

Memo confirms Bush and Blair knew claims Iraq had WMDs were lies

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A confidential memo obtained by the *Observer*, detailing a meeting between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, confirms their determination to press ahead with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 without any evidence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and without United Nations approval.

The five-page memo, written by Blair's foreign policy adviser Sir David Manning, is dated January 31, 2003, some two months before the invasion began. It records the thinking of Bush and Blair as it became increasingly obvious that United Nations weapons inspectors would not find the advanced weaponry, including a nuclear capability, that both leaders were using to justify military action.

According to the memo, Bush discussed various possible provocations that might trigger a second UN resolution to justify war in the absence of any WMD. One plan being considered by the White House was "to fly U2 reconnaissance aircraft painted in UN colours over Iraq with fighter cover" provoking Iraqi forces into opening fire and thereby putting them in breach of a UN resolution.

Bush also discussed his hopes that an Iraqi defector might still be "brought out" to talk about WMD, or that someone might assassinate Saddam Hussein. The memo confirms that the decision had already been taken to go to war. Bush expressed his readiness for war, even if their provocations failed to produce the second UN resolution.

The US, in order to offset its economic decline relative to its rivals, was determined to use its military strength to seize strategically crucial energy resources in the Middle East. Bush, accordingly, had already decided on a date for the start of the war. Manning

records, "The start date for the military campaign was now pencilled in for 10 March. This was when the bombing would begin."

"Our diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the military planning," wrote Manning.

British imperialism hoped to gain some share of the spoils from the plunder of Iraq. Blair told Bush he was "solidly with the president" in his thinking.

At this point, Blair had not yet received any legal advice on the war from the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith. Publicly, his government had doctored and manufactured intelligence reports on the supposed WMD. In the face of overwhelming popular hostility to the war, Blair announced that the test of government was its ability to ignore the popular will.

Manning's memo was copied to Sir Jeremy Greenstock, British ambassador to the UN, Jonathan Powell, Blair's chief of staff, Admiral Lord Boyce, the chief of defence staff, and Sir Christopher Meyer, the British ambassador to Washington.

The Manning memo underlines the character of the invasion of Iraq. It was a calculated act of imperialist aggression. The memo demonstrates again the limitations of yet another government-sponsored whitewash. It makes the case for a war crimes tribunal to prosecute Bush, Blair and their fellow conspirators for their murderous actions in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the memo's release has added to the deepening sense of crisis over Iraq in the UK, with events in danger of spiralling out of control.

Sir John Chilcott was chosen by Prime Minister Gordon Brown to head a panel of privy counsellors to inquire into the Iraq war. They were to meet behind closed doors and were charged, according to Brown, with identifying "lessons learned." They could not, he stressed, "apportion blame or consider issues of civil or

criminal liability.”

Chilcott was also a member of the 2004 Butler Inquiry that examined the intelligence used to justify the invasion of Iraq and which produced a whitewash.

With Brown’s government weakened, however, the Conservatives, who fully supported the Iraq war, have opportunistically demanded that proceedings be made more open. They put a motion to parliament Wednesday calling for a change to the inquiry’s remit, on openness and whether witnesses would be questioned under oath. This was defeated by 299 votes to 260 after a six-hour debate in which a small number of Labour MPs called for more openness and threatened to vote with the Opposition.

For the Tories, Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague said that declaring the inquiry would not report before a general election was “utterly cynical and politically motivated” and demanded that the committee should include people with military and ministerial experience.

Broader sections of the establishment are also prepared to make public material that is highly damaging, even dangerous to the government—and particularly to Blair. Lord Guthrie, a former chief of defence staff under Blair, said the memo underlined that the Chilcott Inquiry must not be “a whitewash as these inquiries often are.”

Brown’s insistence that the inquiry be held behind closed doors has been rejected by Chilcott himself, who wrote to Brown, “It will be essential to hold as much of the proceedings of the inquiry as possible in public, consistent with the need to protect national security and to ensure and enable complete candour in the oral and written evidence from witnesses.”

Brown released the letter two days ahead of Wednesday’s debate and was forced to welcome Chilcott’s position. During the debate, Foreign Secretary David Miliband also conceded to Chilcott that the inquiry “can praise or blame whoever it likes. It is free to write its own report at every stage.” It may also be possible to interview witnesses under oath, he said, but insisted again that the inquiry had not been set up “to establish civil or criminal liability.”

A Dutch government’s inquiry into the Netherlands’ support for the war will look at all MI5 and MI6 intelligence that was shared with its intelligence services. That inquiry is due to report in November, and

this could mean that information about the US and British role will be published ahead of Chilcott’s report next year.



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