

The Bush-Aznar tapes: glimpse of a gangster preparing for war

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The transcript of February 2003 discussions between US President George W. Bush and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar published Wednesday by Spain's largest daily, *El Pais*, provides fresh documentary confirmation of what is already a widely known historical fact. That is: the Bush administration was determined to wage a war of aggression to conquer Iraq and was not about to allow international law or compromise settlements to interfere with its long-planned invasion.

The contents of the conversation, transcribed by Spain's ambassador to Washington, Javier Ruperez, had been kept secret by Madrid—both under Aznar's right-wing government and under that of his successor, Socialist Party (PSOE) Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero—before someone leaked them to *El Pais*.

The document provides one more piece of irrefutable evidence that the Bush White House launched the invasion of Iraq on the basis of lies fabricated to further a predetermined policy. A significant component of this web of lies was the repeated claims made by Washington and its allies in the period leading up to the invasion that war was a last resort, and that they were determined to exhaust all diplomatic and peaceful alternatives.

As Bush told his Spanish counterpart, whatever the UN might decide, "In two weeks we will be ready militarily... We will be in Baghdad by the end of March."

The White House failed to deny the authenticity of the document. White House spokesperson Dana Perino described the conversation as a "private meeting" and dismissed questions about its exposure of the Bush administration's deception of the American people and the world during this period. "There are some people who think we never should have gone into Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein," she said. "And there is nothing we are going to be able to do that's going to change their minds."

The transcript records a conversation that took place on February 22, 2003—less than a month before the invasion—at Bush's Crawford, Texas ranch. The discussion centered on the final pre-war diplomatic maneuvers aimed at ramming a

resolution through the United Nations Security Council providing a rubberstamp for the US plans to attack Iraq.

It also reveals that Saddam Hussein had indicated through the Egyptian government that he was prepared to go into exile, provided he could take with him \$1 billion and documents on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, presumably including records proving US backing for Baghdad's weapons programs, particularly under Bush senior's administration.

In addition, it touches on plans for the Iraqi leader's possible assassination and the campaign of intimidation initiated against countries represented on the Security Council that opposed a war.

The meeting also came just one week after massive worldwide demonstrations that brought millions of people into the streets in opposition to the war, including huge crowds in both Spain and Britain, Washington's two principal supporters in preparing the aggression. In Spain, polls showed 90 percent of the population opposing an invasion, and Aznar's principal concern was to convince Bush to use the UN to provide some form of pseudo-legal cover for war to help him with massively hostile public opinion at home.

In addition to Aznar and Bush, then US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice also joined in the discussion, together with another White House advisor on European affairs, Aznar's chief advisor on international policy, Alberto Carnero, and the Spanish ambassador.

According to the transcript, Bush told Aznar he was willing to go to the Security Council for another resolution that would be crafted so that it could be used to claim authorization for military action, without actually saying so. He said that the document should not include any demands upon Iraq—with which Baghdad could potentially comply—and should "not mention the use of force." Bush added, "A lot of people could vote for a resolution like that."

Both Bush and Aznar made it clear that they expected the resolution to be vetoed—France, Russia and China, all permanent members of the Security Council with veto

power, opposed it. But they hoped to get a majority of the council's members to support it, giving them a propaganda victory. In the end, they were forced to withdraw the resolution after it became clear that it would have gone down to overwhelming defeat without any veto having to be cast.

The US president continued: "Saddam Hussein will not change and he will keep playing around. The time has come to get rid of him. That's the way it is. I, for my part, will try from now on to use the most delicate rhetoric possible while we try to get the resolution approved."

Bush repeatedly expressed frustration over the failure of other European governments to fall into line behind Washington's war plans. Singling out French President Jacques Chirac, Bush said, "The problem is that Chirac thinks he's *Mister Arab*, and in reality he's making life impossible." The US president continued by expressing his contempt for public opinion in Europe, declaring, "The more the Europeans attack me, the stronger I am in the United States."

When Rice reviewed a schedule for the presentation of reports to the Security Council by UN weapons inspectors—reports that would subsequently affirm Iraq's substantial compliance with disarmament—Bush erupted in frustration.

"This is like Chinese water torture," he said. "We have to put an end to it."

Aznar said he understood Bush's annoyance, but they had to get more support. "Have a little patience," he begged.

"My patience has run out," Bush replied. "I don't plan on going beyond the middle of March."

Referring to the non-permanent members on the Security Council that were voicing opposition to a resolution authorizing a US war, Bush declared: "Countries like Mexico, Chile, Angola and Cameroon should know that what's at stake is the security of the US and act with a feeling of friendship towards us."

The imperialist arrogance is breathtaking. Mexico, which historically has been the victim of multiple US invasions, Angola, a country that saw more than half a million of its people killed in a CIA-instigated civil war and Chile, which was the victim of a US-orchestrated coup that imposed a quarter century of fascist-military dictatorship, should all subordinate any concern for international law or the rights of nations to the security concerns of the US.

Bush went on to spell out the kind of gangster-style threats being made behind the scenes. "Lagos [the Chilean president] should know that the free trade agreement with Chile is facing confirmation in the Senate and that a negative attitude on this issue could put its ratification in danger," he said. "Angola is receiving funds from the Millennium

Account and they too could be compromised if they don't take a positive approach. And Putin should know that with his attitude he is putting relations between Russia and the United States in danger."

Referring to differences with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on how soon to put the resolution before the Security Council, Bush commented, "This is like the bad cop, good cop game. It doesn't bother me being the bad cop and Blair being the good one."

Also appalling—given the one million Iraqi dead and the country's total devastation—is Bush's conception of the coming war's impact. "We can win without destruction," he said. "We are already planning out the post-Saddam Iraq, and I believe there are good foundations for a better future. Iraq has a good bureaucracy and a relatively strong civil society. It could be organized in a federation. Meanwhile, we're doing everything we can to attend to the political needs of our friends and allies."

Aznar himself was somewhat taken aback by Bush's sanguine approach to the upcoming slaughter.

"The only thing that worries me about you is your optimism," said the Spanish prime minister.

Bush replied: "I am optimistic because I believe I am in the right. I am at peace with myself."

The dialogue between the US president and the Spanish prime minister sounds more like a meeting between a Mafia godfather and one of his obsequious gangster captains than a discussion of international relations and policy between two heads of state. What they were cold-bloodedly planning, however, was not any run-of-the-mill crime, but a mass killing of world-historic proportions.

The ultimate significance of the Bush-Aznar transcript is that it constitutes one more piece of evidence for the prosecution of Bush and all those who conspired to launch the war of aggression against Iraq for war crimes.



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