

Secret British Memo Shows Bush Tampered with Iraq Intelligence

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A top secret British memorandum dated 23 July 2002 was leaked in the run-up to yesterday's parliamentary elections in the UK (which Blair won, though his Labour Party was much weakened by public disgust with such shenanigans as the below). I mirror the memo below, from the Times Online site. It summarizes a report to Blair and others in the British government by Sir Brian Dearlove (This is the press release when he was appointed in 1999: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/286128.stm). The head of MI6, or the foreign intelligence service of the UK, is known as "C."

Here is the smoking gun:

"C [Dearlove] 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"

It is not surprising on the face of it that Bush had decided on the Iraq war by summer of 2002. It is notable that Dearlove noticed a change in views on the subject from earlier visits. By summer of 2002, the Afghanistan war had wound down and al-Qaeda was on the run, so Bush no longer felt vulnerable and was ready to go forward with his long-cherished project of an Iraq War. What is notable is that all this was not what Bush was telling us.

Bush was lying to the American people at the time and saying that no final decision had been made on the war.

Godfrey Sperling of the Christian Science Monitor could write on August 27, 2002, "Indeed, Bush has said he welcomes a 'debate' on Iraq from those in Congress and from the public. But he has made it clear that he will make his decision based on what his intelligence people are telling him."

But Dearlove's report makes it clear that Bush had already decided absolutely on a war already the previous month, and that he had managed to give British intelligence the firm impression that he intended to shape the intelligence to support such a war. So poor Sperling was lied to twice. Any "debate" was meaningless if the president had already decided. And he wasn't waiting to make his decision in the light of the intelligence. He was going to tell the intelligence professionals to what conclusion they had to come. "But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

Why would it even be necessary to turn the intelligence analysts into “weasels” who would have to tell Bush what he wanted to hear?

It was necessary because the “justification” of the “conjunction” of Weapons of Mass Destruction and terrorism was virtually non-existent.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw admitted it at the meeting: “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.”

So the “justification” would have to be provided by “fixing” the intelligence around the policy. Bush was just going to make things up, since the realities did not actually justify his planned war! The British cabinet sat around and admitted to themselves that

a) there was no justification for the war into which they were allowing themselves to be dragged and

b) that the war would be gotten up through Goebbels-like techniques!

It is even worse. British Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith was at the meeting. He had to think up a justification for the war in international law. Britain is in Europe, and Europe takes international law seriously. You could have war crimes trials. (Remember that Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet almost got tried in Spain for killing 5000 people in the 1970s).

Goldsmith was as nervous as a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs: “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 dryness of the wit is unbearable. “The desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action”! Naked aggression is illegal, he could have said. Then he reviews the three possible grounds for a war. You could have a war if Iraq attacked you. Iraq had not attacked the US. Or you could have a war if it was a humanitarian intervention (e.g. under the genocide convention). But Saddam’s major campaigns of death had been a decade before. Or you could get a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing the war, in accordance with the UN charter. But Goldsmith makes it clear he thought you would need a new resolution, that the old ones wouldn’t work for this purpose.

The Attorney General of the United Kingdom thought the reports Dearlove and Straw were bringing back from Washington reeked of an illegal war. People who plan out illegal wars are war criminals. He knew this. He was stuck, however. They were all stuck.

The man from Connecticut with the Crawford ranch had decided to cut down some trees. And they were all hostages in his guest house and he was going to put chain saws in their hands and make them help, whether they liked it or not. Goldsmith’s hands trembled as he reached out for the chainsaw rig. He saw himself and the others sitting in the Hague, one day, facing the same judges that Milosevic harangued. Charged.

But it is a long way from Crawford to the Hague. The man from Connecticut with the cowboy boots and the fake twang would get away with it. They would all get away with it.

But people would know they had lied.

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