

## INTELLIGENCE ON IRAQ WAR

## Australia relied on 'thin, incomplete' report

BBC ONLINE

Australia relied on "thin, ambiguous and incomplete" intelligence to go to war in Iraq, according to an inquiry.

But the independent report by Philip Flood, a diplomat and former spy master, clears Prime Minister John Howard of "politicising" intelligence.

Its conclusions echo those reached by separate US and UK inquiries prompted by the failure to find the banned Iraqi weapons that formed the case for war.

Australia sent 2,000 troops to Iraq last year; 900 are still in the area.

Prime Minister Howard commissioned Flood's inquiry in March, on the recommendation of a parliamentary committee investigating the role Australia's spy agencies had played in the build-up to war.

The BBC's Sydney correspondent, Phil Mercer, says the Flood report, like its US and British equivalents, blames intelligence failures on spy agencies, sparing the politicians.

Investigators attached to Flood's team interviewed Howard, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Defence Minister Robert Hill.

The Flood report also says that Australia, like other countries in the region, was not aware enough of the threat posed by Jemaah Islamiah (JI), the militant group which has been blamed for the bomb attacks in Bali in 2002 that killed more than 200 people, many of them Australian tourists.

The report says Australia's spies should have known more about the "terrorist capabilities and intentions" of JI.

But it says that there is no evidence Australia had any specific warning of the Bali attack.

Prime Minister Howard has hailed the report for clearing his government of allegations it interfered with pre-war intelligence on Iraq to fortify its argument for backing the US-led war.

Howard is set to face the electorate in September or October this year in a campaign which pits him against the staunchly anti-war Labor Party leader, Mark Latham.

Latham has pledged to withdraw what remains of Australia's Iraq contingent if he wins the election.

The Flood report makes several recommendations for the reform of Australia's spy agencies - all but one of which Mr Howard has said he will implement.



Freed Filipino hostage Angelo de la Cruz (C) is reunited with his children Jack (L), Jenny (R) and Jerick (bottom) after his arrival at Manila airport yesterday. De la Cruz arrived home a national hero after a harrowing 17-day hostage ordeal in Iraq.

## UN to evacuate staff from Gaza

Israel violating int'l law by constructing barrier: EU

REUTERS, AP, Jerusalem

The United Nations plans to evacuate non-essential foreign staff from the Gaza Strip because of the deteriorating security situation, a U.N. official said yesterday.

The official, speaking in Jerusalem, said the move followed after a decision was taken to move Gaza to security level "Phase Four" - one step below the maximum "Phase Five," which requires all international staff to leave.

AP adds: During a visit to the Jewish state, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana on Thursday said Israel's West Bank separation barrier violates international law.

Solana's comments came just two days after the European Union infuriated Israeli leaders by supporting a UN General Assembly resolution calling on Israel to tear down the barrier in compliance with a world court ruling.

"A country has the right to build a fence on its own territory but we believe the route of this fence is contrary to international law,"

Solana said during a joint news conference with Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

Moments earlier, Shalom said "the government and people of Israel are deeply disappointed by Europe's decision to vote with the Palestinians and against the fence."

"The EU should be engaged in promoting Palestinian reform in Gaza and Ramallah, not Palestinian manipulation in the UN," Shalom said, adding that Europe's vote "encourages the Palestinians to continue their evasion of responsibility" on fighting.

The two men met for an hour before the news conference amid an atmosphere of rising tensions between Israel and Europe.

Israel says the string of fences, walls and barbed wire that will eventually stretch 425 miles keeps out suicide bombers. Palestinians say the construction of the barrier is a land grab since it cuts into the West Bank at several points.

"The fence goes through occupied territories and from the very

beginning we have been against that, it's no surprise," he said.

"The security of Israel and the protecting of the Israeli people is something we have always supported and we'll continue to support," Solana added.

Israel's Foreign Ministry summoned European ambassadors for consultations Wednesday to express Israel's displeasure over the European position on the barrier.

Shalom said Israel had hoped the meetings with Solana would focus on improving Israeli-European relations but were redirected because of the UN vote.

"This visit is now taking place in the shadow of Europe's vote... Much of our time today was spent in a frank discussion of the issue,"

"Mum, if you see me on TV don't get worried, we are with the best people, the Iraqis. They are feeding us, but this is routine and must happen so they can stop infidels from entering Iraq," he said.

"You too my kids, Ahmed and Ali, don't worry, I am coming at the end of the month as I promised you, but if we die then I say thank God."

None of the militants were visible in the tape, but a few of the hostages glanced sideways when they spoke.

As one of the Indians nervously spoke to the camera, Sanad could be heard saying to him in Arabic: "Tell them we're in danger. Tell them we're in danger."

Iraq hostages plead for lives on tape

REUTERS, Baghdad

Lined up in a dark room, seven foreign truck drivers pleaded for their lives in a video tape filmed by militants holding them hostage in Iraq -- the tension broken only when an Egyptian told his mother not to worry.

Nervous and sweating, the three Indians, three Kenyans and the Egyptian gave their names and nationalities on the tape, given to foreign news agencies yesterday.

At the end of the tape -- and after he had asked not to be beheaded -- a smiling Mohammed Ali Sanad from Egypt tried to reassure his family.

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## Saddam lawyers file new complaint with human rights court

AFP, Paris

Lawyers for ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein said Thursday they had filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights calling on France to make the United States respect the Geneva Conventions.

The complaint is based on article one of the Geneva Convention, which calls on all signatories to "respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances," Emmanuel Ludot, one of Saddam's attorneys, told AFP.

According to Saddam's defense team, Washington "has not respected the Geneva Convention at all," specifically articles 85 and 105 which detail the required living conditions for prisoners of war and

provisions for their representation.

Ludot said Saddam's lawyers "are physically incapable of meeting their client as the detaining power has acted in such a way as to paralyze the rights of the defense, pure and simple."

The case also refers to the European Convention on Human Rights, which stipulates that all defendants have the right to the time and facilities needed to prepare their defense, and to question all necessary witnesses.

He explained that the legal team opted to file its complaint against France because it is a signatory to both the Geneva Conventions and the European Convention on Human Rights.

France "can thus defend its image as a defender of human rights," Ludot added.

## Euro-MPs back Barroso as new Brussels chief

AFP, Strasbourg

EU lawmakers yesterday confirmed the nomination of ex Portuguese premier Jose Manuel Durao Barroso as next head of the European Commission, despite criticism notably over his support for the Iraq war.

The European Parliament voted by 413 in favour and 251 against Durao Barroso, who emerged as a compromise candidate last month to head the EU's executive arm from November. Forty-four MEPs abstained.

He was supported by the conservative European People's Party (EPP), the biggest party in the Strasbourg assembly, but faced criticism from Socialists and Greens notably over his support for the Iraq war.

The conservative leader, who spent two days making his case to the EU parliament before the vote, reiterated his pledge to rise above partisan political affiliations.

## India urges militants to set free hostages

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India is trying to open channels of communication with the militant group, which abducted three of its nationals along with three Kenyans and an Egyptian on Wednesday, to secure their safe and early release, official sources said here yesterday.

Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh, now in Islamabad after attending the Saarc Foreign Ministers' meeting there, said in a statement issued that New Delhi was in touch with the authorities in Iraq to secure the early release of the three Indians taken hostage by the militant outfit, which calls itself as "The Holders of the Black Banner."

In an interview to the Arabic television channel Al-Jazeera, Singh appealed to the militants to free the hostages as they are non-combatants and innocent.

The Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahmed said all possible steps would be taken to secure the release of the Indian hostages who are in Iraq and working for a Kuwaiti transport firm.

He said the three Indians had gone to Iraq on their own and the Indian government has no role in it.

Ahmed said India has made it clear several times that it is opposed to sending troops to Iraq and that is the reason why no Indian has not so far been harmed anywhere in the world.

Indian Ambassador to Iraq B B Tyagi, who was here, rushed back to Baghdad yesterday to help secure the release of the hostages. The Indian embassy in Jordan has been asked to get in touch with the mission in Kuwait.

The militants have threatened to kill each hostage after 72 hours, a deadline, which expires on the night of Saturday. They are demanding that the countries to which the hostages belong pull their troops out of Iraq. However, neither India, nor Kenya or Egypt have their soldiers in Iraq.

The world is no safer than it was three years ago, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said on Wednesday, countering President Bush's claims he had made the world a safer place.

Annan, at a news conference, also criticised a Bush administration decision to withhold \$34 million from the UN Population Fund, saying the agency was saving women's lives.

Annan's remarks could renew strains on ties between the United States and United Nations, which -- while devastated by Bush's inability to win UN backing for the US-led war on Iraq -- had improved following UN help in setting up a new government in Baghdad in time for the US occupation to end.

"No, I cannot say the world is safer today than it was two, three years ago," the UN leader said.

He was responding to a reporter

who asked for comment on the Bush funding move and also whether Annan felt the world had become safer in the last two or three years.

Bush, who has launched two wars since moving into the White House in January 2001, repeatedly asserts in campaign swings ahead of the Nov. 2 presidential election that his policies are making the world safer.

"America is a safer place. Four more years and America will be safer and the world will be more peaceful," he said on Tuesday in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"The world is a safer and better place as a result of (Iraqi leader) Saddam Hussein not being in power," he told NBC Television in February.

The US administration has funded the UN Population Fund, known as UNFPA, for three years, accusing it of supporting China's policy of coercive abortion.

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