

WAR IN IRAQ



DEFENCE AND VETERANS
WAR IN IRAQ
AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ISSUE SHEET

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Photos: www.robert-fisk.com



done to international co-operation. More than 10,000 innocent Iraqi civilians have died as a consequence of the US barrage of munitions against Iraq.

No WMD, no legal basis

The Democrats know that there was no basis for Australia to join the US invasion of Iraq. The pre-emptive war against Iraq was illegal and the rising human toll and unrest shows it was also unwise.

The Prime Minister misled the Australian people by saying that the rationale for war was that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. We know from the recent Parliamentary inquiry that some Australian intelligence agencies were expressing doubt about the existence of WMD in Iraq months before the US invaded Iraq. Assessments of the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) made months before the war advised that there was no known Chemical weapon production and no known Biological weapons testing or evaluation since 1991

From the beginning, the Australian Democrats urged the Government to stay out of a war with Iraq and focus our military resources on our region, rather than sending Australia's Special Forces to the other side of the world.

We do not object to the strengthening of Australia's counter terrorist capabilities. However we strongly opposed the Howard Government sending Australian men and women to take part in an unjustified and destructive war against Iraq.

The Human Cost

The Prime Minister has ignored the shocking human cost of the Iraq war and occupation, just as he ignored the damage it has

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and that Iraq did not have nuclear weapons.

The Government was selective in its use of intelligence. There was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and there was no immediate threat to Australia. The Government ignored intelligence that suggested Iraq was not an immediate threat, and therefore misled the Australian public.

Since it became evident that there never was any proof that Iraq possessed WMD, the Prime Minister has been playing down that issue and instead concentrating on the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. This is despite the fact Mr Howard said before the war that it was not about regime change, but enforcing UN resolutions on WMD. He has made the reason for this war a moving target.

International law ignored

The Democrats know that if the real aim of the war was not weapons of mass destruction but simply to remove Hussein's regime, then that is clearly illegal under international law. There were always other choices to deal with Saddam Hussein. We believe that

united international pressure on Hussein and support for alternative democratic leadership in Iraq might have taken longer to bring about regime change, but the human cost would have been much lower.

Senate didn't consent

The Democrats are adamant that Parliamentary consent should be needed before Australian troops are sent to overseas conflict. It is unacceptable that the Prime Minister has the power to send our troops to war without the support of the United Nations, the Australian Parliament or the Australian people and without the Governor-General needing to authorise the decision.

The Howard Government has been the first Government in our history to go to war without majority Parliamentary support. The PM put the issue to the Parliament only after the decision had been made. This saw the Senate vote against the decision to commit Australian troops to war in Iraq at almost the same time as the bombs began to fall on Baghdad. The Democrats have intro-

duced legislation to take the decision to commit troops to overseas conflict out of the hands of the Prime Minister and a subservient and secretive Cabinet, and place it with the Parliament, except in the need to take swift action in an emergency.

Moving forward

The Democrats believe that Australia must continue to try and find ways to build peace in Iraq. Whilst we believe this

war should never have been started, the fact that Australia was a key part in the waging of the war means we have a special

obligation to assist in repairing the damage. Economic and infrastructure assistance should be provided to the Iraqis to them gain peaceful self-determination as soon as possible.

We must work to quickly bring the situation in Iraq back within the framework of international law and the broader international community through the United Nations.

Iraq is proof again that it is easier to start wars than to end them.



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