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**The Sunday Times - Britain**  
**May 01, 2005**

*(copied from [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1593607\\_1,00.html](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1593607_1,00.html))*

**The secret Downing Street memo**

**SECRET AND STRICTLY PERSONAL - UK EYES ONLY**

DAVID MANNING  
From: Matthew Rycroft  
Date: 23 July 2002  
S 195 /02

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 extreme 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 US. 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.

CDS said that military planners would brief CENTCOM on 1-2 August, Rumsfeld on 3 August and Bush on 4 August.

The two broad US options were:

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(a) Generated Start. A slow build-up of 250,000 US troops, a short (72 hour) air campaign, then a move up to Baghdad from the south. Lead time of 90 days (30 days preparation plus 60 days deployment to Kuwait).

(b) Running Start. Use forces already in theatre (3 x 6,000), continuous air campaign, initiated by an Iraqi casus belli. Total lead time of 60 days with the air campaign beginning even earlier. A hazardous option.

The US saw the UK (and Kuwait) as essential, with basing in Diego Garcia and Cyprus critical for either option. Turkey and other Gulf states were also important, but less vital. The three main options for UK involvement were:

(i) Basing in Diego Garcia and Cyprus, plus three SF squadrons.

(ii) As above, with maritime and air assets in addition.

(iii) As above, plus a land contribution of up to 40,000, perhaps with a discrete role in Northern Iraq entering from Turkey, tying down two Iraqi divisions.

The Defence 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.

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.

The Attorney-General said that the desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action. There were three possible legal bases: self-defence, humanitarian intervention, or UNSC authorisation. The first and second could not be the base in this case. Relying on UNSCR 1205 of three years ago would be difficult. The situation might of course change.

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 and WMD were linked in the sense that it was the regime that was producing the WMD. There were different strategies for dealing with Libya and Iran. If the political context were right, people would support regime change. 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.

On the first, CDS said that we did not know yet if the US battleplan was workable. The military were continuing to ask lots of questions.

For instance, what were the consequences, if Saddam used WMD on day one, or if Baghdad did not collapse and urban warfighting began? You said that Saddam could also use his WMD on Kuwait. Or on Israel, added the Defence Secretary.

The Foreign Secretary thought the US would not go ahead with a military plan unless convinced that it was a winning strategy. On this, US and UK interests converged. But on the political strategy, there could be US/UK differences. Despite US resistance, we should explore discreetly the ultimatum. Saddam would continue to play hard-ball with the UN.

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John Scarlett assessed that Saddam would allow the inspectors back in only when he thought the threat of military action was real.

The Defence Secretary said that if the Prime Minister wanted UK military involvement, he would need to decide this early. He cautioned that many in the US did not think it worth going down the ultimatum route. It would be important for the Prime Minister to set out the political context to Bush.

Conclusions:

(a) We should work on the assumption that the UK would take part in any military action. But we needed a fuller picture of US planning before we could take any firm decisions. CDS should tell the US military that we were considering a range of options.

(b) The Prime Minister would revert on the question of whether funds could be spent in preparation for this operation.

(c) CDS would send the Prime Minister full details of the proposed military campaign and possible UK contributions by the end of the week.

(d) The Foreign Secretary would send the Prime Minister the background on the UN inspectors, and discreetly work up the ultimatum to Saddam.

He would also send the Prime Minister advice on the positions of countries in the region especially Turkey, and of the key EU member states.

(e) John Scarlett would send the Prime Minister a full intelligence update.

(f) We must not ignore the legal issues: the Attorney-General would consider legal advice with FC0/MOD legal advisers.

(I have written separately to commission this follow-up work.)

MATTHEW RYCROFT

(Rycroft was a Downing Street foreign policy aide)

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**Major Players:  
the officials present at the secret meeting**

Below is a breakdown of the various individuals mentioned in the memo - all of whom were present during the meeting with the Prime Minister and subsequently received copies of these minutes.

- Foreign Policy Advisor - David Manning
- Matthew Rycroft - aide to Manning, wrote up the minutes of the meeting.
- Defence Secretary - Geoff Hoon
- Foreign Secretary - Jack Straw
- Attorney-General - Lord Goldsmith
- Cabinet Secretary - Sir Richard Wilson
- Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee - John Scarlett
- Director of GCHQ - Francis Richards, head of the UK's "signals intelligence establishment", an intelligence agency, which reports to the Foreign Secretary
- Director of SIS (aka MI6) - Sir Richard Dearlove, identified as 'C' in the meeting minutes, heads the UK's foreign intelligence service
- Chief of the Defence Staff - Admiral Sir Michael Boyce
- Chief of Staff - Jonathan Powell
- Head of Strategy - Alastair Campbell
- Director of Political & Govt Relations - Sally Morgan

(We will be posting a revised version of this list with descriptions of the various roles and their US equivalents soon.)

Though it is sometimes difficult to equate a given official to his or her US counterpart, it's clear that this was a meeting at the highest level within the UK government.

Attendees included three members of the Cabinet (Prime Minister Blair, the Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary), the nation's most senior bureaucrat (the Cabinet Secretary), three out of the four top people from the UK intelligence community (the JIC Chair and the heads of MI6 and GCHQ), the head of the armed forces and four of the innermost circle of the PM's political advisors.

Note: The relatively junior level of Rycroft bears no relevance to the contents of the minutes, which summarize what the principals said at the meeting to each other.

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**Quotes regarding the document's credibility:**

"The newly disclosed memo, which was first reported by the Sunday Times of London, hasn't been disavowed by the British government. The British Embassy in Washington did not respond to requests for comment.

A former senior U.S. official called it "an absolutely accurate description of what transpired" during the senior British intelligence officer's visit to Washington. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

A White House official said the administration wouldn't comment on leaked British documents..."

- Memo: Bush manipulated Iraq intel, Newsday, May 9, 2005  
<http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/nation/ny-uswmd074251820may09,0,7225183.story?coll=ny-uspolitics-headlines>

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"British officials did not dispute the document's authenticity..."

- Bush asked to explain UK war memo,  
CNN, May 12, 2005  
<http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/05/11/britain.war.memo/>

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"Since Smith's report was published May 1, Blair's Downing Street office has not disputed the document's authenticity. Asked about them Wednesday, a Blair spokesman said the report added nothing significant..."

- Indignation Grows in U.S. Over British Prewar Documents,  
LA Times, May 12, 2005  
<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/latimes/836819801.html?did=836819801&FMT=ABS&FMTS=FT&date=May+12%2C+2005&author=John+Daniszewski&desc=The+World%3B+Indignation+Grows+in+U.S.+Over+British+Prewar+Documents%3B+Critics+of+Bush+call+them+proof+that+he+and+Blair+never+saw+diplomacy+as+an+option+with+Hussein.>

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