



## U.S.

### Bush asked to explain UK war memo

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**WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Eighty-nine Democratic members of the U.S. Congress last week sent President George W. Bush a letter asking for explanation of a secret British memo that said "intelligence and facts were being fixed" to support the Iraq war in mid-2002.**

The timing of the memo was well before the president brought the issue to Congress for approval.

The Times of London newspaper published the memo -- actually minutes of a high-level meeting on Iraq held July 23, 2002 -- on May 1.

British officials did not dispute the document's authenticity, and Michael Boyce, then Britain's Chief of Defense Staff, told the paper that Britain had not then made a decision to follow the United States to war, but it would have been "irresponsible" not to prepare for the possibility.

The White House has not yet responded to queries about the congressional letter, which was released on May 6.

The letter, initiated by Rep. John Conyers, ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, said the memo "raises troubling new questions regarding the legal justifications for the war as well as the integrity of your own administration..."

"While various individuals have asserted this to be the case before, including Paul O'Neill, former U.S. Treasury Secretary, and Richard Clarke, a former National Security Council official, they have been previously dismissed by your administration," the letter said.

But, the letter said, when the document was leaked Prime Minister Tony Blair's spokesman called it "nothing new."

In addition to Blair, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon, Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, MI6 chief Richard Dearlove and others attended the meeting.

A British official identified as "C" said that he had returned from a meeting in Washington and that "military action was now seen as inevitable" by U.S. officials.

"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 U.N. route, and no enthusiasm for publishing

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material on the Iraqi regime's record. There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action."

The memo further discussed the military options under consideration by the United States, along with Britain's possible role.

It quoted Hoon as saying the United States had not finalized a timeline, but that it would likely begin "30 days before the U.S. congressional elections," culminating with the actual attack in January 2003.

"It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided," the memo said.

"But the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbors, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran."

The British officials determined to push for an ultimatum for Saddam to allow U.N. weapons inspectors back into Iraq to "help with the legal justification for the use of force ... despite U.S. resistance."

Britain's attorney general, Peter Goldsmith, advised the group that "the desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action" and two of three possible legal bases -- self-defense and humanitarian intervention -- could not be used.

The third was a U.N. Security Council resolution, which Goldsmith said "would be difficult."

Blair thought that "it would make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refused to allow in the U.N. inspectors."

"If the political context were right, people would support regime change," the memo said.

Later, the memo said, Blair would work to convince Bush that they should pursue the ultimatum with Saddam even though "many in the U.S. did not think it worth going down the ultimatum route."