

# Spymaster speaks out

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In the James Bond movies the head of British intelligence is portrayed as a patrician civil servant smoking a pipe in a leather arm chair who amiably reprimands 007 for his womanising. In practice, it is one of the most important jobs within the UK Establishment with some of the toughest decisions to make regarding the safety of individual agents and the country's security. [Sir Richard Dearlove](#) was the man in that leather armchair between 1999 and 2004 and on Wednesday October 31st he will give a POLIS lecture about his extraordinary career.

The media has quite rightly subjected Sir Richard and British intelligence to an enormous amount of scrutiny for what happened during the period. Where were the intelligence warnings about Al Qaeda and 9/11? What was the role of British intelligence in providing the evidence that the Blair government used to make the case for the invasion of Iraq? Sir Richard is widely held to be the author of the so-called '[Downing Street memo](#)' from 2002 which allegedly raised questions about the use by the Bush administration of intelligence in its argument for the removal of Saddam Hussein.

These have been extensively inquired in to by people like [Lord Hutton](#) but gaps remain. More broadly for journalists, there is the question over the role of the media. Did the British media fail to hold government and the intelligence services to account? Is it impossible for journalists to break through the layers of secrecy that cloak the British state? Or is it simply unrealistic to expect these sensitive issues of national security ever to be opened up to press scrutiny?

There is no doubt we now live in a world where Al Qaeda and other 'Islamist' groups will continue to pursue a complex and lethal form of terrorism. How different is it from past threats? What role can or should the media play in reporting the intelligence that is gathered about it? Are journalists being used to inculcate a false sense of fear, as suggested by Adam Curtis' series of documentaries, [The Power Of Nightmares](#), for example?

Sir Richard will draw upon his vast experience of intelligence from the Cold War to Al Qaeda to address these issues and more at the Old Theatre, Houghton Street, LSE, at 6.30pm on Wednesday 31st October. To reserve a place email us at [polis@lse.ac.uk](mailto:polis@lse.ac.uk)

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