

Iraq, Israel and WMD dossier

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A scribbled reference to Israel in the margin of a withheld draft of the Iraq dossier is revealed. Chris Ames who has doggedly pursued the government on the issue responds



The [Guardian](#) has today revealed the contents of the margin note that the Information Tribunal allowed to be removed when ordering the Foreign Office to publish the John Williams draft of the Iraq dossier.

It reveals that a senior government official or minister suggested at the time of the dossier (September 2002) that Israel had brazenly flouted the UN's authority in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. A reference to Israel in the margins of the Williams draft is linked to an assertion in the text that Iraq is unique in this respect. It is clear that the author of the reference thought that the same charge might be levelled against Israel.

The *Guardian* has obtained a copy of the witness statement given to the Tribunal by Neil Wigan, Head of the Foreign Office's Arab, Israel and North Africa Group. He told the Tribunal:

"I interpret this note to indicate that the person who wrote it believes that Israel has flouted the United Nations authority in a manner similar to that of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein."

Wigan asserted that the comment would 'seriously damage Britain's bilateral relationship with Israel'. He stated that Israel would believe that the FCO had compared it with Saddam Hussein's regime and that this would confirm its view that elements of the FCO are prejudiced against it.

I attended the Tribunal hearing in December and was aware that Wigan was giving evidence in secret. When the Tribunal issued its decision last month it ordered that the note should be removed from the document, which was finally published on Monday. It also kept secret its reason for doing so, although it stated that it related to the exemption under Section 27 of the Freedom of Information Act, that publication would damage international relations.

When Jack Straw, then Foreign Secretary, originally blocked my 2005 FOI request for the Williams draft, he made no mention of this exemption, relying instead on the Section 36 exemption relating to government confidentiality.

The Foreign Office has refused to say who wrote the marginal note, saying that it does not comment on leaked documents. It is clear from documents on the Hutton Inquiry website that Straw was one of a small number of people within the Foreign Office who followed the drafting of the dossier at this time. He almost certainly saw the Williams draft, which the

FCO described as 'advice to ministers'.

Labour MP Lynne Jones said: "The Government's timid refusal to make an accurate reference to Israel's flouting of UN authority over its WMD shows their lack of objectivity on breaches of international law, which damages our Country's moral authority.

"The reticence over this issue is mirrored by the unwillingness to push for enforcement of human rights provisions of the EU-Israel Association Agreement."

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