

## Nothing There To Vote For

Michael Howard is now sounding increasingly like a parody of himself. His latest statement on Iraq is that he **would not** have voted to go to war in Iraq on the basis of WMD if he had known about flaws in the intelligence. But...

Mr Howard said he could not have backed the Commons pre-war motion on WMD, but he would have still supported going to war by backing a different motion.

Intellectually, this is pure sophistry. Politically, it is yet more **cynical opportunism**, designed for nothing other than to pick up a few careless votes by provoking the inevitable headline "Howard changes mind on WMD vote".

Several leading Conservatives have made similar noises. But if a political party gives up on the quaint old idea of having political positions and arguing in their favour, who can support it? What is there to support?

Thu, 07/22/2004 - 23:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## erm, how will this get him votes?

NT

-- Elliot Temple  
<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 07/23/2004 - 02:30 | [reply](#)

## But...

... where is Bin Laden?

by a reader on Sat, 07/24/2004 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

## in answer to your non sequitur

Bin Laden's dead. --Blix

by a reader on Mon, 07/26/2004 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

## dead people still have a location

(or multiple locations)

so your answer isn't really an answer ;-p

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/26/2004 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

## Re: dead people still have a location

Not necessarily, since atoms of a given element are fungible.

by **David Deutsch** on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

## touche

Well either way, Elliot's got me there, I didn't really answer the question. ;-)

by a reader on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 01:27 | [reply](#)

## It was an answer

I think your response implied that the question had no answer in the form of a location.

I think most questions really mean "Tell me what I'm asking for, or explain why what I'm asking for doesn't make sense, or can't be answered in the way I expect. I don't want a false answer just for the sake of giving me something in the form I requested... I want a response that satisfies me so that I don't have to keep asking the question. I would consider such a response an answer."

**Gil**

by **Gil** on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

## Yeah but

I was gonna say something like that Gil, but I didn't want to arrogantly presume to speak for A Reader<sup>@</sup>18:55 by telling him what his question "really" was. Maybe he \*really did\* want to know where Bin Laden's remains are! And if so, I didn't, and couldn't, answer his question. ;-)

by a reader on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 18:31 | [reply](#)

## Speaking For Others

What Blix meant to say is that speaking for other people is a great idea, and hard to mess up.

-- Elliot

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 01:25 | [reply](#)

## I don't understand this post.

I don't understand this post. Michael Howard would not have voted to go to war in Iraq on the basis of WMD if he had known about flaws in the intelligence. But he would have voted to go to war based on other arguments. That seems like an entirely consistent, logical, clear and good view point to me. What is your point?

### Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 08:01 | [reply](#)

## This is nuts

Nothing to vote for? How about the best available side- how about working to *improve* that side, even?

Or, we could just give up, and watch the UK slide into oblivion. I call that passive cynicism.

Whither principled *active* optimism?

Alice

by a reader on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 13:35 | [reply](#)

## Equivocation

Henry:

When Michael Howard says that he would not have voted for the war on the basis of WMD, he equivocates between two possible interpretations of his words:

1. That if he had known at the time that there were no WMD stockpiles, he would have insisted, before endorsing the Parliamentary motion to back the war, that it not say that there was good evidence that such stockpiles existed.

Not only is that Howard's position, it is also Prime Minister Blair's position and the position of every MP (and probably every person without exception) who backed the war. It is not something that any sane person would bother to assert, being rather like saying that if he had known in advance that a particular bomb was going to go astray and cause collateral damage, he would not have advocated dropping that particular bomb, but that he would still have backed the general policy of dropping bombs as a tactic in the war.

2. That Tony Blair is guilty of wrongdoing in that he knew (or through negligence did not know) that the intelligence referred to in the motion was false.

Only the interpretation (2) constitutes a 'U-turn' or a 'change of mind' or a criticism of the government or a statement with any political import whatsoever. Howard is not willing or able to defend

position (2) -- because it is indefensible -- which is why he equivocates: to any serious enquiry, he can always claim he meant (1). But he wants to reap some of the political benefit of (2), which is a popular belief. Though his words were very carefully chosen to be slightly closer to (1) than (2), his tone of voice and body language were totally appropriate to (2) and not at all to (1), and given the context, he knew that the press, eager for sensational developments, especially those that tend to justify the anti-war position, would adopt interpretation (2). That is why the headlines were all along those lines. And these events would constitute some much-needed positive press coverage for Howard and the Conservatives on the subject of the war.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 13:59 | [reply](#)

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