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How regime change was dressed up as disarmament

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How regime change was dressed up as disarmament

In the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq, the Prime Minister continually stated that his objective was the disarmament of Iraq as laid down in Security Council resolutions, and not regime change.

For example, on 25 February 2003, he told the House of Commons:

“I detest his [Saddam Hussein’s] regime – I hope most people do – but even now, he could save it by complying with the UN’s demand. Even now, we are prepared to go the extra step to achieve disarmament peacefully.”

In fact, a year earlier, the Prime Minister had already offered his wholehearted support to President Bush in taking military action to overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

This is proved by official documents from March 2002 leaked to journalist, Michael Smith, which were the subject of articles by him in the Daily Telegraph on 18 September 2004. These documents are now in the public domain, and facsimiles of them are on my [website](#).

The Prime Minister’s commitment to regime change as early as March 2002 is confirmed by other documents leaked to Michael Smith in the spring of 2005. These are a memo containing minutes of a high powered meeting on Iraq, chaired by the Prime Minister on 23 July 2002 ([published](#) in the Sunday Times on 1 May 2005) and a Cabinet Office paper prepared for this meeting ([published](#) in the Sunday Times on 12 June 2005).

(The memo on the meeting of 23 July 2002 has gained considerable notoriety in the US, where it is known as the Downing Street memo, because Sir Richard Dearlove, the head of MI6, is minuted as saying, in a report on recent talks in Washington:

“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.”

For obvious reasons, the last sentence has been a boon to US opponents of the war.)

More recently, the Prime Minister’s commitment to regime change in March 2002 has been confirmed by Sir Christopher Meyer in his book *DC Confidential*. Sir Christopher was British Ambassador in Washington at the time.

The story begins ...

“I said [to Condoleeza Rice] that **you would not budge in your support for regime change** but you had to manage a press, a Parliament and a public opinion that was very different than anything in the States [my emphasis].”

These are the words of Sir David Manning in a [memo](#) to the Prime Minister on 14 March 2002, when he was the Prime Minister’s Foreign Policy adviser. Sir David was reporting on discussions

in Washington with Condoleeza Rice, who was then President Bush's National Security adviser.

In other words, in March 2002 the US administration was given an assurance that the Prime Minister was unflinching in his commitment to regime change in Iraq, and not merely to its disarmament in accordance with Security Council resolutions. Since Sir David remained the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy adviser after writing this memo (and was subsequently promoted to be British Ambassador to Washington), it can be taken for granted that Sir David had accurately transmitted the Prime Minister's view to the US administration.

The Prime Minister's unflinching commitment to regime change in March 2002 is confirmed by another [memo](#), this one from the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Christopher Meyer, to Sir David himself. This reported on a conversation with Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Defense Secretary, on 17 March 2002. The next day, Sir Christopher wrote to Sir David:

“I opened by sticking very closely to the script that you used with Condi Rice. **We backed regime change**, but the plan had to be clever and failure was not an option. It would be a tough sell for us domestically, and probably tougher elsewhere in Europe [my emphasis].”

Parliament not told

Of course, neither Parliament nor the public was told at the time, or ever, that “we backed regime change”. On the contrary, on many occasions in the following 12 months, the Prime Minister specifically denied that “we backed regime change”.

For example, when he launched the September dossier in the House of Commons on 24 September 2002, he was asked if regime change was his objective. He [replied](#):

“Regime change in Iraq would be a wonderful thing. That is not the purpose of our action; our purpose is to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction ...”

Speaking on Radio Monte Carlo on 14 November 2002, he [said](#):

“So far as our objective, it is disarmament, not regime change – that is our objective I have got no doubt either that the purpose of our challenge from the United Nations is disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, it is not regime change.”

On 25 February 2003, he [told](#) the House of Commons that Saddam Hussein could stay in power if he gave up his proscribed weapons:

“I detest his regime – I hope most people do – but even now, he could save it by complying with the UN's demand. Even now, we are prepared to go the extra step to achieve disarmament peacefully.”

On 18 March 2003, in proposing the resolution for war, he [told](#) the House of Commons:

“I have never put the justification for action as regime change. We have to act within the terms set out in resolution 1441 – that is our legal base.”

Deception on a par with Suez

The memos by Manning and Meyer prove that the Prime Minister's misleading of Parliament on Iraq was much more fundamental than merely exaggerating intelligence (which has been meticulously documented by Glen Rangwala and Dan Plesch in [A Case to Answer](#)). They prove that his objective from the outset was regime change and that he dressed it up as disarmament in order to manipulate parliament (in particular, the parliamentary Labour Party) into supporting military action.

The impression was given to the British public in the autumn of 2002 that the Prime Minister

had persuaded President Bush to modify his position from regime change to disarmament under UN auspices. In reality, from the outset he shared the President's objective of regime change, but persuaded the President to co-operate in dressing it up as disarmament under UN auspices, in order to establish a *casus belli* that would be palatable to the parliamentary Labour Party.

Taking the "UN route" in the autumn of 2002 was, in reality, the central element in a strategy to, in Sir David Manning's words, "manage a press, a Parliament and a public opinion" into supporting military action with the objective of changing the regime in Iraq.

This was a deception on a par with Eden's prior to Suez.

Cover from the UN

Four of the six leaked documents from March 2002 are memos, one by Jack Straw (to the Prime Minister) and the other three by officials. They all take it for granted that Government policy is to support the US in effecting regime change by military means. There is little or no discussion in them of the pros and cons of regime change, or of Britain's taking part in the military action alongside the US to effect regime change. The underlying assumption is that the US is going to take military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and that Britain will take part in this action. The central concern in the memos is one of presentation, that is, how to dress up the project in order to secure public and parliamentary support for it.

This doesn't mean that it was 100% certain in March 2002 that Britain was going to take military action against Iraq, because (a) it wasn't 100% certain that the US was going to take military action, and (b) the selling process in Britain might have failed dramatically.

The selling process might have gone wrong in a number of ways. For example, Robin Cook might have resigned after the publication of the Government dossier in September 2002 and, with the authority of a former Foreign Secretary, said that the dossier was "one-sided, dogmatic and unqualified" and "bore no relation in tone to any of the intelligence assessments that I saw" (as he [did](#) in the House of Commons on 20 July 2004) – in which case it would have been very difficult for Blair to get British troops into battle against Iraq six months later.

The selling process might have failed if the US had not agreed to go down the "UN route". "UN cover", to use Jack Straw's phrase (quoted in Christopher Meyer's memoirs - see below), was an essential ingredient in the selling process in Britain.

This was not because the Prime Minister had scruples about acting contrary to the UN Charter, which forbids the use of force, except (a) in self-defence after being attacked, or (b) with the specific authorisation of the Security Council. After all, as we will see, the Attorney General eventually dreamed up a fairy story that said that the Security Council had already authorised the military action of March 2003 in November 1990. What is more, as we will also see, the US/UK contemplated taking military action in response to an invented Iraqi attack.

No, "UN cover" was required in order to sell the project in Britain, particularly to the parliamentary Labour Party. The ideal "UN cover" would have been specific authorisation by the Security Council of military action against Iraq in March 2003. This was undoubtedly the best way of securing support for military action in Britain, and of broadening international support for it.

In the end, it wasn't possible to get specific authorisation, but the pretence that it would have been possible to get it, if it hadn't been for France threatening to use its veto, was sufficient to keep the parliamentary Labour Party onside for military action.

US/UK blocks inspection

There was a good deal of circumstantial evidence in the months prior to the invasion of Iraq that the US/UK were not going to settle for the disarmament of Iraq in accordance with Security

Council resolutions. This began with their refusal to allow UN weapons inspections to restart in September 2002.

UNSCOM inspectors had been forced out of Iraq in December 1998 by Clinton and Blair. They had to be pulled out for their own safety, because the US/UK were about to embark on a bombing campaign against Iraq, ostensibly because Iraq was refusing to co-operate with the inspectors – which wasn't true. Understandably, after the bombing, Iraq refused to allow inspectors back in again.

Nearly 4 years later, on 16 September 2002, Iraq stated its willingness to admit UNMOVIC weapons inspectors. Up to then, the US/UK had been clamouring for Iraq to do just that. But, when Iraq said Yes, the US/UK refused to take Yes for an answer. Other members of the Security Council, for example, France and Russia, were in favour of inspection beginning right away, but the US/UK opposed this. See, for example, the BBC report of 20 September 2002 [here](#).

On 19 September 2002, US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, gave evidence to the House of Representatives International Relations Committee and was asked what the administration would do “if, within the Security Council, some of the permanent representatives, France, Russia, China, would insist on proceeding with inspections under the current existing UN regime”. He [replied](#):

“We would oppose it. We would oppose it. ... And if somebody tried to move the team in now, we would find ways to thwart that.”

Remember that around this time, the British Government published its dossier on Iraq's “weapons of mass destruction” and, in presenting it to Parliament on 24 September 2002, the Prime Minister warned the British public of a growing danger from these weapons, [telling](#) the House of Commons:

“... [Saddam Hussein's] chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programme is not an historic left-over from 1998. The inspectors are not needed to clean up the old remains. His weapons of mass destruction programme is active, detailed and growing.”

Despite this allegedly growing threat, at the same time Blair and his friends in Washington were actively preventing UN inspectors from re-entering Iraq. This was not the action of someone who believed that Iraq's proscribed weapons posed a threat, let alone a growing threat, nor was it the action of someone committed to disarming Iraq by inspection.

The reason given at the time for this superficially inexplicable behaviour was that the inspection regime prescribed in existing Security Council resolutions wasn't tough enough and that there had to be a new resolution laying down tougher conditions. This makes no sense, since the presence of inspectors on the ground, even inspectors with restrictions on their movement, would obviously render the production and deployment of proscribed weapons more difficult. As such, it would have been some form of constraint on what the Prime Minister said was the growing threat from Iraq's proscribed weapons. Yet, the Prime Minister worked to stop this constraint being applied.

The sensible course of action in these circumstances for someone committed to disarmament by inspection was to send the inspectors in as soon as possible and to lay down tougher conditions later, if necessary. Because the US/UK prevented this happening, two months' inspection time was lost – and Iraq had two more months to produce and deploy lethal weapons, if we are to believe what the Prime Minister said at the time.

Stopping inspectors entering Iraq in September 2002 made little sense if the Prime Minister's objective was the disarmament of Iraq by inspection. It made no sense at all if the danger from

Iraq's proscribed weapons was growing.

Why block inspection?

So what were the US/UK up to in blocking inspection? The clue is in Sir David Manning's [memo](#) to the Prime Minister, where he writes that "renwed refused [sic] by Saddam to accept unfettered inspections would be a powerful argument" for military action. In similar vein, Sir Christopher Meyer reported in his [memo](#) to Manning that, having assured Paul Wolfowitz that "we backed regime change", he told him:

"The US could go it alone if it wanted to. But if it wanted to act with partners, there had to be a strategy for building support for military action against Saddam. I then went through the need to wrongfoot Saddam on the inspectors ..."

The hope was that the Security Council could be persuaded to prescribe an inspection regime that was so unpalatable to Saddam Hussein that he would refuse to allow inspectors in – which would, in Sir David's words, be "a powerful argument" for military action. In other words, Plan A was that UN inspectors would never enter Iraq again, that Saddam Hussein would refuse them entry, and by so doing provide a *casus belli*.

That this was Plan A is confirmed by the [minutes](#) of the meeting of 23 July 2002. This meeting was a very high-powered affair: those present included the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, the Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), John Scarlett, the head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove (aka C) and the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), Admiral Boyce. The Prime Minister's closest political advisers – Alistair Campbell, Jonathan Powell and Sally Morgan – were also present.

Jack Straw proposed to the meeting:

"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 Prime Minister concurred:

"... it would make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refused to allow in the UN inspectors. ... If the political context were right, people would support regime change."

The disarmament of Iraq by peaceful means required UN inspectors being on the ground in Iraq. Yet, here the Prime Minister is expressing the hope that Saddam Hussein will **refuse** to allow UN inspectors in. It doesn't take a genius to work out that, contrary to his countless public assertions, he wasn't interested in the disarmament of Iraq by peaceful means. Had the latter been his objective, he would have been hoping against hope that Iraq would **admit** UN inspectors so that disarmament by inspection could proceed.

Of course, Saddam Hussein's refusal to admit inspectors "would make a big difference politically and legally" if one wanted to justify, and gain support for, military action against Iraq, leading to regime change. In this "political context", "people would support regime change". If Iraq refused to admit inspectors, it was likely that the Security Council could have been persuaded to authorise military action in a clear-cut manner. Then, there would have been no argument about the "legality" of military action against Iraq – it would have been authorised by the Security Council, ostensibly to enforce Security Council resolutions, and in the process Saddam Hussein would have been removed from power – which was the Prime Minister's real objective.

In July 2002, the UK plan was that Iraq be given an ultimatum, by means of a Security Council resolution, to re-admit UN inspectors or face military action. As the Cabinet Office paper of 21 July 2002 said:

“It is just possible that an ultimatum could be cast in terms which Saddam would reject (because he is unwilling to accept unfettered access) and which would not be regarded as unreasonable by the international community.” (paragraph 14)

By September 2002, the US had agreed to follow this “clever” plan and “go down the UN route”. Since a strategy of making Saddam Hussein an offer he couldn’t accept was incompatible with allowing inspections to restart once Iraq gave permission on 16 September 2002, the US/UK found “ways to thwart” the restart of inspections, to quote Colin Powell.

Wrongfooting Saddam

In furtherance of this strategy the US/UK attempted to get the Security Council to pass a resolution which

- laid down conditions which Iraq couldn’t possibly accept, and
- clearly authorised military action in that event without further recourse to the Council.

On 2 October 2002, the US/UK proposed a [draft resolution](#), geared to achieve these objectives. It contained the following provisions (paragraph 5):

- “any permanent member of the Security Council may request to be represented on any inspection team with the same rights and protections accorded other members of the team”
- “teams shall be accompanied at their bases by sufficient UN security forces to protect them”
- “[teams] shall have the right to declare for the purpose of this resolution no-fly/no-drive zones, exclusion zones, and/or ground and air transit corridors, (which shall be enforced by UN security forces or by member states)”

So, if this draft had been approved by the Security Council, US/UK forces would have been authorised to enter Iraq on the pretext of being part of the inspection process. And if Iraq refused to accept these provisions, the draft resolution (paragraph 10) authorised member states

“to use all necessary means to restore international peace and security in the area”.

In other words, if Saddam Hussein refused to accept inspectors on these terms, the US/UK would have been unambiguously authorised by the Security Council to take military action against Iraq forthwith. In this event, there would have been no argument about the “legality” of military action against Iraq. It would, indeed, have made “a big difference politically and legally” in the Prime Minister’s words.

But the US/UK didn’t get their way: with France taking the lead, the special rights afforded to permanent members of the Council in the inspection process were removed, together with any suggestion that they could put forces on the ground in Iraq as part of the inspection process, and the explicit authorisation of the use of force, without a further Security Council resolution, was deleted. The Security Council eventually passed the amended resolution on 8 November 2002 as resolution [1441](#).

France [voiced](#) its objections to these provisions in the Security Council on 17 October 2002 in the following terms:

“... we reject measures that would in fact multiply the risk of incidents without improving the effectiveness of the work carried out by UNMOVIC and the IAEA. We also set store by the multinational, independent nature of the inspectors; any measure countering this fundamental element would be tantamount to repeating past mistakes [when the CIA penetrated UNSCOM] and would not have our support.”

France was interested in making practical arrangements for verifying the disarmament of Iraq by inspection. The US/UK were interested in (a) putting conditions on inspection which Iraq wouldn't accept, so that inspectors would never enter Iraq again, and (b) getting Security Council authorisation for military action in the event of Iraq's refusal to admit inspectors.

But, thanks to France and others, resolution 1441, passed on 8 November 2002, was acceptable to Iraq, which then allowed inspectors in, while repeating that it had no "weapons of mass destruction" (which was true). The attempt to "wrongfoot Saddam on the inspectors" had failed. The US/UK were denied an immediate *casus belli*.

Not co-operating fully?

Another *casus belli* had to be found: it had to be that Iraq was not co-operating fully with the UN inspectors. It was difficult to convince the world of this, since Iraq allowed unfettered access. All of the sites named in the September dossier as possibly being used for agent/weapons production were visited by inspectors in December 2002 and January 2003. The inspectors found no evidence of current, or recent, production activity. Other sites, nominated to the inspectors by the CIA and MI6, were also visited with the same result. Iraq even allowed the destruction of its Al Samoud missiles that were only marginally (if at all) beyond the 150km range permitted by Security Council resolution [687](#) (the original disarmament resolution).

Faced with this lack of evidence that Iraq possessed proscribed weapons, the Prime Minister's response was to publish the largely plagiarised February dossier, entitled [Iraq - its infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation](#). Its purpose was to explain to the world that the inspectors' failure to find any proscribed material was due to Iraq's hiding it, rather than to its non-existence.

Understandably, the [Butler Report](#) published in July 2004 expresses "surprise that policy-makers and the intelligence community did not, as the generally negative results of UNMOVIC inspections became increasingly apparent, re-evaluate in early-2003 the quality of the intelligence" (paragraph 472).

A Prime Minister committed to the disarmament of Iraq by inspection would, of course, have ordered such a re-evaluation. He might even have ordered the intelligence community to explain to him again why they didn't believe Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, Kamel Hussein, when, after his defection in August 1995, he told UNSCOM (as well as the CIA and MI6) that all Iraq's proscribed agents and weapons were destroyed on his orders in 1991 (as has now been confirmed by the Iraq Survey Group). But the last thing a Prime Minister committed to regime change wanted to hear in March 2003 was any suggestion that Iraq had no proscribed weapons.

By March 2003, after 3 months' inspection, no significant quantities of proscribed agents or weapons had been found (apart from the Al Samoud missiles). The US/UK were in an awkward spot. How were they to justify overthrowing the Iraqi regime militarily, when it was obviously co-operating with the inspection process, and 11 out of the 15 members of the Security Council held the reasonable opinion that inspection should continue? They couldn't even persuade the Security Council to agree that Iraq was in breach of resolution 1441 – this was what their [draft "second" resolution](#) said – let alone explicitly authorise military action because Iraq was in breach. They never even tried to do the latter.

The Attorney General's gobbledegook

This meant that the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, had to use his imagination to make a case that the use of force against Iraq in March 2003 was authorised by existing Security Council resolutions, and that the "second" resolution wasn't necessary after all. His case, such as it is, is in a written [answer](#) to Baroness Ramsey in the House of Lords on 17 March 2003.

Security Council authority for using force against Iraq in March 2003 lay, Lord Goldsmith said, in resolution [678](#), passed on 29 November 1990 – which authorised the use of force to expel Iraqi

forces from Kuwait. It is not obvious why this resolution, passed for an entirely different purpose long before any disarmament resolution was passed, could be said to authorise military action to enforce disarmament 12 years later – especially, since 12 years later, military action was opposed by 11 out of the 15 members of the Council. Nevertheless, Lord Goldsmith asserted that, if Iraq was in breach of 1441, resolution 678 passed in November 1990 authorised the use of force in March 2003.

But, who was to determine that Iraq was in breach of 1441? The Security Council had refused to do so by passing the “second” resolution. The US had always held the convenient opinion that any member state of the UN could decide if Iraq was in breach of Security Council resolutions, but no other state agreed with this proposition – until 17 March 2003, when Lord Goldsmith changed his mind and decided that the US was right after all: he came to the conclusion that if the UK believed that Iraq was in breach, then Iraq was in breach.

(Because she dissented from this, Elizabeth Wilmshurst resigned her post as deputy chief legal adviser at the Foreign Office on 18 March 2003, but she had been prepared to swallow the rest of the gobbledegook.)

So, as explained in the [Butler Report](#) (paragraphs 383-5), Lord Goldsmith wrote to the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003 seeking confirmation that

“... it is unequivocally the Prime Minister’s view that Iraq has committed further material breaches as specified in paragraph 4 of resolution 1441.”

The Prime Minister replied the next day saying:

“... it is indeed the Prime Minister’s unequivocal view that Iraq is in further material breach of its obligations, as in OP4 [Operative Paragraph 4] of UNSCR 1441, because of ‘false statements or omissions in the declarations submitted by Iraq pursuant to this resolution and failure by Iraq to comply with, and co-operate fully in the implementation of, this resolution’.”

No doubt, he was up all night agonising over this response.

This gobbledegook, in which the Prime Minister himself acted as the sole arbiter of fact, has enabled him to assert in March 2003, and re-assert continuously since, that it was “legal” to take military action against Iraq to enforce Security Council disarmament resolutions. Just by coincidence, of course, this military action would remove Saddam Hussein from power – which was the Prime Minister’s real objective.

Officially, Britain took military action to uphold the authority of the Security Council by disarming Iraq as prescribed by Security Council resolutions, beginning with resolution 687. The motion passed by the House of Commons on 18 March 2003 [said](#):

“That this House ... believes that the United Kingdom must uphold the authority of the United Nations as set out in Resolution 1441 and many Resolutions preceding it, and therefore supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction;”

The fact that in March 2003 11 out of 15 members of the Security Council were opposed to military action against Iraq was immaterial: when the US/UK took military action against Iraq in March 2003, they were enforcing the will of the Security Council – albeit against the will of the Security Council in March 2003. This is the stuff of Alice in Wonderland.

Alternative: continue inspections

Of course, even if one accepts that the ridiculous proposition that the military action was authorised by the Security Council, the political decision to proceed was a separate matter. In his

“address to the nation” on 20 March 2003, as British forces went into action, the Prime Minister [justified](#) this decision as follows:

“For 12 years, the world tried to disarm Saddam UN weapons inspectors say vast amounts of chemical and biological poisons, such as anthrax, VX nerve agent, and mustard gas remain unaccounted for in Iraq.

“So our choice is clear: back down and leave Saddam hugely strengthened; or proceed to disarm him by force. Retreat might give us a moment of respite but years of repentance at our weakness would I believe follow.”

But, if one was committed to disarmament rather than regime change, the alternative to military action in March 2003 was not “to back down and leave Saddam hugely strengthened”: it was to continue inspections. Even if one believed that Iraq had an arsenal of proscribed weapons and was manufacturing more, there was no need to invade Iraq, and overthrow the regime, in order to disarm it.

Inspection could have continued indefinitely and it stands to reason that, while inspection and other forms of surveillance were going on, Iraq’s ability to manufacture agents and weapons and deploy them, assuming it had a mind to, would be greatly inhibited.

The Government had intelligence to that effect – the Government’s official response to the Intelligence & Security Committee report published in February 2004 [said](#) so:

“The Government accepts that the inhibiting effect of the UN inspections was relevant The JIC Assessments produced in October and December 2002 and again in March 2003 reflected this point. In December 2002 the JIC specifically pointed out that Iraq’s ability to use CBW might be constrained by the difficulty of producing more whilst UN inspectors were present.” (paragraph 21)

Understandably, the Prime Minister did not share this intelligence with the House of Commons, lest MPs got the impression that the continuation of inspections was an effective alternative to military action in order to disarm Iraq.

The bottom line was that the continuation of inspections was not an effective alternative for a Prime Minister who refused to budge in his support for regime change.

Meyer confirms “Blair’s big lie”

Blair lied about regime change in Iraq, Meyer confirms. This should have been the headline over every press report on Christopher Meyer’s memoirs, *DC Confidential* (which was serialised in The Guardian on 7-10 November 2005). He does indeed confirm that by March 2002 Blair was fully committed to regime change in Iraq and had communicated this commitment to the US administration, and that “taking the UN route” was merely a means to this end, and had got nothing to do with disarming Iraq. There would have been great disappointment in Downing Street and in the White House if UN inspectors had declared Iraq disarmed, with Saddam Hussein still in power.

Perhaps, Meyer’s most telling revelation is in his account of Powell’s persuading Bush to “take the UN route”, and Jack Straw’s contribution to this. Meyer writes:

“One of Powell’s arguments was that Britain needed UN cover. Jack Straw, who had built a solid relationship with Powell, had made this point in spades.” (p 250)

You only need “cover” if you are hiding your real intentions.

Writing about the period leading up to Blair’s meeting with Bush at Crawford in early April 2002,

Meyer says:

“It was by now clear that Bush was determined to implement the official American policy of regime change in Iraq [established by the Iraq Liberation Act, signed into law by President Clinton on 31 October 1998]; but the how and the when of it were uncertain. It made war probable but not inevitable. ...

“It was time to put our fix into American thinking before it coagulated and Blair arrived at Crawford. David Manning, the Prime Minister’s Foreign policy Adviser, came to Washington in mid-March to see Condi Rice. A few days later I gave lunch to Wolfowitz. It was reports of these two sets of encounters that were leaked in 2004.” (p 241)

Earlier Meyer wrote:

“It was a strange experience to see a photo in the Sunday Telegraph of the report that I had sent to London about a conversation over lunch at the embassy with Paul Wolfowitz.” (p 241)

In fact, the photo appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 18 September 2004. But together these remarks by Meyer eliminate any residual doubt about the authenticity of the Manning and Meyer memos.

Meyer continues:

“The central issue was to influence the Americans. **By this stage, Tony Blair had already taken the decision to support regime change**, though he was discreet about saying so in public. It would be fruitless to challenge a fixed, five-year-old policy that had bipartisan support in the US [my emphasis].” (p 241)

Not much doubt there that the Prime Minister was fully committed to the US policy of regime change by March 2002.

On his meeting with Wolfowitz, he writes:

“To reinforce my credentials as someone who had something to say worth listening to, **I emphasized the Prime Minister’s commitment to regime change**. I wanted Wolfowitz to know that we were starting from the same premise and that in Britain this was not without political cost. It was the diplomacy of ‘Yes, but ...’. [my emphasis]” (p 242)

“With Paul Wolfowitz, I went through the ‘buts’ in our ‘yes, but ...’ approach. Of course, if it came to war, the US had the military power to go it alone and prevail; but if it wanted to go into Iraq in company, it would need to take on board the concerns of potential coalition partners and the international community. Attacking Iraq would be a tough sell in Britain and continental Europe. There had to be a strategy for building international support. So what was needed was a clever plan that convinced people there was a legal basis for toppling Saddam and the US was taking into account international opinion. The UN had to be at the heart of such a strategy. We would need to wrongfoot Saddam in the eyes of the Security Council. This, anyway, was long overdue. One way was to demand the readmission of the UN weapons inspectors into Iraq. If he refused, this would not only put him in the wrong but also turn the searchlight onto the Security Council Resolutions of which he remained in breach.” (p 243)

Not much doubt there that the purpose of having the UN at the heart of the strategy is not to disarm Iraq in accordance with Security Council resolutions – as the Prime Minister constantly assured the British public – but to provide justification for military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

Prime Minister confronted

On three occasions, the Prime Minister has been confronted in interviews with the fact that his Foreign Policy adviser, Sir David Manning, told the US administration in March 2002 that he “would not budge in” his “support for regime change” (see extracts [here](#)):

- (1) On the Jonathan Dimbleby Programme on ITV1, on 13 March 2005
- (2) On the election programme, ASK THE LEADER on ITV1, presented by Jonathan Dimbleby, on 2 May 2005, and
- (3) On Today, on Radio 4, on 4 May 2005, when he was interviewed by John Humphries

In the first of these, the Prime Minister’s strategy was to deny that his stated refusal to budge referred to regime change. Instead, he pretended that it referred to the enforcement of the Security Council resolutions on disarmament. For example, he said:

“What he [Manning] said was this: we have to be absolutely clear that the development of WMD in breach of the United Nations resolutions will no longer be tolerated. ... it’s that we would not budge in insisting that the United Nations resolutions that were outstanding, that had been outstanding for many years, were actually enforced and that was the crucial thing ...”

This was a straightforward lie: his unwillingness to budge, as reported by Manning, referred specifically to regime change. Furthermore, there is no mention whatsoever in the memo of outstanding United Nations disarmament resolutions, let alone that Blair would not budge from their implementation.

By the time he came to be interviewed in election week, the Prime Minister had prepared a different, and more plausible, defence, saying that he was always committed to regime change as a last resort, if disarmament couldn’t be achieved by any other means. For example, he told Jonathan Dimbleby:

“If you couldn’t enforce the UN resolutions by any other route, then you’d have to go down the route of regime change. ...

“Now if it had been, as you say, and, as parts of the media have suggested, I’d made up my mind for regime change, come what may, what was the purpose of going back to the United Nations? ...

“We went back to the United Nations in November. We got a resolution that said Saddam Hussein now had to let the inspectors back into Iraq; he has to comply immediately fully and unconditionally with them. He didn’t do so and that is the reason why we went to war.”

This makes sense until you remember

- (a) that it wasn’t necessary to go back to the United Nations in November 2002 in order to get inspectors back into Iraq – since Iraq had agreed in September 2002 to allow them in but the Prime Minister and his friends in Washington blocked them, and
- (b) that the Prime Minister was so enthusiastic for disarmament by inspection that he made it clear to the meeting on 23 July 2002 that he hoped that Iraq would not admit inspectors – and thereby provide a pretext for regime change.

The dialogue with John Humphries was on similar lines, and neither Jonathan Dimbleby nor John Humphries managed to breach his defence.

Iraq no threat, says Jack Straw

The leaked documents, together with Meyer memoirs, prove conclusively that by March 2002 the Prime Minister had decided to join with the US in taking military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein. If the US invaded Iraq, it was Blair’s intention that British forces would be there too.

The leaked documents also give some insight into the real views of ministers and officials about Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" and about whether Iraq posed a threat to its neighbours and the wider world. As we will see, these views are very different from what the Prime Minister said in public on these issues at the time.

One of the leaked documents is a [memo](#) from Peter Ricketts, the Political Director of the Foreign Office, to the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, dated 22 March 2002. This memo doesn't mention the disarmament of Iraq as an objective, but assumes that Britain will be taking military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and worries that the lack of a demonstrable threat from Iraq will make it difficult to convince the British parliament and public that it is worth risking the lives of British troops.

Ricketts writes that there are "two real problems" in supporting Bush's objective of regime change in Iraq:

"First, the THREAT. The truth is that what has changed is not the pace of Saddam Hussein's WMD programmes, but our tolerance of them post-11 September. ...

"But even the best survey of Iraq's WMD programmes will not show much advance in recent years on the nuclear, missile or CW/BW fronts: the programmes are extremely worrying but have not, as far as we know, been stepped up.

"US scrambling to establish a link between Iraq and al-Qa'eda is so far frankly unconvincing.

"To get public and Parliamentary support for military options we have to be convincing that
 - the threat is so serious/imminent that it is worth sending our troops to die for;
 - it is qualitatively different from the threat posed by other proliferators who are closer to achieving nuclear capability (including Iran)."

(Ricketts' second "problem" is what he describes as the "END STATE" – what will happen after the regime is overthrown.)

This privately expressed view by Ricketts on Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" is broadly consistent with the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) assessment of 15 March 2002, which was made public in part by the Butler Report in July 2004. This is hardly surprising since he would have seen all the intelligence at the time. This JIC assessment said:

"Intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programmes is sporadic and patchy. [...] From the evidence available to us, we believe Iraq retains some production equipment, and some small stocks of CW agent precursors, and may have hidden small quantities of agents and weapons. [...] There is no intelligence on any BW agent production facilities but one source indicates that Iraq may have developed mobile production facilities." ([Butler Report](#), paragraph 270)

The Prime Minister would also have seen this JIC assessment. But, his public statements on Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" in this period bear no relationship to Ricketts' private view or to the JIC assessment. For example, he [told](#) NBC news on 4 April 2002:

"We know that he [Saddam Hussein] has stockpiles of major amounts of chemical and biological weapons, we know that he is trying to acquire nuclear capability, we know that he is trying to develop ballistic missile capability of a greater range."

There, the "small quantities" that might exist, according to the JIC assessment, were transformed by the Prime Minister into "stockpiles" that definitely did exist.

Again, on 10 April 2002, the Prime Minister [told](#) the House of Commons:

"... there is no doubt at all that the development of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein poses a severe threat not just to the region, but to the wider world."

and, later that day, he [said](#) that Saddam Hussein:

"... is a threat to his own people and to the region and, if allowed to develop these weapons, a threat to us also."

By contrast, at the Prime Minister's (private) meeting on Iraq on 23 July 2002, Jack Straw was [minuted](#) as saying:

"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. [my emphasis]"

This privately expressed view by Straw is wildly at variance with what Blair said before and afterwards about the perceived threat from Iraq. For example, on 3 September 2002, at a press conference in his Sedgefield constituency, he [said](#):

"Iraq poses a real and a unique threat to the security of the region and the rest of the world."

And in his Foreword to the September [dossier](#), published on 24 September 2002, he described Iraq armed with "weapons of mass destruction" as "a current and serious threat to the UK national interest". He continued:

"I am in no doubt that the threat is serious and current, that he has made progress on WMD, and that he has to be stopped."

And the person who said in the Prime Minister's meeting on 23 July 2002 that "Iraq wasn't threatening his neighbours" dutifully kept his mouth shut, while the Prime Minister made these statements – and kept his job in the Foreign Office.

Other revelations

The minutes of the meeting on 23 July 2002 reveal two other interesting matters:-

(1) The US/UK were prepared to invent an attack by Iraq in order to provide an excuse for attacking Iraq, ostensibly in self-defence.

The Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Boyce, reported to the meeting that the US was examining two broad military options at the time:

"(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."

Option (b) was to be "initiated by an Iraqi casus belli". And since the Iraqis couldn't be guaranteed to provide one, it would have had to be invented, wouldn't it?

(2) Beginning in the spring of 2002, the US/UK had stepped up their bombing of Iraqi targets in the so-called no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq.

Geoff Hoon reported to the meeting that “the US had already begun ‘spikes of activity’ to put pressure on the regime”.

Since 1991, when the US/UK unilaterally established the no-fly zones, the official story was that US/UK aircraft patrolling in these zones bombed Iraqi air defence systems, only if they were “threatened” by these systems. (Since the US/UK aircraft were infringing Iraqi sovereignty, Iraq had every right under the UN Charter to attack these aircraft in self-defence).

In the spring and summer of 2002, suspicions grew that the bombing of Iraqi installations had increased dramatically. This was later confirmed in a Ministry of Defence [reply](#) to a written question from Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesman, Menzies Campbell, on 27 November 2002, which showed that in 2002 the amount of ordinance used by US/UK aircraft in the southern no-fly zone had grown from nothing in March, through 0.3 tons in April to 7.3 in May, 10.4 in June, 9.5 in July, 14.1 in August and 54.6 in September.

This is what Hoon euphemistically referred to as ‘spikes of activity’. In reality, it was part of a process of softening up Iraqi air defences in preparation for war, a process the UK participated in from April 2002.

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