

Blair Will Give Iraq War Evidence in Public: Inquiry

By [Global Research](#)

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LONDON (AFP) – The Iraq war inquiry said Sunday that former prime minister Tony Blair would be questioned “very much in public” amid fears that crucial evidence would only be heard in private.

Blair, who is to appear before the long-awaited official inquiry early next year, said in a BBC television interview to be screened Sunday that he would have backed the invasion of Iraq even if he had known that president Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

He said London would have used other ways to justify its support for the March 2003 US-led invasion to oust the Iraqi dictator.

The interview triggered concerns that when he testifies it would be heard behind closed doors.

Most evidence to the inquiry will be given in public, although closed hearings can take place for issues concerning national security or secret intelligence. Mindful of the risk, proceedings are broadcast with a one-minute delay.

The Independent on Sunday newspaper suggested that Blair’s meetings with US president George W. Bush and details of the decision-making process that led to war would be dealt with in secret on grounds of national security and the need to protect London’s relations with Washington.

However, a spokesman for the inquiry said: “Mr Blair will be appearing very much in public and will be questioned in detail on a wide range of issues surrounding Britain’s involvement in Iraq.

“We have said right from the start that he will be a key figure in the inquiry. Mr Blair has said that he is ready and willing to give evidence in public.”

The inquiry opened last month, after Britain’s mission in Iraq ended earlier this year.

Liberla Democrats leader Nick Clegg said following Blair’s BBC interview that it is essential that as much of his evidence as possible is heard in public.

“It would be wholly unacceptable for any of Blair’s testimony to be held in private, except that which could directly compromise national security,” he said.

“Tony Blair’s breathtaking cynicism in stating that he would have found any old excuse to go to war simply underlines how vital it is that we hear his testimony in public.”

In his BBC interview, Blair said of Saddam and the lack of WMDs found: “I would still have thought it right to remove him. Obviously you would have had to use and deploy different arguments, about the nature of the threat.

“I can’t really think we’d be better with him and his two sons still in charge but it’s incredibly difficult.

“It was the notion of him as a threat to the region, of which the development of WMD was obviously one, and because you’d had 12 years of United Nations to and fro on this subject, he used chemical weapons on his own people — so this was obviously the thing that was uppermost in my mind.”

Hans Blix, the former United Nations chief weapons inspector in Iraq, said Blair’s comments suggested a “lack of sincerity” over his stated reasons for going to war.

“The war was sold on the WMD, and now you feel, or hear that it was only a question of deployment of arguments, as he said, it sounds a bit like a fig leaf that was held up, and if the fig leaf had not been there, then they would have tried to put another fig leaf there,” he told the BBC.

“What could they have argued? Tony Blair talks about the threat to the region. I don’t think that any country in the region, with the possible exception of Kuwait, really saw Iraq, which was prostrate at the time, as a threat.”

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