

be Resolution 1441 **after** Iraq had **accepted** the return of UN weapons inspectors. The negotiation and adoption of the Resolution delayed the re-entry of the weapons inspectors.

The intended purpose of the Resolution was actually to derail the entry of weapons inspectors into Iraq. The Resolution was supposed to be objectionable - by imposing tougher inspection rights on Iraq, and by threatening Iraq with dire consequences if Baghdad failed to cooperate' - so that the Iraqis would once again shut the door on the inspectors. (For more documentation on this, see Milan Rai, *Regime Unchanged* and *War Plan Iraq*.)

The Resolution was designed to be refused.

### THE STRAW/BLAIR GAMBIT

This strategy had its British roots in the July 2002 meeting, when Jack Straw said: 'We should work up a plan for an ultimatum to Saddam to allow back in the UN weapons inspectors.' And Tony Blair added 'that it would make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refused to allow in the UN inspectors.'

But Iraq refused to refuse the inspectors, and Hans Blix and his colleagues were able to do valuable work. They were well on the way to discovering that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction (the ultimate White House nightmare scenario) when they were ordered out of the country on 17 March 2003.

### CONCLUSIONS

The July 2002 memo confirms what was long known:

**that the British Government had decided on war by mid-2002;** that the evidence and intelligence was 'fixed around the policy' rather than the evidence determining the policy; **that dislodging Saddam Hussein (misleadingly referred to as 'regime change') rather than disarmament was the key goal from the very beginning;** that UN inspectors were seen from the outset as a public relations device rather than as a means of disarmament; **that Britain (and the US) were trying to create a situation in which Baghdad would refuse to re-admit the inspectors, in order to create a political and legal justification for a war they were already committed to for other reasons;** that Tony Blair and his ministers lied through their teeth.

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# SECRET MEMO

## The Secret 23 July 2002 Downing Street Memo: The Inevitable War and The Dispensable Inspectors **JNV Anti-War Briefing 82 (23 May 2005)**

On 1 May 2005, *The Sunday Times* published a highly revealing memo of a top secret meeting in Downing Street in July 2002, a crucial meeting which set Britain down the path to war with Iraq. (The text of the memo, and more commentary, is on the Justice Not Vengeance website <[www.j-n-v.org](http://www.j-n-v.org)>.)

The memo establishes that war against Iraq was seen as **'inevitable'** by July 2002; that the British government was **committed** to participating in that war; that the government hoped to secure political support for what it called 'regime change' by **manipulating** the political environment; that the chief means of doing so was to issue an **ultimatum** to Baghdad which would provoke an Iraqi **refusal** to re-admit UN weapons inspectors.

### WHO WAS THERE

The 23 July 2002 meeting involved the major decision-makers in the drive to war, including **Tony Blair**; **Jack Straw** (Foreign Secretary); **Lord Goldsmith** (the Attorney General); and **Sir Richard Dearlove**, the head of MI6 (the British equivalent of the CIA), referred to as 'C'. The minutes which have been leaked were written for another participant, **David Manning**, Tony Blair's Foreign Policy Adviser (equivalent to the US National Security Advisor), by his assistant, Matthew Rycroft.

### INTELLIGENCE BEING FIXED AROUND THE POLICY

'C', the head of MI6, the British equivalent of the CIA, said that after visting Washington, **'Military action was now seen as inevitable.'** This is July 2002. He went on: 'Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.'

The intelligence chief remarked that in the US, **'the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.'**

### IRAQ NOT A THREAT

Jack Straw, Foreign Secretary, said, 'the case was thin': 'Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and **his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran.'**

## USING THE INSPECTORS

Straw continued: 'We should work up a plan for an ultimatum to Saddam to allow back in the UN weapons inspectors.' Why? 'This would also help with the legal justification for the use of force.'

Tony Blair emphasised this: 'The Prime Minister said that **it would make a big difference politically and legally** if Saddam **refused** to allow in the UN inspectors.'

## REGIME CHANGE

The Attorney General 'said that the desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action.'

Tony Blair countered that '**Regime change and WMD were linked** in the sense that it was the regime that was producing the WMD.'

He added: '**If the political context were right**, people would support **regime change**.'

## WAR IS INEVITABLE - JULY 2002

In the conclusions of the meeting, it was minuted that, '**We should work on the assumption that the UK would take part** in any military action.'

Tony Blair said, on 23 July 2002, 'The two key issues were whether the military plan worked and whether we had the political strategy to give the military plan the space to work.'

## INEVITABILITY

The key issue was not how the world could disarm Iraq - either by inspections or by war. The key issues were whether the war plan would work, and if the 'political context' could be created in which the public would 'support regime change' and give the military 'the space to work'.

The day after this meeting concluded that 'the UK would take part in any military action', Tony Blair said in the House of Commons, 'We have not got to the stage of military action. If we do get to that stage, at any point in time, we will, of course, make sure that Parliament is properly consulted' (col 975) '**...we have not yet reached the point of decision**' (col 980).

## USING THE INSPECTORS

War was certain. It was just a matter of shaping public opinion, and drawing up good plans for battle.

In this strategy, the inspectors would be a critical tool - not a tool for disarmament, but a tool for public relations.

## INSPECTIONS: THE WHITE HOUSE NIGHTMARE

The US/UK strategy was already clear in July 2002. We pointed out then, in Briefing 19, that, in the White House, UN weapons inspectors were seen as a potential **problem** rather than a **solution**:

'Key figures in the White House believe that demands on Saddam to re-admit United Nations weapons inspectors should be set so high that **he would fail to meet them** unless he provided officials with total freedom.' (Times, 16 Feb. 2002, p. 19) A US intelligence official has said the White House '**will not take yes for an answer**'. (Guardian, 14 Feb. 2002, p. 1)

According to one former US official, '**The hawks' nightmare is that inspectors will be admitted**, will not be terribly vigorous and not find anything. Economic sanctions would be eased, and **the U.S. will be unable to act...** and the closer it comes to the 2004 elections the more difficult it will be to take the military route.' (Washington Post, 15 Apr. 2002, p. A01)

'The more hawkish members of the US defence department are said to favour direct military action on Iraq, **which would be more difficult if weapons inspectors were on the ground**.' (FT, 5 Mar. 2002, p. 10)

## THE WHITE HOUSE NIGHTMARE SCENARIO

US Secretary of State Colin Powell (allegedly a 'dove') made it clear that the inspectors were irrelevant: 'US policy is that, **regardless of what the inspectors do**, the people of Iraq and the people of the region would be better off with a different regime in Baghdad. The United States reserves its option to do whatever it believes might be appropriate to see if there can be a regime change.' The issue of the inspectors was a '**separate and distinct and different**' matter from the US position on Saddam Hussein's leadership, said Powell. (Guardian, 6 May 2002)

The 'principals' in the Bush Administration '**fear that Saddam is working his own UN angle for the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq, whose presence could make the US look like a bully if it invades.**' ' "**The White House's biggest fear** is that UN weapons inspectors will be allowed to go in," says a top Senate foreign policy aide.' (Time magazine, 13 May 2002, p. 38)

## IRAQ REFUSES TO REFUSE

Tony Blair defended himself on 1 May 2005: 'The idea that we had decided definitively for military action at that stage is wrong, and disproved by the fact that several months later we went back to the UN to get a final resolution, and actually the conflict didn't begin until four months after that.'

But the US and UK went to the Security Council for what turned out to