

British documents detail US and UK plans for Iraq war

Julie Hyland
26 November 2009

Documents obtained by the *Sunday Telegraph* provide further proof of the criminal character of the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. They confirm that then-Prime Minister Tony Blair lied to the British public when he repeatedly denied that he and US President George W. Bush had agreed on war months before the invasion in order to effect “regime change.”

The *Sunday Telegraph* reported that it had received “hundreds of pages of secret Government reports,” some of which it has published on its website. The newspaper cited Blair’s statement to parliament on July 16, 2002, in response to speculation about British involvement in an attack on Iraq. Donald Anderson, chairman of the foreign affairs committee, asked the prime minister, “Are we then preparing for possible military action in Iraq?” To which Blair replied, “No. There are no decisions which have been taken about military action.”

In late September of that year, the government published the first of its spurious “intelligence” reports. Entitled *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*, the report claimed that Iraq had “weapons of mass destruction” that could be deployed for attack “within 45 minutes.”

However, planning for a military invasion of Iraq, with the objective of toppling Saddam Hussein, had been underway for some months. The documents state, “formation-level planning for a [British] deployment [to Iraq] took place from February 2002.” It also cites Major General Graeme Lamb, director of special forces during the war, stating, “I had been working the war up since early 2002.”

Telegraph journalist Andrew Gilligan wrote, “On June 28, 2002, the documents say—still two weeks before Mr Blair’s denial to Parliament—US Central Command (Centcom), the people who would run the war, held a special Iraq planning conference for Britain and the other coalition ally, Australia. And on Aug 13, according to the documents, Centcom’s commander, Gen Tommy Franks, held a discussion on assembling a massive contingent of British troops as a northern invasion force through Turkey. That, in fact, was

then adopted as the battle plan.”

Presenting the “intelligence” dossier to parliament on September 24, 2002, Blair stated, “In respect of any military options, we are not at the stage of deciding those options but, of course, it is important—should we get to that point—that we have the fullest possible discussion of those options.” Preparations for attack had been underway for at least six months at the time of this statement.

Gilligan continues, “According to the so-called Downing Street Memo, leaked in 2005, Mr Blair signed on for regime change at an April 2002 summit with President Bush in Crawford, Texas. By the time the British public was finally told there would be a significant troop deployment—on Dec 18, 2002—there were only weeks left before the war and it had too much momentum to stop.”

The “Downing Street Memo” was leaked to the *Sunday Times* prior to the UK general election in May 2005. The top secret Foreign Office document, dealing with the legality of a pre-emptive attack on Iraq, was written in March 2002 and appended as “Annex A” to a Cabinet Office briefing paper of July 21, 2002. It stated, “The US Government’s military planning for action against Iraq is proceeding apace.... When the prime minister discussed Iraq with President Bush at Crawford in April he said that the UK would support military action to bring about regime change, provided that certain conditions were met.”

This is despite the fact that the government’s chief legal officer at the time, Attorney General Lord Goldsmith, had concluded that the “desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action.”

It is already known that between May 2002 and January 2003, US and British aircraft conducted a series of attacks on Iraq, behind the backs of the British public. They dropped hundreds of tons of ordnance as part of their “softening up” operations prior to full-scale invasion.

The leaked documents were published by the *Sunday Telegraph* just two days before the so-called Chilcot inquiry began its hearings into the nine-year period between July 2001 to July 2009, covering the run-up to the invasion of

Iraq and its aftermath.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown was forced to announce a fresh inquiry under Sir John Chilcot into the circumstances surrounding the Iraq war in June 2009. Headed by a panel of privy counsellors, it is not intended to address the legality of the invasion, nor the mass popular opposition to the war that made Blair's deceptions so necessary. Brown stated that its task was to identify "lessons learned" and it could not "apportion blame or consider issues of civil or criminal liability." It will not report until the end of 2010 at the earliest.

Chilcot was a member of the 2004 Butler Inquiry into the intelligence used to justify the invasion of Iraq, which produced a whitewash. His latest review was originally scheduled to meet in private, but such are the antagonisms between the government and leading military personnel that Brown was forced to abandon this plan.

Gilligan, the *Telegraph* journalist, was himself the fall-guy for the Hutton inquiry in August 2003 into the circumstances surrounding the death of top weapons inspector Dr. David Kelly on July 17 of that year. Kelly's supposed suicide came after he was outed as the source for a report by Gilligan on BBC's Radio 4 *Today* programme alleging that the government had "sexed up" intelligence information on Iraq's WMD in order to make the case for war. The Hutton inquiry exonerated the government and blamed the BBC for "unfounded" and "defective" reporting.

Chilcot's deliberations are intended to assuage criticisms from the armed forces and others in the upper echelons of the state that Blair's underhandedness prevented adequate military preparations for the invasion, thereby contributing to the quagmire now facing the occupation some six years after "victory" was proclaimed. Amongst those due to be questioned is Blair. In recent weeks, there has been speculation in the media that a major reason for Blair's failed attempt to be appointed the European Union's new president was that it could confer on him immunity from prosecution.

No one in the media or the armed forces, however, is suggesting that prosecutions are in order. The *Telegraph* editorialised, "The purpose of the Chilcot inquiry is not to act as a 'show trial' of Mr Blair, and nor is it a court of law...but that does not relieve the former prime minister of a public responsibility to answer some of the outstanding questions about this unhappy chapter in British foreign policy."

Nevertheless, the inquiry is dealing with explosive issues, which could implicate not just Blair but many others in war crimes. For this reason, the first day of the inquiry was dominated by efforts to distance the British government and military hierarchy from the charge of planning an illegal war for regime change.

Sir Peter Ricketts, then-chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, said that he was aware of a "background noise" in the United States about overthrowing the Iraqi regime soon after the election of President George W. Bush. British officials were "conscious," he said, of an article by Condoleezza Rice even before Bush took power in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in which she discussed overthrowing Saddam and introduced the concept of "rogue states."

A review of Iraq policy was already underway in Whitehall in anticipation of the installation of the new Bush Administration, he also admitted, but claimed, "We didn't have a policy for getting rid" of Saddam Hussein: "All the advice I saw go to [British] ministers in 2001...it was clear that it was not something we thought was advisable."

Sir William Patey, head of the Middle East department at the Foreign Office in 2001, added, "In February 2001 we were aware of these drum beats from Washington and internally we discussed it," but insisted, "Our policy was to stay away from that.... The question of regime overthrow was, I recall, mentioned but it was quite clear that there was no proposition being put in our direction on that."

Simon Webb, then a policy director at the Ministry of Defence, said that during a visit to Washington in March 2001, the issue of overthrowing Saddam had been discussed with American officials. "The issue of overthrow came up but I wrote in my notes that 'the dog did not bark.' I said it grizzled but it did not bark," he claimed.

In their highly unconvincing efforts to proclaim innocence, those giving testimony have confirmed that an illegal war is precisely what was carried out by the Bush administration—using the pretext of the 9/11 bombings and by alleging non-existent links between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact