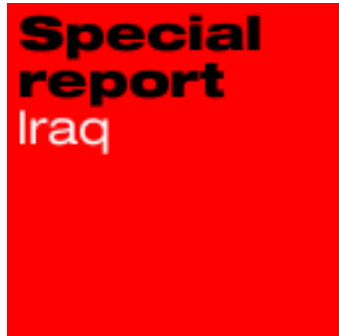


[Sign in](#) | [Register](#)

Go to:

**GuardianUnlimited Special reports**

Home	UK	Business	Online	World dispatch	The wrap	Weblog	Talk	Search
The Guardian	World	News guide	Arts	Special reports	Columnists	Audio	Help	Quiz



## Straw, Powell had serious doubts over their Iraqi weapons claims

Secret transcript revealed

**Dan Plesch and Richard Norton-Taylor**

**Saturday May 31, 2003**

[The Guardian](#)

Search this site

### Full coverage

[Special report: Iraq](#)

[Iraq archived articles](#)

[Interactive guides on Iraq](#)

### More special reports

[Britain's armed forces](#)

[The anti-war movement](#)

[Al-Qaida](#)

[United States](#)

[Iran](#)

[Israel & the Middle East](#)

Jack Straw and his US counterpart, Colin Powell, privately expressed serious doubts about the quality of intelligence on Iraq's banned weapons programme at the very time they were publicly trumpeting it to get UN support for a war on Iraq, the Guardian has learned.

Their deep concerns about the intelligence - and about claims being made by their political bosses, Tony Blair and George Bush - emerged at a private meeting between the two men shortly before a crucial UN security council session on February 5.

The meeting took place at the Waldorf hotel in New York, where they discussed the growing diplomatic crisis. The exchange about the validity of their respective governments' intelligence reports on Iraq lasted less than 10 minutes, according to a diplomatic source who has read a transcript of the conversation.

The foreign secretary reportedly expressed concern that claims being made by Mr Blair and President Bush could not be proved. The problem, explained Mr Straw, was the lack of corroborative evidence to back up the claims.

Much of the intelligence were assumptions and assessments not supported by hard facts or other sources.

[Nato](#)

[Turkey](#)

[Full index of our special reports](#)

## In this section

[Soldier arrested over Iraqi torture photos](#)

[Straw, Powell had serious doubts over their Iraqi weapons claims](#)

[Fighting continues in Saddam's heartland](#)

[Future oil sales may be pawned to banks](#)

[Bush special office 'justified war'](#)

[John Newbury: Why won't they listen?](#)

[General admits chemical weapons intelligence was wrong](#)

[Slate's US press review](#)

[Get-out for Blair over intelligence inquiry](#)

[Blair warned of Iran-backed Shia powers](#)

[MI6 led protest against war dossier](#)

['I simply don't believe the whole thing was a lie'](#)

[Polly Toynbee: Did Blair lie to us?](#)

Mr Powell shared the concern about intelligence assessments, especially those being presented by the Pentagon's office of special plans set up by the US deputy defence secretary, Paul Wolfowitz.

Mr Powell said he had all but "moved in" with US intelligence to prepare his briefings for the UN security council, according to the transcripts.

But he told Mr Straw he had come away from the meetings "apprehensive" about what he called, at best, circumstantial evidence highly tilted in favour of assessments drawn from them, rather than any actual raw intelligence.

Mr Powell told the foreign secretary he hoped the facts, when they came out, would not "explode in their faces".

What are called the "Waldorf transcripts" are being circulated in Nato diplomatic circles. It is not being revealed how the transcripts came to be made; however, they appear to have been leaked by diplomats who supported the war against Iraq even when the evidence about Saddam Hussein's programme of weapons of mass destruction was fuzzy, and who now believe they were lied to.

People circulating the transcripts call themselves "allied sources supportive of US war aims in Iraq at the time".

The transcripts will fuel the controversy in Britain and the US over claims that London and Washington distorted and exaggerated the intelligence assessments about Saddam's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programme.

An unnamed intelligence official told the BBC on Thursday that a key claim in the dossier on Iraq's weapons released by the British government last September - that Iraq could launch a chemical or biological attack within 45 minutes of an order - was inserted on the instructions of officials in 10 Downing Street.

Adam Ingram, the armed forces minister, admitted the claim was made by "a single source; it wasn't corroborated".

Speaking yesterday in Warsaw, the Polish capital, Mr Blair said the evidence of weapons of mass destruction in the dossier was "evidence the truth of which I have absolutely no doubt about at all".

[Ministers 'distorted' UN weapons report](#)

[Salam's story](#)



He said he had consulted the heads of the security and intelligence services before emphatically denying that Downing Street had leaned on them to strengthen their assessment of the WMD threat in Iraq. He insisted he had "absolutely no doubt" that proof of banned weapons would eventually be found in Iraq. Whitehall sources make it clear they do not share the prime minister's optimism.

The Waldorf transcripts are all the more damaging given Mr Powell's dramatic 75-minute speech to the UN security council on February 5, when he presented declassified satellite images, and communications intercepts of what were purported to be conversations between Iraqi commanders, and held up a vial that, he said, could contain anthrax.

Evidence, he said, had come from "people who have risked their lives to let the world know what Saddam is really up to".

Some of the intelligence used by Mr Powell was provided by Britain.

The US secretary of state, who was praised by Mr Straw as having made a "most powerful and authoritative case", also drew links between al-Qaida and Iraq - a connection dismissed by British intelligence agencies. His speech did not persuade France, Germany and Russia, who stuck to their previous insistence that the UN weapons inspectors in Iraq should be given more time to do their job.

The Waldorf meeting took place a few days after Downing Street presented Mr Powell with a separate dossier on Iraq's banned weapons which he used to try to strengthen the impact of his UN speech.

A few days later, Downing Street admitted that much of its dossier was lifted from academic sources and included a plagiarised section written by an American PhD student.

Mr Wolfowitz set up the Pentagon's office of special plans to counter what he and his boss, Donald Rumsfeld, considered inadequate - and unwelcome - intelligence from the CIA.

He angered critics of the war this week in a Vanity Fair magazine interview in which he cited "bureaucratic reasons" for the White House focusing on Iraq's alleged arsenal as the

reason for the war. In reality, a "huge" reason for the conflict was to enable the US to withdraw its troops from Saudi Arabia, he said.

Earlier in the week, Mr Rumsfeld suggested that Saddam might have destroyed such weapons before the war.

### **Political Alerts**

[Get daily headlines straight to your mobile](#)

### **Sign up for the Backbencher**

[Our free weekly insider's guide to Westminster](#)

### **What do you think?**

[politics.editor@guardianunlimited.co.uk](mailto:politics.editor@guardianunlimited.co.uk)

### **Special reports**

[Iraq](#)

[Politics and the war](#)

[Iraq and the media](#)

[Foreign affairs](#)

### **Explained**

04.10.2002: [War with Iraq](#)

### **Interactive guides**

[Blair's road to war](#)

### **Speeches**

18.03.2003: [Tony Blair's speech to the Commons](#)

### **Full texts**

18.03.2003: [Emergency Commons motion on Iraq](#)

[Government dossier on Iraqi arms](#)

[Government dossier on human rights](#)

### **Votes**

19.03.2003: [MPs who voted against Blair in March](#)

27.02.2003: [MPs who voted against war in February](#)

### **Useful links**

[Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#)

[Iraq sanctions - UN security council](#)

---

[Printable version](#) | [Send it to a friend](#) | [Save story](#)



Guardian Unlimited © Guardian Newspapers Limited 2003