

# Iraq, Iran, Intelligence and the media: Sir Richard Dearlove

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The former head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, gave a Polis lecture to a packed theatre last night in which he warned about Iran, reviewed Iraq and defended unattributable briefings. It has already made the headlines on the BBC [Today](#) Programme and the [national press](#). He made some fascinating comments about the period of 'dodgy dossiers' in the lead up to the war. Policy was "over-dependent on intelligence particularly when it was presented to parliament", he said. Bear in mind that former Intelligence chiefs rarely speak in public and almost never on such sensitive issues. So that was a pretty stark statement about a situation he made clear must never happen again.

On Iran he warned that there is a danger that America may make the mistake again of using Intelligence to justify action, although he said that in terms of a danger of nuclear war, India and Pakistan came closest during his period in post.

dearlove

And on the tricky issue of unattributable briefings by the Intelligence services Sir Richard made a sophisticated case for the preservation of secrecy, rather than CIA-style press briefings. This was partly based on the need for operational secrecy. "Any press officer for MI6 would still have to answer 99 out of a hundred questions with No Comment" he said. But, he argued, it was also so that when MI6 did brief it did so in the knowledge that it could retain control over the message and so avoid media exaggeration or distortion of what it said.

Here are links to media coverage of the lecture by the [BBC](#), The [Guardian](#), [The Times](#), The [Mirror](#) and [Press Gazette](#).

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