

‘Had we gone to war on a lie?’ is the question behind Rod Barton’s book *The Weapons Detective*. Barton was an analyst with Australian, United Nations and United States intelligence organisations for more than thirty years, using his specialist skills searching for biological and chemical weapons, first in Cambodia and later in Iraq.

Barton got to know the scientists involved in Iraq’s military research. Although he knew they lied about their activities, he was most uncomfortable after the invasion when he met them again as prisoners, especially since he felt they were being held illegally. As he points out, they had been in a difficult position: ‘No major decision was made without Saddam, but rarely did he set out clear policies or give specific, clearly defined instructions. … One can only imagine how difficult it must have been for his lieutenants to get it right.’ And how dangerous if they got it wrong.

*The Weapons Detective* is a sober and informative book. Barton is measured and careful about his claims and avoids colourful rhetoric. As a scientist he is still shocked and depressed by the propensity of politicians to manipulate the facts. And his conclusion to the big question? Yes.