

“NOTHING FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH”? BUSH DISMISSES DOWNING STREET MEMO AS POLITICAL DIRTY TRICK

An internal memo from Blair foreign policy aide Matthew Rycroft detailing a meeting between Prime Minister Tony Blair, his top security advisors, and his Attorney General was leaked in early May and published in the British press. This memo makes a number of assertions about the events leading up to war in Iraq that dispute statements made by President Bush and members of the Administration, including statements on Iraq’s pre-war WMD capacity, whether the U.S. had a plan for post-war Iraq, and whether the timeline for going to war was politicized. Today, President Bush dismissed the memo as a political dirty trick designed to derail Prime Minister Blair’s reelection campaign. Over the weekend, RNC Chairman Ken Mehlman said that the memo “has been discredited by everyone else who has looked at it.” And White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan recently dismissed the contents of this memo as “flat out wrong.” But on issue after issue – from the criteria for the use of military force to the role of the UN to the intelligence on Iraq’s WMD capacity – the facts in the Downing Street memo have been borne out by reality.

MILITARY FORCE WAS THE LAST OPTION?

BRITISH MEMO CLAIM

Timeline Was To Begin “30 Days Before the US Congressional Elections.” The British memo states: “The Defense Secretary said that the US had already begun ‘spikes of activity’ to put pressure on the regime. No decisions had been taken, but he thought the most likely timing in US minds for military action to begin was January, with the timeline beginning 30 days before the US Congressional elections.” [British memo, Sunday Times (London), 5/1/05]

BUSH CLAIM

Bush Claimed He Went To War Because He Was Forced To. “Both of us didn't want to use our military. Nobody wants to commit military into combat. It's the last option. The consequences of committing the military are very difficult. You know, one of the hardest things I do as the president is try to comfort families who have lost a loved one in combat. It's the last option that the president must have.” [Press Conference, 6/6/05]

THE FACTS

Timeline of Iraq War Did Indeed Begin A Month Prior To 2002 Congressional Elections. The President praised the House passage of the Iraq war resolution on October 10th, 2002 and the Senate passage of the Iraq war resolution on October 11th, 2002. He signed the Iraq war resolution on October 16th, 2002. Congressional elections were held on November 5th, 2002. [www.whitehouse.gov, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021011.html>, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021010-5.html>]

THE ROLE OF THE UN

BRITISH MEMO CLAIM

British Memo Stated That Bush Administration Had “No Patience” For UN. “The NSC had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime's record.” [British memo, Sunday Times (London), 5/1/05]

BUSH CLAIM

Use of Force Was Dependent on UN Approval. “...[W]e worked hard to see if we could figure out how to do this peacefully. Put a united front up to Saddam Hussein to say the world speaks and he ignored the world. Remember, 1441 passed the Security Council unanimously.” [Press Conference, 6/6/05]

THE FACTS

Bush and Cheney Made It Plain that UN Was Irrelevant. President Bush made plain yesterday that the United States is willing to take Iraq on alone if the United Nations fails to "show some backbone" by confronting Saddam Hussein. He added: "Make no mistake about it. If we have to deal with the problem, we'll deal with it." Vice President Dick Cheney echoed Bush. "[This is] such an important issue and such an important problem that we will address [it] by ourselves if we have to." [[York Sunday News](#), 9/15/02]

Vote Was "Desirable, Not Mandatory." White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer stated that "...what the president has said is that he believes that a [UN] vote is desirable; it is not mandatory...And so from the president's point of view, we are consulting with nations around the world, as you know, talking to them about the second vote." [White House Press Briefing, 3/4/03]

Shortly After Resolution Was Offered, U.S. Official Said Diplomatic Process Will End. A senior administration official, briefing reporters about the resolution, said, "Win, lose or withdraw, the diplomatic process ends tomorrow." The statement came only hours after France proposed giving Iraq roughly 30 days to comply with inspections. [[NYT](#), 3/17/03]

THE FACTS WEREN'T FIXED? WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

BRITISH MEMO CLAIM

British Memo Disputed WMD Capacity of Iraq. "But the case was thin," the memo states. "Saddam was not threatening his neighbors, and his WMD capacity was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran." [[LAT](#), 5/12/05]

BUSH CLAIM

Bush Repeatedly Claimed Hussein Had Weapons of Mass Destruction. In October of 2002, Bush stated that "[Iraq] possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons... Saddam Hussein is a homicidal dictator who is addicted to weapons of mass destruction." He continued by saying "Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists." [Bush remarks, 10/7/02]

THE FACTS

2001 CIA Report Said Iraq Was Not Reconstituting WMD Programs. According to an unclassified CIA report sent to Congress in February 2001, Iraq was not reconstituting its WMD programs. The report explicitly said, "We do not have any direct evidence that Iraq has used the period since Desert Fox to reconstitute its WMD programs..." [[Defense Daily](#), 2/27/01]

Defense Intelligence Agency Concluded In 2002 That "No Reliable Information" Existed On Iraqi Stockpiles. In September 2002, the Defense Intelligence Agency issued a classified assessment of Iraq's chemical weapons. It concluded: 'There is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons...' [[U.S. News & World Report](#), 6/9/03]

Four Days Before Bush Presented His Case For War The NSC Asked For New Intelligence To Bolster WMD Claims. On Jan. 24, 2003, four days before President Bush delivered his State of the Union address presenting the case for war against Iraq, the National Security Council staff put out a call for new intelligence to bolster claims that Saddam Hussein possessed nuclear, chemical and biological weapons or programs. Robert Walpole, then the national intelligence officer for strategic and nuclear programs, would later tell investigators that "the NSC believed the nuclear case was weak," according to a 500-page report released last year by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. [5/22/05]

Bush And Powell Used Intelligence In Public Addresses That Was Being Questioned By Intelligence Officials. The President's commission on intelligence and the Senate panel report show that as war approached, many U.S. intelligence analysts were internally questioning almost every major piece of prewar intelligence about Hussein's alleged weapons programs. These included claims that Iraq was trying to obtain uranium in Africa for its nuclear program, had mobile labs for producing biological weapons, ran an active chemical weapons program and possessed unmanned aircraft that could deliver weapons of mass destruction. All these claims were made by Bush or then-Secretary of State Colin L. Powell in public addresses even though, the reports made clear, they had yet to be verified by U.S. intelligence agencies. [Washington Post, 5/22/05]

THE FACTS WEREN'T FIXED? MANIPULATION OF PRE-WAR INTELLIGENCE

BRITISH MEMO CLAIM

Intelligence and Facts Were "Fixed Around the Policy." The British memo stated there had been a "perceptible shift in attitude. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and [weapons of mass destruction]. But the intelligence and the facts were being fixed around the policy." [LAT, 5/12/05]

BUSH CLAIM

In March 2003, Bush Claimed He Had Not Made Decision To Go to War. Well, we're still in the final stages of diplomacy... The only thing I can do is assure the loved ones of those who wear our uniform that if we have to go to war, if war is upon us because Saddam Hussein has made that choice... I hope we don't have to go to war. But if we go to war we will disarm Iraq." [Bush, 3/6/03]

THE FACTS

Intelligence Community Analysts Detail Environment of Intense Pressure. The CIA's independent review on U.S. intelligence on Iraq concluded that "Requests for reporting and analysis of [Iraq's links to al Qaeda] were steady and heavy in the period leading up to the war, creating significant pressure on the Intelligence Community to find evidence that supported a connection." The CIA Ombudsman concurred with this conclusion, stating to members of the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence that "... 'the hammering' was harder than any he had previously witnessed... several analysts he spoke with mentioned pressure." [Kerr Report, July 2003; Additional Views, Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence on Iraq, 9/7/04]

Manipulation of Pre-War Intelligence Still An Open Question. During the public release of the Senate Intelligence Committee Report on pre-war intelligence, Senator Rockefeller stated that, despite the unanimous support for the report, there were still "areas of disagreement – there are, especially on the question of whether the Administration pressured the intelligence community to reach predetermined conclusions. And there is real frustration over what's not in this report, since the whole question of whether intelligence was hyped or misused by policymakers has been relegated to a Phase II effort." [Statement by Senator Jay Rockefeller, 7/9/04]