

As Brian Toohy wrote in the *Australian Financial Review* (4–5 October)—a paper that has maintained the highest standards of critical commentary on the war—this was ‘one of the worst intelligence failures in modern history’. ‘The staggering level of incompetence makes it extremely difficult to see why Australia should take any notice of anything emanating from British intelligence agencies.’

But the Australian government seems remarkably unconcerned about this.

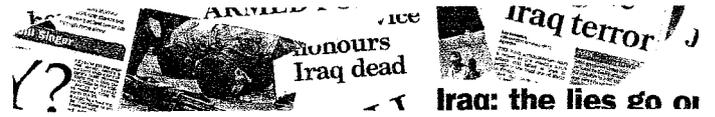
MOREOVER, AS ONE OF only three countries with significant forces invading Iraq, Australia had added responsibility, and could have used its influence to insist on incontrovertible evidence and UN backing before joining the invasion.

All three ‘coalition of the willing’ leaders are now seeking to cover themselves. Politicians will be politicians after all. But recall how eager our Australian government was for war, and how even in mid-2002 Mr Downer accused those who questioned the evidence about WMDs of anti-Americanism, adding ‘only a fool could support appeasement’. It was Mr Howard who declared on 14 March 2003 that were Saddam to rid himself of WMDs, there would be no war.

The Howard government has a long track record of not knowing or telling the truth—over East Timor, *Tampa* and the asylum seekers, as well as Iraq. No-one is expecting that Mr Howard will confess all to the Australian people, that his government misjudged the situation badly, and will now

make some compensation to the people of Iraq.

But what has happened to the social conscience of other members of our political parties? Was there a single public word of dissent about our intervention in Iraq from members



of the Coalition parties, or did I miss it? At least in Britain, members of the Labour Party are able to debate the issue. In Australia, do members of the Liberal Party still have a right of free speech?

The whole Iraq adventure is fast becoming a fiasco. I believe that Mr Howard will go down in the history books as having committed Australia to an unnecessary war, gullibly or otherwise, at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, making Australians a larger target for terrorists, damaging the United Nations, and possibly further polarising much of the Muslim world against the West. ■

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