

Secret Downing Street Memo

The following are excerpts from a secret document reporting on a meeting of British Prime Minister Blair and his top security advisors, on the subject of Iraq; it also reports on a visit to Washington by Richard Dearlove, the head of MI-6, identified only as "C." The meeting took place July 23, 2002, well before the Iraq War. The document was leaked to the London Times, and published on May 1, 2005. The memo was written by Matthew Rycroft, then a Downing Street foreign policy aide.

SECRET AND STRICTLY PERSONAL—UK EYES ONLY

From: Matthew Rycroft

Date: 23 July 2002

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cc: Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Attorney-General, Sir Richard Wilson, John Scarlett, Francis Richards, CDS, C, Jonathan Powell, Sally Morgan, Alastair Campbell

Iraq: Prime Minister's Meeting, 23 July

Copy addressees and you met the Prime Minister on 23 July to discuss Iraq.

This record is extremely sensitive. No further copies should be made. It should be shown only to those with a genuine need to know its contents.

John Scarlett summarised the intelligence and latest JIC assessment. Saddam's regime was tough and based on ex-

treme fear. The only way to overthrow it was likely to be by massive military action. Saddam was worried and expected an attack, probably by air and land, but he was not convinced that it would be immediate or overwhelming. His regime expected their neighbours to line up with the U.S. Saddam knew that regular army morale was poor. Real support for Saddam among the public was probably narrowly based.

C reported on his recent talks in Washington. There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy. The NSC had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime's record. There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action. . . .

The Defence Secretary said that the U.S. 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 U.S. minds for military action to begin was January, with the timeline beginning 30 days before the U.S. Congressional elections.

The Foreign Secretary said he would discuss this with Colin Powell this week. It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided. But the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran. We should work up a plan for an ultimatum to Saddam to allow back in the UN weapons inspectors. This would also help with the legal justification for the use of force. . . .