and *deceptive organized political persuasion*. As such, organized political persuasion may be conducted in a way that is honest and non-misleading, or it can be conducted in a way that involves deception. With respect to Mearsheimer's recent work on lying and deception, by including the sub-categories of non-deceptive and deceptive organized political persuasion, our notion of political persuasion spans his categories of truth-telling, deception, and lying.<sup>27</sup> Identifying the point at which organized political persuasion becomes deceptive is challenging; indeed the tensions between truth, rhetoric, and political debate is a perennial issue. It is also important to distinguish between attempts to simplify in order to demonstrate the essence of a situation and manipulation of facts in order to mislead about the essence of a situation. Drawing upon the relevant classic and contemporary literatures,<sup>28</sup> there are categorizations available that can be used to help define when organized political persuasion becomes deceptive. First, there is *deception through lying*, defined here as making a statement that one knows or suspects to be untrue in order to mislead. Officials and politicians know it would be very costly were they to be exposed as having lied and so have a major incentive to find other ways of misleading. Second, deception can be achieved through withholding

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<sup>27</sup>Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, 15.

<sup>28</sup>Principally, Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers," in *Crises of the Republic* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1971), 1-47; Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*; and Thomas L. Carson, *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

information to make the viewpoint being promoted more persuasive; the article refers to this as *deception through omission* (synonymous with Mearsheimer's category of deception through concealment). It is deceptive because those involved know that an audience might not be persuaded if they knew the full picture. Third, *deception through distortion* can also occur. This involves framing a statement in a deliberately misleading way to support the viewpoint being promoted. Our categories of deception through omission and deception through distortion are equivalent to Mearsheimer's categories of concealment and spin respectively.<sup>29</sup>

Central to the task of assessing whether the above categories of deception are in play is the issue of intentionality. Omissions, distortions, and the circulation of untruths may all occur through accident, misperception, or even self-deception by those responsible.<sup>30</sup> This study proceeds by establishing whether the dossier contained untruths or distortions or involved important omissions and then assessing whether they resulted from a deliberate intent to deceive about the essence of the situation. Of course, establishing that the dossier was misleading is an easier task than establishing intentionality, and due consideration is given to the possibility of self-deception and misperception on the part of those involved. Where uncertainty or lack of information prevents a clear assessment regarding intentionality, this will be noted.

## THE DECEPTIVE DOSSIER

### *The Dossier before the Arrival of Report X: Preparing to Persuade and Deceive, not Inform*

The first problem that emerges with the official claim that the dossier was simply an attempt to inform public understanding is the history of both the dossier and the lead up to the Iraq War. The dossier originated in the need to make the case to the public for British backing for U.S. plans to invade Iraq, rather than in response to public demand for information. The policy of removing Saddam Hussein from power had been a component of conservative U.S. thinking throughout the 1990s, and the terrorist attack of 9/11 provided an opportunity for these aspirations to be realized. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, some in the Bush administration advocated attacking Iraq. However, the Bush administration decided to invade

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<sup>29</sup>Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, 16–17.

<sup>30</sup>Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Robert Jervis, "Understanding Beliefs," *Political Psychology* 27 (October 2006): 641–663; Robert Trivers, *Deceit and Self-Deception: Fooling Yourself the Better to Fool Others* (Allen Lane, 2011).

Afghanistan first. From late 2001, regime change in Iraq through military force was back on the agenda.<sup>31</sup> Leaked British documents from March 2002 show that the British government told the U.S. government that it backed regime change through military force; would need a strategy to sell military action to the public, the press and Parliament by wrong-footing Iraq on weapons inspections; and would also need a public document to help make the case on the basis of disarming Iraq of WMD.<sup>32</sup> By late July, the internal British assessment of the U.S. position was that war was inevitable.<sup>33</sup> The pressures facing Britain were different from those facing the United States. Britain put much greater weight on trying to secure at least a semblance of UN Security Council authorization in order to buttress the claim that the war was legal. The British government also faced much greater public opposition compared with the Bush administration, again creating great pressure to justify any military action. This contributed to the emphasis on imminent threat from chemical weapons rather than a potential longer-term threat from nuclear ones that was more of a focus in the United States.

Starting in February 2002, there were internal discussions about the publication of declassified intelligence regarding WMD threats. A letter dated 28 February and released in response to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request refers to a “meeting last Tuesday,” held to “consider the unclassified paper on [four] WMD countries of concern.”<sup>34</sup> This is the earliest indication of the existence of plans for the dossier, and the meeting noted that “Iraq continues to look a bit thin.”<sup>35</sup> References to using a dossier to help build public support appear in a number of other documents released due to FOI requests. For example, on 6 March, a letter titled “WMD: Public Handling” from Julian Miller, chief of the JIC assessment staff, to the U.S. Embassy in London states that “we were preparing a draft paper for public consumption, setting out the facts on WMD in a number of nations ... [T] here are also continuing discussions on the policy approach to handling this

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<sup>31</sup>Joyce Battle, “The Iraq War – Part I: The US Prepares for Conflict, 2001,” 22 September 2010, accessed at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB326/>, 30 May 2013; John Prados and Chris Ames, “The Iraq War – Part II: Was There Even a Decision?” 1 October 2010, accessed at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB328/>, 30 May 2013.

<sup>32</sup>Iraq Inquiry Digest, “The Downing Street Documents,” accessed at [http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/?page\\_id=161](http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/?page_id=161), 5 June 2013. See Jane M.O. Sharp, “Tony Blair Nurtures the Special Relationship,” in Jane K. Cramer and A. Trevor Thrall, eds., *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2012), 167–200.

<sup>33</sup>Matthew Rycroft, “Iraq: Prime Minister’s meeting, 23 July,” 23 July 2002, S 195 /02, accessed at <http://downingstreetmemo.com/memos.html>, 26 May 2013.

<sup>34</sup>J. Hamilton-Eddy, “WMD Programmes of Concern,” 28 February 2002, in FOI305712, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 14, accessed at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/foi-wmd-iraq.pdf>, 22 April 2013.

<sup>35</sup>Hamilton-Eddy, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 14.

material in public. And it may be buffed up somewhat by the presentational experts.”<sup>36</sup> On 8 March 2002, the “Iraq Options Paper” from the Defence and Overseas Secretariat in the Cabinet Office listed steps to be taken in relation to launching an invasion of Iraq, the final one of which referred to “sensitising the public” and the need for “a media campaign to warn of the dangers that Saddam poses and to prepare public opinion both in the UK and abroad.”<sup>37</sup> A minute from Scarlett dated 15 March indicated the involvement of Campbell: “Getting the presentational tone right will clearly be a key. We will need to consider at what stage to consult Alastair Campbell. Alastair ... stands ready to advise.”<sup>38</sup> The *Butler Report*, when discussing this period, refers to “[t]he importance of presentational activity on Iraq’s breaches to persuade other members of the United Nations Security Council as well as domestic audiences of the case for action to enforce disarmament.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, the starting point was preparing the public for war on the basis of an Iraqi WMD threat and with heavy emphasis on presentation. In other words, the dossier was part of a campaign of organized political persuasion.

A central problem with a dossier that discussed Iraq alongside North Korea, Iran, and Libya was that the intelligence did not suggest that Iraq was the most threatening of the four or required military action to be taken against it and not the others. Documents released due to FOI requests show concerns over the dossier’s weakness, the need for better presentation, and suggestions over manipulation of material in order to increase impact. Scarlett noted on 6 March the need to discuss whether the paper should only cover Iraq.<sup>40</sup> On 11 March, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw is quoted as stating “Good, but should not Iraq be *first* and also have more text? The paper has to show why there is an exceptional threat from Iraq. It does not quite do this yet.”<sup>41</sup> Following this criticism, a minute from Scarlett explicitly proposed deception through omission on 15 March:

The Foreign Secretary felt that an earlier draft did not demonstrate why Iraq posed a greater threat than other countries of concern. The new draft highlights some unique features (violation of SCRs [UN Security Council

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<sup>36</sup>Julian Miller, “WMD: Public Handling,” 6 March 2002, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 26.

<sup>37</sup>UK Defence and Overseas Secretariat, “Iraq Options Paper,” 8 March 2002, accessed at <http://downingstreetmemo.com/docs/iraqoptions.pdf>, 14 September 2011.

<sup>38</sup>Excerpt of minute from John Scarlett to David Manning, 15 March 2002, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 27.

<sup>39</sup>*Butler Report*, 67.

<sup>40</sup>Minute from Scarlett to Manning, 6 March 2002, document 7, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 27.

<sup>41</sup>Excerpt of minute from Simon McDonald to Peter Ricketts, “Iraq,” 11 March 2002, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 43.

Resolutions]; use of CW [Chemical Warfare] agents against own people). You may still wish to consider whether more impact could be achieved if the paper only covered Iraq. This would have the benefit of obscuring the fact that in terms of WMD, Iraq is not that exceptional.<sup>42</sup>

On the same day, Tim Dowse, head of counter-proliferation at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), suggested that the intelligence be presented in a way designed to prevent the public from realizing what it was saying:

Thereafter, if it appears that we do have to change our public line, I wonder if we might finesse the presentational difficulty by changing the terms? Instead of talking about tonnes of precursor chemicals (which don't mean much to the man in the street anyway), could we focus on munitions and refer to precursor chemicals sufficient to produce x thousand Scud warheads/aerial bombs/122mm rockets filled with mustard gas/the deadly nerve agents tabun/sarin/VX? ... I realise that this would not in the end hoodwink a real expert, who would be able to reverse the calculation and work out that our assessment of precursor quantities had fallen. But the task would be ... impossible for a layman. And the result would, I think, have more impact on the target audience for [the] unclassified paper.<sup>43</sup>

Dowse's proposed deception through distortion was not implemented in the dossier but it shows again an official offering up an idea for deception. On 19 March, a minute from Campbell confirmed that a decision had been taken to focus only on Iraq,<sup>44</sup> and the following week a new version was produced along those lines.

Blair had already indicated on 17 March that that he recognized the weakness of the intelligence regarding WMD, and he speculated over alternative ways of justifying action. He stated that the "immediate WMD problems don't seem obviously worse than 3 years ago," before going on to describe how, given this situation, "we have to re-order our story and message" and suggesting that public presentation of Iraq policy focus on the humanitarian and moral arguments for removing Saddam.<sup>45</sup> A memo from Straw to Blair dated 25 March reiterated the presentational problems. Straw stated that "in the documents so far presented it has been hard to glean whether the threat from Iraq is so significantly different from that of Iran and North Korea as to

<sup>42</sup>Minute from Scarlett to Manning, 15 March 2002, document 13, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 50.

<sup>43</sup>Letter from Dowse to Miller, 15 March 2002, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 73.

<sup>44</sup>Minute from Campbell to Scarlett, 19 March 2002, document 14, *WMD Programmes of Concern*, 52.

<sup>45</sup>Memo from Blair to Powell, 17 March 2002, Chilcot Inquiry, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50751/Blair-to-Powell-17March2002-minute.pdf>, 6 April 2012.

justify military action.”<sup>46</sup> He then notes the problem caused by lumping Iraq into the same category as the other countries of concern:

By linking these countries together in his ‘axis of evil’ speech, President Bush implied an identity between them not only in terms of their threat, but also in terms of the action necessary to deal with the threat. A lot of work will now need to be done to delink the three, and to show why military action against Iraq is so much more justified than against Iran and North Korea.

With the dossier on the verge of being released in late March, it was decided that its publication should be postponed.<sup>47</sup> Major General Michael Laurie was Director General Intelligence Collection in the DIS in 2002 and had a central role in gathering intelligence for the dossier. He explained the postponement to Chilcot in the following way:

[Air Marshall Sir] Joe French [Chief of Defence Intelligence] came back from some JIC meeting and said, you know, that dossier which was the four country dossier did not make a case for war and we are going to be doing this all again and we need to collect more information. So over the summer the pressure sort of built up and up to try to collect more. ... [T]he purpose of this thing was to make a case for war.<sup>48</sup>

As instructed, over the next few months, work on the dossier and the strategy of publishing intelligence in order to mobilize public opinion continued, both in Britain and the United States. Campbell met with Scarlett on 23 April “to go through what we needed to do communications wise to set the scene for Iraq, e.g. a WMD paper and other papers about Saddam.”<sup>49</sup> On 8 May, Bush commissioned the CIA *White Paper* that would ultimately be published in October 2002 titled *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs*.<sup>50</sup> This was the U.S. equivalent of the U.K. dossier. On 6 June, a draft of the U.K. dossier was circulated to which was attached a cover sheet stating “produced by CIC.”<sup>51</sup> The CIC (Coalition

<sup>46</sup>Memo from Straw to Blair, “Crawford/Iraq,” 25 March 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50151/straw-to-blair-25march2002-letter.pdf>, 29 April 2013.

<sup>47</sup>Scarlett, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 August 2009, 55–55, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/40665/20091208pmscarlett-final.pdf>, 12 June 2013.

<sup>48</sup>Laurie, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 3 June 2010, 6, also 11–16, 24–30, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52048/Laurie-2010-06-03-S1.pdf>, 15 June 2013.

<sup>49</sup>Alistair Campbell, *The Blair Years* (London: Random House, 2008), 618.

<sup>50</sup>John Prados and Chris Ames, “The Iraq War – Part III: Shaping the Debate,” 4 October 2010, accessed at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/>, 30 May 2013; John Prados, “PR Push for Iraq War Preceded Intelligence Findings,” 22 August 2008, *National Security Archive*, accessed at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB254/>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>51</sup>Obtained by Ames via FOI request, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/cover-letter-june-02-cic-draft.pdf>, 22 April 2013.

Information Centre) was run by Campbell from within the Foreign Office as an autonomous unit which drew on staff from a range of government departments and the governments of other countries, including the United States. A minute from Jonathan Powell, Blair's Chief of Staff, dated 19 July, reiterated the need to make a public case for war based on Iraqi WMD:

We need to establish a *legal base*. More difficult for us than for them [the United States]. It needs to be based on WMD rather than terrorism or regime change. ... We need to *make the case*. We need a plan and a timetable for releasing papers we have prepared on human rights abuses, WMD etc. We need to have the sort of Rolls Royce information campaign we had at the end of Afghanistan before we start in Iraq.<sup>52</sup>

This campaign was not about informing the public about a serious WMD threat or responding to a public clamor for information: it was about presenting a defensible rationale for war as part of a campaign of organized political persuasion.

As mentioned earlier, by late July, No.10 was being briefed that military action by the United States was seen as inevitable, even though existing intelligence on Iraq fell far short of establishing either that there was a significant threat from Iraqi WMD, or that Iraq was in clear breach of UN resolutions.<sup>53</sup> So the problem that had confronted the government in March was still there in August.<sup>54</sup> The White House Information Group was formed in August in order to coordinate a media campaign regarding Iraqi WMD.<sup>55</sup> Documents released in the U.K. show the continued drafting of intelligence material as well as coordination with the United States.<sup>56</sup> They include an email on 9 August from a DIS official who wrote: "further to your request to make the public paper more exciting and/or more like the slightly iffy claims about big buildings in REDACTED please see the following."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Powell minute to Blair, 19 July 2002, Chilcot Inquiry, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50772/Powell-to-Blair-19July2002-minute.pdf>, 6 April 2012.

<sup>53</sup>Rycroft, "Iraq."

<sup>54</sup>For an overview from the start of September, see; Letter from Jeremy Greenstock to Michael Jay, "Iraq: Handling in the Security Council," 3 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52504/greenstock-jay-security-council-2002-09-03.pdf>, 22 April 2013.

<sup>55</sup>Scott McLellan, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 142.

<sup>56</sup>D.I.S. email, "Dossier – Missile Sites," 8 August 2002, obtained by Ames via FOI request, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Extract-Pages-From-dis-up-to-16-setp.pdf>, 5 April 2012.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

Despite the lack of good evidence of a threat, Blair announced publicly on 3 September that a dossier would soon be published. On 4 September, John Williams, FCO Head of Communications, wrote a minute titled “Iraq Media Strategy” setting out the work that needed to be done: “The media siege should now be challenged regularly by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary: to reinforce the broad case, so that it strikes a chord with more and more people, as opposed to journalists; and to create the right environment for the dossier.”<sup>58</sup> Williams elaborated: “The tone of the launch will be critical ... Our target is not the argumentative interviewer or opinionated columnist, but the kind of people to whom ministerial interviewers are a background hum on the car or kitchen radio.” Williams indicated the weakness of the dossier in relation to this task: “The evidence dossier is unlikely to be enough ... to win the argument ... There is no ‘killer fact’ ... that ‘proves’ that Saddam must be taken on now, or this or that weapon will be used against us.” Campbell emailed Powell the next day to say that the dossier needed to be rewritten substantially and that JIC Chairman Scarlett and his subordinate, Miller, would be in charge of the dossier “as per TB’s [Tony Blair’s] discussion.”<sup>59</sup> As Blair made clear at the Hutton Inquiry, placing Scarlett in charge was seen as critical: “The whole purpose of having the JIC own this document was in order to provide the absolute clarity and certainty ... that in the end they were perfectly happy with this ... [I]t was essential that anything that we said in the course of my statement or in the dossier we could hand on heart say: this is the assessment of the Joint Intelligence Committee.”<sup>60</sup> The political credibility of the dossier was seen as being linked to it being perceived as the work of intelligence officials. However, and despite Campbell’s claim in his diary that the dossier “was the work of the [intelligence] agencies,”<sup>61</sup> there were continual interactions between Scarlett, communications experts from the FCO, and Blair’s advisers. Campbell chaired meetings on 5 and 9 September with senior officials and Scarlett regarding the dossier and reported that his role was to provide advice on “all the presentation

<sup>58</sup> John Williams, “Iraq Media Strategy”, 4 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/williams-media-strategy-sep-02.pdf>, 6 April 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Email from Campbell to Powell, 5 September 2012, CAB 11/0017, accessed at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/evidence/CAB\\_11\\_0017.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/evidence/CAB_11_0017.pdf), 1 June 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Blair, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 28 August 2003, para. 17, accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans22.htm>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Alastair Campbell, *The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq – The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, vol. 4 (London: Arrow, 2013), 589.



aspects.”<sup>62</sup> An interdepartmental drafting group met on 5 and 9 September that was chaired by Miller. Many of the individuals at the 5 September meeting would later form part of Campbell’s Iraq Information Group of government department media heads.<sup>63</sup> When this group met on 9 September, and again on 17 September, representatives from the FCO News Department and No.10 Press Office were present.<sup>64</sup> Individuals involved in finalizing the dossier included Williams and Paul Hammill from Campbell’s CIC team.<sup>65</sup> Scarlett confirmed on 10 September the extensive involvement of Williams: “I attach a revised draft of the dossier ... This has been significantly recast, with considerable help from John Williams and others in the Foreign Office.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Williams had drafted a version of the dossier before 9 September. Hand-written on the front of this document are the words “John Williams’s re-draft.” Crossed out in the header is the reference “JIC Two Document Version 24 July 2002.”<sup>67</sup> Although the government has claimed that Williams’s September draft was simply a document he chose to write on his own initiative, its existence, coupled with Scarlett’s confirmation regarding Williams’s involvement, gives good reason to think that Scarlett’s 10 September dossier was a version of the material that had been in production for months with people who were not intelligence analysts playing a central role. When questioned about the various earlier drafts and the involvement of Williams, Campbell admitted that “[o]nce we got to September 5 and September 9, it was anything that anybody had written before, frankly, was to be used by John Scarlett as he saw fit.”<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the final drafting process, officials were concerned to ensure that the dossier made a persuasive case against Iraq. In an email from DIS dated 6 September, the author writes “unless we want people picking holes in the case presented, the specifics should either be left out or made clear. If

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<sup>62</sup>Campbell, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 January 2010, morning session, 76, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/42384/20100112am-campbell-final.pdf>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>63</sup>Campbell, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 19 August 2003, morning session, paras. 9–10, accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans12.htm>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>64</sup>Scarlett, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 23 September 2003, morning session, paras. 82–84, accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans41.htm>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>65</sup>Excerpt from letter from Miller, “Iraq Public Dossier,” 6 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Sept-6-Miller.pdf>, 22 April 2013.

<sup>66</sup>Email from Scarlett to Campbell, “The Iraq Dossier,” 10 September 2002, accessed at [www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc10.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc10.pdf), 1 June 2013.

<sup>67</sup>“JIC Two Document Version”, 24 July 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/williams.pdf>, 7 October 2014.

<sup>68</sup>Campbell, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 January 2010, morning session, 81.

the aim is to support the line being taken, then we need to say something like the following.”<sup>69</sup> On 9 September, Campbell expressed his gratitude to the intelligence services: “The media/political judgement will inevitably focus on ‘what’s new?’ and I was pleased to hear from you and your SIS colleagues that, contrary to media reports today, the intelligence community are taking such a helpful approach to this in going through all the material they have. It goes without saying that there should be nothing published that you and they are not 100% happy with.”<sup>70</sup> Campbell told Scarlett that the dossier had to be “revelatory and we needed to show that it was new and informative and part of a bigger case.”<sup>71</sup> It was during this period that vague intelligence, including about the ability to launch WMD within 45 minutes and about mobile biological production facilities, was received, and then used in the 9 September JIC assessment and the 10 September draft of the dossier. When the 9 and 10 September dossier drafts were circulated, however, there was still widespread concern that they were insufficiently persuasive. One official wrote that “much of the evidence we have is largely circumstantial so we need to convey to our readers that the accumulation of these facts demonstrates an intent on Saddam’s part—the more they can be led to this conclusion themselves rather than have to accept judgements from us, the better.”<sup>72</sup> Another official wrote, “Very long way to go, I think we’re in a lot of trouble with this as it stands now.”<sup>73</sup> An email dated 11 September states that “No. 10 through the Chairman want the document to be as strong as possible within the bounds of the available intelligence. This is therefore a last call for any items of intelligence that agencies think can and should be included.”<sup>74</sup> On the same day, in a minute to Scarlett, Desmond Bowen, Deputy Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, wrote:

In looking at the WMD sections, you clearly want to be as firm and authoritative as you can be. You will need to judge the extent to which

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<sup>69</sup>D.I.S. email, 6 September 2002, obtained by Ames via FOI request, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Extract-Pages-From-dis-up-to-16-setp.pdf>, 5 April 2012.

<sup>70</sup>Memo from Campbell to Powell, Manning, Williams and Omand, 9 September 2002, CAB/6/0002-0004, accessed at [www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc07.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc07.pdf), 1 June 2013.

<sup>71</sup>Campbell, *Blair Years*, 634.

<sup>72</sup>Email from Daniel Pruce to Mark Matthews, 10 September 2002, CAB/11/0021, accessed at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc09.pdf>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>73</sup>Email from Philip Bassett to Daniel Pruce and Alistair Campbell, 11 September 2002, CAB/11/0025, accessed at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/evidence/CAB\\_11\\_0025.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/evidence/CAB_11_0025.pdf), 1 June 2013.

<sup>74</sup>Email [unidentified official], “Iraq Dossier-Questions from No. 10,” 11 September 2002, *Hutton Inquiry*, CAB/23/0015, accessed at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/evidence/CAB\\_23\\_0015.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/evidence/CAB_23_0015.pdf), 1 June 2013.

you need to hedge your judgments with, for example, “it is almost certain” and similar caveats. I appreciate that this can increase the authenticity of the document in terms of it being a proper assessment, but that needs to be weighed against the use that will be made by opponents of action who will add up the number of judgments on which we do not have absolute clarity.<sup>75</sup>

The end result of this process was that the dossier presented a strengthened impression of the threat from Iraq and of the certainty of the intelligence. The *Butler Report* put it this way:

[I]n translating material from JIC assessments into the dossier, warnings were lost about the limited intelligence base on which some aspects of these assessments were being made. ... Language in the dossier may have left with readers the impression that there was fuller and firmer intelligence behind the judgements than was the case.<sup>76</sup>

At this point, then, preliminary conclusions can be reached regarding the two research questions in relation to the dossier, from its conception in February 2002. On the first research question, the dossier was not a straightforward reflection of the intelligence authored by the “single pen” of Scarlett and intended to inform in response to public demand. Instead, the dossier was conceived and drafted in order to serve a campaign of organized political persuasion. This is demonstrated by its initiation in relation to justifying British backing for military action against Iraq and the interactions between intelligence staff, politicians, and communications staff. The aim was to persuade the public, the media, Parliament, and the UN Security Council that Iraq was a current WMD threat in order to bolster the case for war. On the second research question, the processes surrounding the drafting of the dossier show that this campaign of organized political persuasion was a deceptive one through intentional distortion and omission. This can be seen in the advice to focus the dossier on Iraq to obscure the fact that Iraq was not an exceptional WMD threat, the repeated admissions that the intelligence did not make a strong case for military action, the drive to remove caveats and qualifications, and the search for exciting material to include. No one is on record at the time or subsequently as saying that the efforts to strengthen the claims in the dossier resulted from the view that the various drafts had underplayed the certainty or alarming nature of the intelligence. There is also no evidence of groupthink

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<sup>75</sup>Minute from Bowen to Scarlett, copied to Campbell, Powell and Manning, “Iraq Dossier,” 11 September 2002, document 7, obtained by Ames via FOI request, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/info.pdf>, 21 April 2013.

<sup>76</sup>*Butler Report*, 114.

in which there was collective self-deception or misperception that the intelligence was certain or alarming. Instead, the evidence demonstrates that all of those leading its production understood the gulf between the overall picture that they wanted to portray and what the intelligence actually demonstrated. The alternative was to admit that the intelligence did not show that Iraq was particularly threatening and to argue, nevertheless, that military action should be taken in case the threat worsened in the future. However, they could not do that, as it was clear that it would not be persuasive politically, never mind defensible legally. The deceptive claims were pushed furthest due to Report X as the article now explains.

*The Gap Between the Dossier and the Intelligence Widens:*

*Report X Marks the Spot*

On 10 September, Sir Richard Dearlove, the Chief of the SIS, alerted Scarlett to the imminent arrival of an intelligence report subsequently named Report X by Brian Jones, then Head of the Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Technical Intelligence Branch of the DIS. The informant was described at the time as a “new source on trial”. The report arrived the following day.<sup>77</sup> Scarlett told Chilcot: “the compartmented intelligence, which was influential, which came in on 11 September, did famously influence what was said in the dossier.”<sup>78</sup> Considering its importance, this fact is not nearly as famous as it should be and there is a need to understand exactly how it influenced the dossier. Throughout 2002 the intelligence had never been sufficient to permit a confident JIC judgment that Iraq was actually producing chemical and biological agents never mind putting them into warheads and bombs. Although the details of Report X remain secret, the *Butler Report* indicates that it claimed the “production of biological and chemical agent had been accelerated by the Iraqi Government, including through the building of further facilities throughout Iraq.”<sup>79</sup> As far as can be ascertained, Report X contained at most very little and possibly no specific evidence of chemical and biological agent production. Instead, it was mainly a promise that evidence would soon be provided. The *Butler Report* stated that there were “well-founded hopes that this source would become a major asset. In particular, the source had indicated that he would be able to provide substantial and critical additional

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<sup>77</sup>Jones, *Failing Intelligence*, 83; *Butler Report*, 138-139; Lyne in SIS4, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, Part 1, no date [between 2009 and 2011], 58, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50700/SIS4-part-1.pdf>, 29 May 2013.

<sup>78</sup>Scarlett, oral private evidence with Miller to Chilcot Inquiry, 5 May 2010, 20, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50444/ScarlettandMiller-2010-05-05.pdf>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>79</sup>*Butler Report*, 75.

intelligence in the near future.”<sup>80</sup> Other evidence has also emphasized the weak nature of Report X. SIS1 stated: “Here was a chap who promised the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow.”<sup>81</sup> During SIS4’s hearings, Chilcot inquiry member Sir Roderic Lyne stated that SIS was hoping to obtain additional evidence promised in Report X in three or four weeks.<sup>82</sup> Finally, the footnote summarizing a redacted section of SIS4’s testimony provides a concise overview of Report X and its potential value:

The witness described the background to, and political impact of, an important piece of intelligence about Iraqi production of chemical and biological agent, received in mid-September 2002 from a new source on trial. SIS believed that further material on possible WMD sites might follow. The witness explained, therefore, that given the situation the lead was pursued because it might provide a ‘silver bullet’.<sup>83</sup>

Ultimately, of course, the source failed to deliver in the following six months leading up to the invasion, and it was repudiated in July 2003.<sup>84</sup>

Despite being unassessed, thin and passed on from a subsource (i.e. a person gave the information to the source who then passed it to MI6), Report X was rushed to the top and seized upon with high hopes. On 12 September, Dearlove with one other SIS official briefed Blair about it in the presence of Blair’s advisers Campbell, Powell, and Manning. He described the source on trial as “developmental” and “unproven.”<sup>85</sup> Scarlett characterized Report X in his testimony to Chilcot as follows: “We were told that this [Report X] was important, potentially important reporting, but a new source, with a little bit more about the nature of access of the subsource, but a very limited amount, not really possible to make—much of it.”<sup>86</sup> Commenting on why a piece of raw, untested intelligence should be so rapidly communicated to the Prime Minister, an MI6 officer, SIS4, said, “the Prime Minister was interested in a silver bullet. If there was a gleam of a silver bullet anywhere, he wanted to see it.”<sup>87</sup> The excitement about the report was related to the attempt to get UN Security Council support for action on Iraq. Blair seems to have been taken with Report X. At the Chilcot Inquiry, Lyne

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>81</sup>SIS1, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 18, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52549/sisi1-declassified.pdf>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>82</sup>SIS4, *Chilcot Inquiry*, 66.

<sup>83</sup>SIS4, *Chilcot Inquiry*, 52–54, footnote.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 138; Lyne in SIS1, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 2010, 18, 1 June 2013; Lyne in SIS4, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, Part 1, 67; see also 52–54 footnote and 66.

<sup>85</sup>*Butler Report*, 139.

<sup>86</sup>Scarlett, private oral evidence with Miller to Chilcot Inquiry, 5 May 2010, 31.

<sup>87</sup>SIS4, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, Part 1, 59.

stated that “it clearly had an impact at the political level.”<sup>88</sup> In testimony to Chilcot, SIS1 confirmed its impact upon Blair: “It goes in our system right up to the top policy making levels and to the PM indeed.”<sup>89</sup> SIS1 also underlined the point that Report X “influenced expectation on the part of people who were concerned” that they were on the right track.<sup>90</sup> When pressed as to whether he thought there should have been concern over how much excitement the report might cause in No.10, SIS4 was reticent: “What I divine to be the direction of questioning is the issue of whether the Chief detonated a psychotropic line of thinking and excitement in the Prime Minister by giving him what in quieter days might be thought rather precipitate briefing on casework which turned out not to be real. I don’t think it is for me to offer a judgement on that.”<sup>91</sup> Although this was an inconclusive exchange, it illustrates the fact that the Chilcot panel and SIS4 understood the possible significance of Report X with respect to Blair. With senior officials armed with the promise of a silver bullet, Report X had three major impacts on the dossier that have not been widely understood. These were in relation to the judgment that Iraq was actively producing chemical and biological agents, stifling dissent over the claim that Iraq had WMD that could be launched within 45 minutes, and the strength of Blair’s “beyond doubt” claim in the Foreword to the dossier.

*“Underpinning” the Dossier Judgment that Iraq Was Producing Chemical and Biological Agents.* Report X was used to increase the certainty of the claim that Iraq was continuing to produce chemical and biological weapons agents. Prior to the arrival of Report X, the 9 September JIC assessment referred to intelligence which only “indicates that: production of chemical and biological weapons is taking place.”<sup>92</sup> The 10/11 September draft of the dossier executive summary said: “Our judgement, based on all the available sources is that Iraq: has stocks of chemical and biological agents and weapons available, both retained from before the Gulf War, and probably from more recent production.”<sup>93</sup> Following the arrival of Report X and Dearlove’s briefing of Blair on 12 September regarding Report X, the

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>89</sup>SIS1, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 19.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>SIS4, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, Part 1, 61.

<sup>92</sup>JIC Assessment, “Iraqi Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons – Possible Scenarios,” 9 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50473/JICAssessment-9September2002.pdf>, 21 April 2013.

<sup>93</sup>UK Government, WMD dossier draft 10/11 September 2002, Executive Summary, 5, DOS/2/0002, accessed at [www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc11.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc11.pdf), 30 May 2013.

dossier claim regarding continued production was strengthened, claiming that production was judged, and not just “indicated” to be continuing and with “probably” removed. In the precise language of intelligence reports, the greater strength of the word “judged” over “indicating” is well understood. The 16 September version now said: “Intelligence ... allows us to judge that Iraq: has continued to produce chemical and biological agents.”<sup>94</sup> This stands out as the first in a list of thirteen bullet points in the executive summary (the second was the 45 minute claim, which is discussed next). Report X was the basis for these changes. Regarding chemical agent production, Scarlett told Hutton that Report X, which he referred to as “compartmented intelligence” not available to DIS staff, was “underpinning the judgement” with respect to CW agent production.<sup>95</sup> Regarding biological agent production, Scarlett does not explicitly state that Report X was also underpinning this aspect of the judgment. However, the report was the only new piece of intelligence that had become available after the 9 September JIC assessment and which could have been used as the basis to justify strengthening the dossier judgment that biological agent production was continuing. Of course, it is also possible that senior officials decided to revisit earlier intelligence that had been used for the 9 September JIC assessment, and then “strengthened” their interpretation of it, over and above that of the existing JIC assessment, in order to underpin the biological agent claim. However, the *Butler Report* does state that Report X “provided significant assurance to those drafting the government’s dossier that active, current production of chemical *and biological* agent (*emphasis added*) was taking place.”<sup>96</sup> The *Butler Report* also states that Report X “played a major role for the JIC in confirming previous intelligence reports that Iraq was producing chemical *and biological* weapons (*emphasis added*).”<sup>97</sup> Hence, even if senior officials were also revisiting earlier intelligence in order to justify their strengthening of the biological agent claim, the *Butler Report* confirms that Report X was influential regarding this claim. As Chris Ames has pointed out, the strengthening of the dossier claim regarding continued production occurred even though the formal JIC assessments did not get strengthened, and the subsequent 28 October JIC

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<sup>94</sup>UK Government, WMD dossier draft 16 September 2002, Executive Summary, 3, CAB/11/0141-0143, accessed at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/cab/cab\\_11\\_0141to0143.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/cab/cab_11_0141to0143.pdf), 30 May 2013.

<sup>95</sup>Scarlett, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 23 September 2003, afternoon session, paras. 109–110, accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans42.htm>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>96</sup>*Butler Report*, 100–101.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.* 111. See also 100.

assessment only used the weaker term “indicates” with respect to both chemical and biological agent production.<sup>98</sup> Report X did not strengthen the formal JIC assessment; it was used only to add certainty to the dossier. Another significant change between the 9 September JIC assessment and the 16 September dossier draft concerned the judgment that Iraq possessed mobile biological weapons facilities. Here, the dossier claim was hardened from only “indicating”<sup>99</sup> possession of mobile biological facilities, which accurately reflected the 9 September JIC assessment,<sup>100</sup> to one that “judged”,<sup>101</sup> there to be possession. It is not clear on what basis this change was justified, inasmuch as there was no new intelligence on mobile facilities following the 9 September JIC assessment. This raises the issue of whether senior officials revisited existing intelligence and then chose to override existing JIC assessments; this matter will be returned to in the conclusion.

Where the responsibility lies for the decision to use Report X in the dossier in order to harden the continued production claim is unclear. The *Butler Report* implicates all of the senior officials, but without naming names other than that of the Prime Minister. After stating that the failure to show Report X to DIS analysts had resulted “in a stronger assessment in the dossier in relation to Iraqi chemical weapons production than was justified by the available intelligence,”<sup>102</sup> it says:

As it happened, the Chief of SIS had a meeting with the PM on 12 September... He told us that he underlined to the Prime Minister the potential importance of the new source and what SIS understood his access to be; but also said that the case was developmental and that the source remained unproven. Nevertheless, it may be that, in the context of the intense interest at that moment in the status of Iraq’s prohibited weapons programmes, and in particular continuing work on the dossier, this concurrence of events caused more weight to be given to this unvalidated source than would normally have been the case.<sup>103</sup>

Blair and Scarlett do not appear to have ever been asked by the Chilcot Inquiry about the decision to use Report X. This is extraordinary, considering its importance and the fact that the Chilcot panel are on record as

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<sup>98</sup>*Butler Report*, 87–88.

<sup>99</sup>UK Government, WMD dossier draft 10/11 September 2002, Executive Summary, 5, DOS/2/0002, accessed at [www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc11.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB330/III-Doc11.pdf), 30 May 2013.

<sup>100</sup>JIC Assessment, “Iraqi Use of C.B.W.”

<sup>101</sup>UK Government, WMD dossier draft 16 September 2002, Executive Summary, 3, CAB/11/0141-0143, accessed at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/cab/cab\\_11\\_0141to0143.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/cab/cab_11_0141to0143.pdf), 30 May 2013.

<sup>102</sup>*Butler Report*, 139.

<sup>103</sup>*Butler Report*, 139.



quoted above as understanding its importance. During his Chilcot hearing, Dearlove was unequivocal that he had insisted that material from Report X could not be published in the dossier because it had not been assessed. He was also unequivocal that it was not used:

I can say very authoritatively that there was no material in the dossier [from Report X] ... if you actually look at the introduction to the dossier, it refers to assessed intelligence, specifically assessed intelligence ... [Report X] was not assessed intelligence, and therefore are [sic] actually authoritatively excluded because [it does not] fall into that category, and I had put my foot down and said this material could not be used.<sup>104</sup>

However, in his testimony to Hutton, Campbell stated that at the 12 September meeting, Dearlove allowed Report X to influence the contents of the dossier: “And what C, the head of SIS said, was there was some material in there which could be used through what he called ‘through assertion’”.<sup>105</sup> It seems that Dearlove prevented the details of Report X from being published in the dossier to protect the source on trial. However, as indicated by Campbell’s statement, he did allow assertions to be made in the dossier that were based on Report X. Used in this fashion, then, Report X was used to assert in the dossier that Iraq was continuing to produce chemical and biological agents.

*Stifling dissent over the 45 minute claim.* Report X was vital to stifling dissent in DIS regarding the claim that Iraq could launch WMD within 45 minutes of the order being given. Of three lines of intelligence emerging in early September separately from Report X, the weakest concerned the 45 minute claim. Although received from an established source, it was sub-sourced and deemed unreliable in 2004.<sup>106</sup> The report containing the 45 minute claim was vague<sup>107</sup> and that claim warranted little prominence in the JIC assessment of 9 September. Despite this, it ended up as the second judgment in the executive summary of the dossier and was highlighted in Blair’s Foreword and his 24 September statement to the Commons. Throughout the drafting of the dossier, objections had been raised by DIS staff over the strength of the wording attached to the 45 minute claim. Jones quotes one of his colleagues as follows: “I have been making this point

<sup>104</sup>Dearlove, private oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 16 June 2010, 56, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50694/20100616-Dearlove.pdf>, 29 May 2013.

<sup>105</sup>Campbell, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 19 August 2003, morning session, para. 41, accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/2009012821546/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans12.htm>, 8 October 2014.

<sup>106</sup>Jones, *Failing Intelligence*, 82.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

in comments on every draft of the dossier...but we are just being ignored.”<sup>108</sup> Also, and as with the continued production claim, the characterization of the 45 minute claim as a judgment reflected a strengthened claim in comparison with the 9 September JIC assessment, which referred to intelligence as only “indicating” that WMD could be fired on that timescale.<sup>109</sup> At the 17 September drafting meeting, DIS analysts challenged the prominence of the 45 minute claim as a judgment and restated the fact that there was no firm evidence that Iraq was producing, or even had available, chemical weapons.<sup>110</sup> Scarlett acknowledges that DIS analysts had challenged the strength of the wording attached to the 45 minute claim as well as its status as a judgment in the dossier.<sup>111</sup> According to Scarlett, the objections raised were resolved as follows: “As I now know, and we did not at the time, the matter was discussed with the DIS at a meeting chaired by Tony Cragg [Deputy Chief of the DIS] on the afternoon of 17 September when it was decided not to pursue the point raised by DIS any further.”<sup>112</sup> In fact, Cragg, also a JIC member, over-ruled DIS analysts with a claim from SIS that new intelligence had arrived which was so sensitive that DIS staff could not see it and which supported the firm judgment now being made regarding the 45 minute and continued production claims. Faced with this, DIS analysts withdrew their objections, although Jones felt compelled to place his concerns in writing on 19 and 20 September.<sup>113</sup> At Chilcot in 2010, Scarlett claimed that he had agreed that it would be necessary to show the DIS managers the compartmented report and, as far as he was concerned, that had happened.<sup>114</sup> However, it is not clear why Report X was not shown to the DIS analysts. The *Butler Report* states: “We have not been presented with any evidence that persuades us that there was an insuperable obstacle to allowing expert-level DIS access.”<sup>115</sup> Considering the fact that it was material that Campbell, Powell, and Manning were all permitted to hear about, it may be that the experts were not shown Report X because they would have inconveniently dismissed it as too thin to support any claims, whether directly or through assertion. However, we do not have the evidence to demonstrate that. What can be said with

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>109</sup>JIC Assessment, “Iraqi Use of CBW.”

<sup>110</sup>Jones, *Failing Intelligence*, 83.

<sup>111</sup>Scarlett, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 26 August 2003, morning session, paras. 77–78, accessed at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090128221550/http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans18.htm>, 1 June 2013.

<sup>112</sup>Scarlett, public oral evidence to Hutton Inquiry, 23 September 2003, morning session, para. 100.

<sup>113</sup>Jones, *Failing Intelligence*, 91–92.

<sup>114</sup>Scarlett, oral private evidence with Miller to Chilcot Inquiry, 5 May 2010, 47.

<sup>115</sup>*Butler Report*, 139.

confidence is that Report X was used to overrule objections to the strength of the 45 minute and the continued production claims.

*Reinforcing Blair's "Beyond Doubt" Claim in the Dossier Foreword:* With the dossier executive summary now presenting a more certain judgment that Iraq was continuing to produce chemical and biological agents, Blair, in his own foreword to the dossier, proceeded to assert the following: "What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons."<sup>116</sup> What justified his remarkably strong claim that the intelligence was actually 'beyond doubt'? When questioned at Chilcot, Blair referred to an earlier JIC report and the dossier executive summary in order to support his "beyond doubt" assertion, but in a misleading and inaccurate way. First, he stated: "if I had taken ... the words out of ... the 9 March 2002 or the March 2002 JIC assessment, it said, 'It was clear that' ... Now, if I said, 'It was clear that' in the foreword, rather than 'I believe, beyond doubt', it would have had the same impact."<sup>117</sup> Here Blair implies that the JIC assessment stated that "it was clear that Iraq was continuing to produce chemical and biological weapons." Blair's claim makes no sense: if clear confirmation of continued production had been contained in any JIC assessment, there would have been much less excitement about Report X and no need for it to be used to underpin the continued production claim, which Scarlett said it did. While the 9 March JIC assessment is not available, the 15 March one is and it says "It is clear that Iraq continues to pursue a policy of acquiring WMD."<sup>118</sup> Of course, pursuing a policy of acquiring is not the same as continuing to produce. Second, Blair stated:

if you just take the executive summary ... this executive summary wasn't drawn up by me. It was drawn up the Joint Intelligence Committee and they did it perfectly justifiably on the information they had before them. It is hard to come to any other conclusion than that this person has a continuing WMD programme.<sup>119</sup>

Here Blair gives the impression that the executive summary underpins his continuing production "beyond doubt" claim, when actually he refers, at the end of his response, to a "continuing WMD programme." Again, a continuing WMD program is not the same as continuing production. In

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<sup>116</sup>Prime Minister's Foreword, UK Government, *Iraq's WMD*, 3.

<sup>117</sup>Blair, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 29 January 2010, 81.

<sup>118</sup>JIC Assessment, "The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes," 15 March September 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50476/JICAssessment-15March2002.pdf>, 23 April 2013.

<sup>119</sup>Blair, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 29 January 2010, 81.

both instances, then, Blair's answer misleads. He gives the impression that the JIC's intelligence underpins his claim that continued production is beyond doubt by first referring inaccurately to an earlier JIC statement that has nothing to do with continued production, and then refers to the executive summary while simultaneously shifting the subject of his answer away from continued production and onto continued programs. Whether or not these inaccuracies were intentional or simply a matter of misunderstanding and confusion is not possible to determine. Either way, Blair did not provide a clear explanation for his "beyond doubt" claim. In the absence of a clear answer from Blair, logic dictates that there were only two sources upon which he could have drawn in order to make such a statement. The first was the dossier, where it was judged that Iraq had continued to produce chemical and biological agents; this judgment was underpinned by Report X. The second source was Report X itself. No other sources of intelligence were mentioned that could have given Blair reason to make such a bald statement. In either case, Report X underpins the "beyond doubt" claim in the Foreword. Moreover, in either case, the statement by Blair is demonstrably untrue. If Blair's claim rested upon the dossier, it was clearly inaccurate, because an intelligence judgment does not imply certainty but only a balance of probabilities. Alternatively, if Blair's "beyond doubt" claim rested upon Report X itself, this again was demonstrably untrue, as Report X was at most little more the promise of confirmation at some point in the future of continued production. Sir John Chilcot was correct to say recently that Blair's "beyond doubt" claim was "not possible to make on the basis of intelligence."<sup>120</sup>

*Report X and the Continued Production Claim: Intentional Deception Through Distortion.* Returning to the central question of intentional deception, what can be inferred here? First, in general terms and with respect to the preliminary conclusions the article set out earlier, deception through omission and deception through distortion were both involved in the preparation of the dossier. The aim was to create a stronger impression of an Iraqi WMD threat than would have been possible with a fair and balanced presentation of the intelligence, in order to be as persuasive as possible. Report X was used in a way that made the gap between the dossier and the intelligence substantial. Report X was not properly assessed, was from a source on trial, and was little more than a promise of substantial

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<sup>120</sup>Quoted in Richard Norton-Taylor, "Chilcot Report into Iraq Delayed by Whitehall Refusal to Release Evidence," *The Guardian* 16 July 2012, accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jul/16/chilcot-report-iraq-delayed-evidence>, 1 June 2013.

intelligence. Nevertheless, it underpinned a series of powerful and prominent claims regarding continued production, the ability to launch within 45 minutes and Blair's "beyond doubt" claim. In short, Report X resulted in the final version of the dossier being highly misleading.

The next question is whether the way in which Report X was used constituted deliberate deception and, if so, what kind of deception it was. First, despite its flimsy nature, Report X was used to strengthen the key dossier claim that Iraqi production of chemical and biological agents was judged to be active. In doing so, the dossier judgment on continued production, as the *Butler Report* agreed, went beyond what could be justified by the available intelligence. In a nutshell, the use of Report X resulted in distortion through exaggeration of the current intelligence on continued production. At best, the strengthening of the judgment rested on a wing and a prayer that the further intelligence would indeed be forthcoming. Second, Blair's "beyond doubt" claim would only be sustainable if the intelligence promised in Report X had actually turned up, which it had not, and never did. In the case of the dossier judgment, the evidence shows that top officials (including Blair, Dearlove, Campbell, Scarlett, and Manning) were all aware of the nature of Report X, and that all were party to the process by which Report X was used to strengthen the dossier judgment on continued production. There is no evidence to suggest that any of those involved misunderstood Report X. It seems that they hoped or expected that the promised intelligence upon which the strengthened judgment rested was indeed the "silver bullet." The use of Report X was deception through distortion in that those involved knew that the strength of the claims regarding continued production exceeded the strength of the intelligence. It was also deception through omission, in that no attempt was made to admit to the remarkable weakness of the intelligence that had come to underpin the leading dossier claims. There might have been self-deception about the likelihood that the intelligence would come good, but the individuals involved were deceptive about the strength of the intelligence that they possessed at the time. They gambled that deception would become vindication. Even if they felt that they were justified in taking the risk, it was still deception. Hence the use of Report X fits the category of intentional deception through both distortion and omission.

Whether Blair's "beyond doubt" statement was a case of deception through distortion, however, is not clear-cut. His qualification that he "believed" the intelligence was beyond doubt is important here. It is certainly not possible to infer from an intelligence judgment that something is beyond doubt. Indeed, a judgment acknowledges a level of uncertainty. In this sense, the "beyond doubt" claim is inaccurate. At the same time, one cannot rule

out that Blair had deceived himself into believing that Report X would deliver. It may be that when Blair made this claim, he was fully aware that intelligence did not support his certainty over WMD. If this was the case, then, Blair's claim was certainly one of deception through distortion, and, if he knew that what he was saying was not true, deception through lying. Indeed, in 2007 Butler claimed that while Blair was sincere about believing that Iraq had WMD and was seeking more, Blair was "disingenuous" about the fact that the intelligence did not prove this conclusively.<sup>121</sup> However, it is also possible that self-deception occurred. Under great pressure to persuade public, international, and UN opinion over the threat posed by Iraq, Blair might have simply deceived himself into believing that the "silver bullet" promised in Report X was beyond doubt. As such, at this point, there is no evidence available to decide whether the "beyond doubt" claim emerged due to intentional deception through lying, or due to self-deception.

## CONCLUSIONS

In stark contrast to the claims by Blair and Campbell set out at the start of the paper, the dossier published in September 2002 was not an accurate reflection of the available intelligence penned by the intelligence services, designed only to inform public understanding. The dossier presented, in quite dramatic terms, the claims that Iraq was actively producing WMD, that they could be launched within 45 minutes of an order to do so, and that the intelligence was "beyond doubt". In his 24 September Commons statement Blair emphasized the drama and repeated this certainty over continued production:

His WMD programme is active, detailed and growing ... It [the dossier] concludes that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons, that Saddam has continued to produce them ... On chemical weapons, the dossier shows that Iraq continues to produce chemical agent for chemical weapons ... In respect of biological weapons, again production of biological agents has continued.<sup>122</sup>

None of these statements accurately reflected the available intelligence. That the dossier ended up presenting such an inaccurate picture was not due to errors in the drafting process, but because it was the core component

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<sup>121</sup>Lord Butler, "Iraq," House of Lords, *Hansard* (22 February 2007), column 1231, accessed at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldhansrd/text/70222-0009.htm#07022239000740>, 10 April 2013.

<sup>122</sup>Tony Blair, Statement by the Prime Minister, "Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Hansard*, 24 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo020924/debtext/20924-01.htm>, 1 June 2013.

of a campaign of deceptive organized political persuasion which involved communications officials working closely with politicians and intelligence officials. As documented here, this campaign involved presenting the intelligence on Iraqi WMD in such threatening terms that it would serve to persuade and mobilize support. Hence, distortion of the intelligence was intentional. Contrary to the findings of the official inquiries to date, this study shows that the campaign involved deceptive organized political persuasion in which deception through distortion and omission occurred. A prominent example of a strategy of deception through omission was the recommendation in Scarlett's minute to policy makers that the dossier exclude other countries of WMD concern so as to "obscure" the fact that Iraq was not an exceptional WMD threat. However, by far the most significant evidence of deliberate deception came with the decision to use Report X—little more than a promise of evidence from a source on trial—in order to declare with greater certainty that Iraq was actively producing chemical and biological agents. At best, the strengthening of the judgment rested on hope that the further intelligence would indeed be forthcoming. Hence intentional deception through distortion and omission had occurred. Blair's over-claim regarding the intelligence being "beyond doubt" was demonstrably untrue. However, it was not possible, on the basis of the existing information available, to adjudicate as to whether this was intentional deception through lying or self-deception on the part of Blair.

These findings both substantiate and clarify the various claims that have been advanced, set out in the literature review, regarding deception on the part of the British government. In particular, the findings resolve the inconsistency in the *Butler Report* in which it was noted that the use of Report X led to an untenable claim regarding continued production, whilst also stating the dossier did not go beyond the outer limits of the intelligence. The dossier did go beyond the limits of the intelligence by judging that Iraq was actively producing chemical and biological agents based only upon an inadequately assessed piece of intelligence, from a source on trial and mainly promising evidence at a future date. Indeed, it is remarkable that the inquiries to date, including the ongoing Chilcot Inquiry, have failed to examine seriously the importance of Report X and how it was used in the dossier. That the Chilcot hearings have failed to question Blair with respect to the decision to use this intelligence is a profound shortcoming. More generally, the findings here support those scholars, discussed in the literature review, and officials who have commented critically with regard to the honesty of the UK government and its intelligence-related claims in the dossier. Regarding officials, for example, Butler's 2007 claim that Blair was disingenuous about the certainty surrounding the intelligence is consistent

with much of the evidence presented here, although we concluded that Blair's "beyond doubt" claim might be explicable through self-deception rather than intentional deception. Writing to the Chilcot inquiry in order to refute the assertion by Campbell that the dossier was not intended to make a case for war, Major General Michael Laurie (Director General Intelligence Collection) has stated that "During the drafting of the final dossier, every fact was managed to make it as strong as possible, the final statements reaching beyond the conclusions intelligence assessments would normally draw from such facts. It was clear to me that there was direction and pressure being applied to the JIC and its drafters."<sup>123</sup> The findings of political involvement and deliberate exaggeration of intelligence in this paper are consistent with Laurie's statement. Our findings are also consistent with the claims of Carne Ross, First Secretary in the UK Permanent Mission to the UN from 1997 to June 2002. In his written submission to Chilcot, he stated that the government's public statements "intentionally and substantially" exaggerated the capabilities indicated in its internal assessments of Iraq's WMD.<sup>124</sup> Our article shows precisely how and where intentional exaggeration occurred.

The findings here raise an important question for further research. While it was established that a group of senior officials was involved in the decision making process by which Report X came to be used to strengthen the dossier, it remains unclear as to who should accept responsibility for this process. In addition, it was also noted that, while this article has established that Report X was used to justify strengthening the claim regarding continued production of chemical and biological agents, the grounds upon which the dossier claim regarding Iraqi possession of mobile biological production facilities was strengthened remain unclear. In all of these cases, the dossier was strengthened following the 12 September briefing from Dearlove, when Blair had been briefed about Report X as well as the other existing human intelligence on Iraqi WMD. Regarding the continued production claim, a critical question concerns who was driving the decision making. There are three possibilities. The first is that Dearlove had encouraged the use of Report X to strengthen the dossier claims. The second is that there was mutual agreement among all those concerned. The third possibility is that either Blair or Campbell or both of them pushed for clearance

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<sup>123</sup>Laurie, Written Statement private statement to Chilcot Inquiry, 27 January 2010, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52051/Laurie-statement-FINAL.pdf>, 15 June 2013.

<sup>124</sup>Carne Ross, written testimony to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 July 2010, 6–7, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/47534/carne-ross-statement.pdf>, 26 May 2013. See also Carne Ross, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 12 July 2010, 6–7, 36–37, 47, 58–60, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/49966/20100712-ross-final.pdf>, 26 May 2013.



to use Report X, and that Dearlove then acceded. Regarding the judgment on the existence of mobile facilities, as shown earlier, there was no new intelligence following the 9 September JIC assessment which could have been used to justify the strengthening of this claim. Consequently, one or all of those involved must have decided to revisit the existing intelligence regarding mobile facilities, and to then strengthen the dossier claims. Blair has in fact referred to the existing mobile intelligence as having influenced him.<sup>125</sup> The question raised, again, is whether Blair himself pushed for the strengthening of the mobile claim, either at the 12 September meeting or earlier, or whether it was an intelligence-led decision. Answers to these questions would provide further insights into the extent to which the intelligence process was contaminated by political pressure.

More generally, the findings in this paper have implications both for discussion over organized political persuasion and the currently widely held thesis that the war against Iraq was a consequence of intelligence failure. With respect to organized political persuasion, the case study here highlights how such activities, designed to persuade or promote policy, can lead to inaccuracy and deception in government communication. This raises critical questions regarding democratic accountability and the ability of the public to hold their government to account adequately. For example, in situations where organized political persuasion leads to a point where the British Prime Minister makes statements that are untrue or misleading, it becomes much more difficult for meaningful debate to occur. When a Prime Minister is declaring in Parliament that he knows for sure, based upon intelligence, that WMD exist in Iraq, journalists are then under strong pressure to accept the claims being made. This case study provides insights into the reality of organized political persuasion, and its consequences for democratic communication, which should be further discussed and evaluated.

Regarding the intelligence failure thesis, while there was an intelligence failure in the sense of a widespread and inaccurate belief among Western intelligence analysts that Iraq had at least some WMD, this has obscured deliberate deception by the British government of the public, the media and Parliament about the strength of the intelligence, the extent of Iraq's capabilities and the threatening nature of those capabilities. This was not a case of intelligence staff alerting the politicians to a serious threat and then politicians and their media staff working out how to educate the public about it and persuade them on the basis of accurate information of the need for action. Nor did the dossier originate as a response to public or

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<sup>125</sup>Blair, public oral evidence to Chilcot Inquiry, 29 January 2010, 87–88.

media clamor for information before invading Iraq was high on the agenda. The impetus was evidently coming from the effort to sway public opinion in favor of invading Iraq, with the intelligence staff then rooting around trying to find anything that they could to support that, some of them willingly. It is also not the case that there was self-deception among individuals or collective misperception in the form of groupthink to misinterpret the intelligence as showing a large, growing or seriously threatening Iraqi WMD capability. The scrabbling around over many months to find anything to support a line already decided was intense, widespread and routinely acknowledged internally as rather fruitless. Presentational experts were active, central players all the way along, and top intelligence and security officials were active collaborators in the presentational game.

In the final analysis, whether Blair thought Iraq had WMD seemed less important to him than his view that Saddam Hussein retained the intent to acquire them given the opportunity, or that if the United States was going to go to war the UK should be in support.<sup>126</sup> For Blair, it was a post-9/11 article of faith that it was intolerable for Saddam Hussein to have even the potential to develop WMD which, however improbably, he might pass on to terrorists. The problem for Blair, aside from the legal one, was that the British public was unlikely to support war against Iraq to eliminate the possibility of this highly improbable outcome. As a result, a case for war had to be built on alleged current capability and danger. The others involved in the process were mostly focused on giving Blair what he wanted—making Iraq look as threatening as possible in a way that could more or less plausibly be defended as intelligence-based—and they constructed the deceptive dossier for that purpose.\*

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 90.

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