



NATION

(copied from www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/nation/ny-uswmd074251820may09,0,7225183.story)

Memo: Bush manipulated Iraq intel

Knight Ridder Newspapers

May 9, 2005

WASHINGTON - A highly classified British memo, leaked in the midst of Britain's just-concluded election campaign, indicates that President George W. Bush decided to overthrow Iraqi President Saddam Hussein by summer 2002 and was determined to ensure that U.S. intelligence data supported his policy.

The document, which summarizes a July 23, 2002, meeting of British Prime Minister Tony Blair with his top security advisers, reports on a visit to Washington by the head of Britain's MI-6 intelligence service.

The visit took place while the Bush administration was still declaring to the American public that no decision had been made to go to war.

"There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable," the MI-6 chief said at the meeting, according to the memo. "Bush wanted to remove Saddam through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD," or weapons of mass destruction.

The memo said, "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

No weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq since the U.S. invasion in March 2003.

The White House has repeatedly denied accusations made by several top foreign officials that it manipulated intelligence estimates to justify an invasion of Iraq.

It has instead pointed to the conclusions of two studies, one by the Senate Intelligence Committee and one by a presidentially appointed panel, that cite serious failures by the CIA and other agencies in judging Hussein's weapons programs.

The principal U.S. intelligence analysis, called a National Intelligence Estimate, wasn't completed until October 2002, well after the United States and United Kingdom had apparently decided military force should be used to overthrow Hussein's regime.

The newly disclosed memo, which was first reported by the Sunday Times of London,

Memo: Bush manipulated Iraq intel

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.

In July 2002, and well afterward, top Bush administration foreign policy advisers were insisting that "there are no plans to attack Iraq on the president's desk." But the memo quotes British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, a close colleague of then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, as saying that "Bush had made up his mind to take military action." Straw is quoted as having his doubts about the Iraqi threat.

"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 memo reported he said.

Straw reportedly proposed that Hussein be given an ultimatum to re-admit United Nations weapons inspectors, which could help justify the eventual use of force.

Powell in August 2002 persuaded Bush to make the case against Hussein at the United Nations and to push for renewed weapons inspections.

But there were deep divisions within the White House over that course of action. The British document says that the National Security Council, then led by Condoleezza Rice, "had no patience with the UN route."

Subscribe to Newsday home delivery | Article licensing and reprint options
By visiting this site, you are agreeing to our Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.
Copyright 2005 Newsday Inc.