

Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing
“An Oversight Hearing on Pre-War Intelligence Relating to Iraq”

Rod Barton
Former Senior Adviser, Iraq Survey Group

June 26, 2006

I would like to make a short statement to the Committee and then invite the Committee ask any questions relevant to that. I make this statement as a private Australian citizen and do not represent, and am not affiliated with, any particular interest group.

My name is Rod Barton and I am a former Director of Intelligence on WMD systems in the Australian Defence Intelligence Organisation, a former UN weapons inspector, and a former senior advisor to the Iraq Survey Group (ISG).

I was invited by Dr David Kay in mid-2003 to join the ISG as his senior advisor but, for contractual reasons, did not arrive in Baghdad until early December 2003, by which time Dr Kay had returned to the U.S. Shortly after I arrived, other senior CIA officials also left for the U.S., and I found myself as the senior specialist in the ISG.

It was uncertain whether Dr Kay was to return, but I worked on the assumption that he probably would not. I was aware that a progress report on the work of the ISG was scheduled for March 2004 and, in consultation with Major General Keith Dayton (the military commander of the ISG) and CIA headquarters in Langley, it was agreed that I would coordinate the drafting of such a report. In early January, I submitted a comprehensive outline to Langley and, in a videoconference with Washington and London on January 20, 2002, the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence agreed with my approach. My notes indicate that the report was to be in two parts with the first to include “tentative assessment” of our findings and the second part that would “identify areas we still need to work.”

By mid-February 2004, most ISG team leaders had provided drafts, so that the report at this stage was about 150 pages in length; the full report would have been somewhat over 200 pages. As agreed, the report drew “tentative” conclusions on a range of issues, including our views that alleged bio-production trailers were not related to biology but were for hydrogen production for artillery balloons, and that aluminium tubes allegedly imported by Iraq for uranium enrichment were for artillery rockets.

Even though our assessments on such issues were to be “tentative,” the inspectors were very certain of their findings on many of the issues. On the trailers

for example, a physical inspection by the ISG engineers unambiguously established that they were not designed (and could not be readily modified) for biological agent production. My own view, as an expert on the Iraqi biological weapons program, was that you would be better starting off with a bucket, rather than try to adapt the equipment to make anthrax. But in addition to physical evidence, there was a folder of documentation on the trailers that included the original contract for their construction, acceptance trials and operating “manual,” all indicating that the trailers were for hydrogen production for artillery balloons. Chemical sampling by the ISG showed that the trailers had in fact produced hydrogen.

Charles Duelfer, the new head of the ISG, arrived in Baghdad on February 12, 2004. Naturally he had his own ideas on a report, and this was discussed with senior staff on the day of his arrival. A key feature was that it would include no assessment, but would simply report our findings without comment. The report as he envisioned it would be about 20 pages in length and would emphasize the work the ISG had yet to complete.

Over a series of three private meetings with Charles, I tried to dissuade him from this course. I argued that we had found evidence that overturned much of the pre-war intelligence and were confident of our findings: this should be reported. Also political leaders in the U.S., UK and Australia were making public statements which we now knew were incorrect, and we had a duty to inform them of our conclusions. If we were aware of certain information and did not disclose it, then that would be tantamount to dishonesty.

Charles’s argument was that he was new to the job and would not be sufficiently familiar with the issues to argue complex technical matters to Congress in just six weeks time. In any case, new information could possibly overturn our findings, and whatever we said about the report being “tentative,” there was a danger that such conclusions would become set in stone. I countered with that he had not come anew to the subject but that he had previous experience, particularly as the former deputy Executive Chairman of UNSCOM. Although I sympathised with his dilemma, I pointed out that it was the job he had accepted. We would of course help him to become familiar with the issues and, if necessary, the report could be delayed by a week or two to give him more time.

Charles would not, however, change his view, and the report went ahead as he conceived it. He claimed the decisions were his. Even though I was concerned that the report would be potentially misleading (because it would be unbalanced and would not say what we knew), I agreed to coordinate its drafting. The final report said little, but there were no statements in it that were blatantly incorrect. However, before the report was finalized, both London and Washington proposed some changes, the consequence of which would have been to imply that there was WMD yet to be found in Iraq. These particular suggestions were rejected.

At the same time as the report was being drafted, instructions from Langley were being sent directly to the leaders of the chemical and biological teams, who were CIA analysts responsible for pre-war intelligence assessments, to channel their work. It seemed to me that the ISG had lost its independence and, with it, its direction. This was illustrated by the approach by the senior CIA professional assisting Charles. In

mid-March 2004, he told me in relation to the trailers that he did not care what they were for, but that it was “politically not possible” to say they were not biological trailers.

As soon as the report was finalized, I tendered my resignation. In a letter to the Australian Department of Defence, I indicated that the reason I resigned was broader than just the March report, and that “I was concerned about the objectivity of the ISG.” Two senior ISG officials (another Australian and one UK) also resigned at that time, for similar reasons, and I am aware that others were also considering quitting.

In spite of the problems in March, Charles did eventually produce an honest and objective report. Charles asked me to assist with that and, when I was convinced that it was a genuine and independent effort, I returned to Baghdad in August/September to help with its coordination and drafting. This “substantive” report was presented to congressional committees early in October 2004. With the exception of a major (and important) section on “Regime Strategic Intent,” most of the report could have been published in March 2004.