

Special Report

How much proof needed before the truth comes out?

Now seven leaked British documents raise Iraq war questions

By Kevin Zeese

Online Journal Contributing Writer

June 17, 2005—The Downing Street Memo—minutes of a meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair and his advisors that said the US was “fixing” the intelligence to support the Iraq War—was not enough to get the mainstream US media or members of Congress to take the issue seriously. Now there is Downing II, III, IV, V, VI and VII!

As [the evidence](#) mounts, the failure of the media to seriously investigate the issues is baffling. Why aren't they interviewing current and former US military intelligence officials about these reports from the highest levels of British government? Isn't the media supposed to investigate and get the truth for their readers and viewers?

And, how about Congress—shouldn't they be subpoenaing witnesses to testify under oath about pre-war intelligence gathering, the influence Bush administration had on manipulating or misstating intelligence findings and whether intelligence was gathered to report the truth or designed to support a pre-ordained war? The chairman of Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Pat Roberts, has promised to investigate whether intelligence was manipulated by the administration—but that promise remains unfulfilled and last week Knight-Ridder reporter Dick Polman was told it was “still on the back burner.” Maybe it is time to make good on that promise.

How much more information is needed before the truth is sought and reported to the American people?

Here's a summary of the British memos:

[Downing Street I](#): This memorandum is the minutes of a meeting between Britain's top national security officials and Prime Minister Blair on July 23, 2002—eight months before the invasion of Iraq. The document, marked “Secret and strictly personal - UK eyes only,” consists of the official minutes of a briefing given by Richard Dearlove, then-director of Britain's MI-6 (the equivalent of the CIA) who, based on a recent visit to Washington, DC, reported that the Bush administration planned to start a preemptive war against Iraq. By the summer of 2002 President Bush had decided to overthrow Iraq President Saddam Hussein by launching a war. Dearlove stated the war would be “justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD [weapons of mass destruction].” Dearlove continued: “But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.” British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw agreed saying: “It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided.” “But,” he continued, “the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea, and Iran.”

[Downing Street II](#): This memorandum dated July 21, 2002, to the prime minister's cabinet seeks comments on the Iraq War Planning. It discusses how to justify the Iraq war by “creating the conditions necessary to justify government military action, which might include an ultimatum for the return of UN weapons inspectors to Iraq.” It describes US planning as proceeding: “The US Government's military planning for action against Iraq is proceeding apace. But, as yet, it lacks a political framework. In particular, little thought has been given to creating the political conditions for military action, or the

aftermath and how to shape it.” It also reports that Tony Blair agreed to support the Iraq war in a discussion with President Bush in Crawford, Texas, in April: “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 . . .” The memo expressed concern about legality stating it “is necessary to create the conditions in which we could legally support military action.” Regarding legality, the memo notes, “US views of international law vary from that of the UK and the international community. Regime change per se is not a proper basis for military action under international law.” One option to create legality stated was: “It is just possible that an ultimatum could be cast in terms which Saddam would reject (because he is unwilling to accept unfettered access) and which would not be regarded as unreasonable by the international community. However, failing that (or an Iraqi attack) we would be most unlikely to achieve a legal base for military action by January 2003.”

[Downing Street III](#): A memorandum from British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to the prime minister dated March 25, 2002, in preparation for the PM’s visit to Crawford, Texas. Straw begins the memo with a warning: “The rewards from your visit to Crawford will be few. The risks are high, both for you and for the Government.” He notes the lack of support for a war with Iraq in the Parliament and sees the case as challenging to make because “(a) the threat from Iraq and why this has got worse recently; (b) what distinguishes the Iraqi threat from that [of] Iran and North Korea so as to justify military action; (c) the justification for any military action in terms of international law.” He also notes: “there has been no credible evidence to link Iraq with UBL and Al Qaida. Objectively, the threat from Iraq has not worsened as a result of 11 September.” He points out how Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ makes the task more difficult—“A lot of work will now need to be done to delink the three, and to show why military action against Iraq is so much more justified than against Iran and North Korea.” He concludes saying: “A legal justification is a necessary but far from sufficient precondition for military action. We have also to answer the big question—what will this action achieve?”

[Downing Street IV](#): This memorandum, written by Blair political director Peter Ricketts and dated March 22, 2002, raises two concerns regarding supporting the planned US war with Iraq. His first concern: “First, the THREAT. The truth is that what has changed is not the pace of Saddam Hussein’s WMD programmes, but our tolerance of them post-11 September. . . the best survey of Iraq’s WMD programmes will not show much advance in recent years on the nuclear, missile or CW/BW [Chemical Warfare/Biological Warfare] fronts.” He also expresses concerns with other aspects of US claims: “US scrambling to establish a link between Iraq and Al Qaida is so far frankly unconvincing,” the threat “is qualitatively different from the threat posed by other proliferators who are closer to achieving nuclear capability (including Iran),” After looking at the goal of the war he says “It sounds like a grudge between Bush and Saddam.”

[Downing Street V](#): This memorandum from then British Ambassador to the US, Christopher Meyer, dated March 18, 2002, discusses a conversation with Paul Wolfowitz. He told Wolfowitz that a war against Iraq would be a difficult sell in Britain, and more difficult in Europe, and “went through the need to wrongfoot Saddam on the inspectors and the UN SCRs [Security Council Resolutions].”

[Downing Street VI](#): A memorandum to Prime Minister Blair dated March 12, 2002, from British foreign policy advisor David Manning, the purpose of which is to prepare the prime minister for his trip to Crawford, Texas, to meet with President Bush. Regarding Iraq, he reports that Bush is “grateful for your support and has registered you are getting flak.” Manning based his comments on a meeting with Condoleezza Rice. He said the president had not yet found answers to several issues, among them “how to persuade the international opinion that military action against Iraq is necessary and justified.” There was recognition that if Bush could not put together a coalition that the US “could go it alone.”

[Downing Street VII](#): A legal options memorandum—eight pages long—looks at the alternative legal justifications for war—security counsel resolutions, self-defense and humanitarian intervention—and finds all of them lacking.

What do all these leaked, confidential British memos point to? The Bush administration had decided to go to war at least one year before doing so and many months before seeking a resolution from Congress.

The invasion of Iraq was illegal under international law so they tried to create legal justification through manipulation of the United Nations in order to trap Saddam into violating UN resolutions. This also provided the side benefit of making it look like they were seeking a peaceful resolution while at the same time putting in place the machinery for a massive US/UK invasion. The case for war was weak—the link to terrorism particularly al Qaida was poor; Iraq was no more dangerous than other 'axis of evil' countries; Iraq's weapons program for nuclear, bio and chemical weapons was no greater than prior to deciding to go to war and intelligence needed to be 'fixed' in order to justify the war to the public and international community. Finally, these memos indicate that the US planned poorly for the post-invasion occupation of Iraq, greatly underestimating how difficult this part of the military activity would be.

The British memos are certainly producing a lot of smoke—will anyone with credibility and resources do the investigation needed to show us the fire?

Kevin Zeese is director of Democracy Rising. You can comment on this column by visiting his blog on www.DemocracyRising.US.

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