

Downing Street Meeting

ACT I

The Players:

Prime Minister Tony Blair – (not much of a speaking role, can be played by a moderately well-behaved poodle)

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw

Then Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon

Attorney General Lord Goldsmith

Sir Richard Dearlove, the Chief of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)

Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee John Scarlett

Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of Defence Staff, head of Britain's armed forces

Sir David Manning

Instructions: Directors acting on the assumption that the Downing Street Minutes and other documents are accurate will want to cast intelligent and articulate actors, men appearing capable of deceiving millions of people on matters of vital importance. Directors acting on the faith that President Bush and Prime Minister Blair, and their cronies, honestly believed that Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and was stockpiling vast quantities of weapons of mass destruction, may want to cast types conveying a sense of stupefying incompetence.

Set: the Prime Minister's residence at #10 Downing Street in London, on July 23, 2002. A very proper setting for afternoon tea. Only unusual element, the large poodle.

SCARLETT: Saddam's regime is tough and based on extreme fear. The only way to overthrow it is likely to be by massive military action. Saddam is worried and expects an attack, probably by air and land, but he is not convinced that it will be immediate or overwhelming. His regime expects their neighbours to line up with the US. Saddam knows that regular army morale is poor. Real support for Saddam among the public is probably narrowly based.

BLAIR: Woof!

DEARLOVE: Here's a report on my recent talks in Washington. There has been a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action is now seen as inevitable. Bush wants to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts are being fixed around the policy. The NSC has no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime's record. There is little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action.

BLAIR: Woof!

BOYCE: Military planners will brief CENTCOM on 1-2 August, Rumsfeld on 3 August and Bush on 4 August.

The two broad US options are:

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

- (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.

BLAIR: Woof!

HOON: The US has already begun "spikes of activity" to put pressure on the regime. No decisions have been taken, but I think the most likely timing in US minds for military action to begin is January, with the timeline beginning 30 days before the US Congressional elections.

BLAIR: Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

STRAW: I will discuss this with Colin Powell soon. It seems clear that Bush has made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing is not yet decided. But the case is thin. Saddam is not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability is 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.

GOLDSMITH: The desire for regime change is not a legal base for military action. There are 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.

BLAIR: Woof! Woof! It will make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refuses to allow in the UN inspectors. Regime change and WMD are linked in the sense that it is the regime that is producing the WMD. There are different strategies for dealing with Libya and Iran. If the political context were right, people would support regime change. The two key issues are whether the military plan works and whether we have the political strategy to give the military plan the space to work.

BOYCE: We do not know yet if the US battleplan is workable. The military are continuing to ask lots of questions. For instance, what are the consequences, if Saddam uses WMD on day one, or if Baghdad does not collapse and urban warfighting begins?

BLAIR: Woof!

MANNING: Saddam could also use his WMD on Kuwait.

BLAIR: Woof!

HOON: Or on Israel.

BLAIR: Woof!

STRAW: I think the US will not go ahead with a military plan unless convinced that it is a winning strategy. On this, US and UK interests converge. But on the political strategy, there could be US/UK differences. Despite US resistance, we should explore discreetly the ultimatum. Saddam will continue to play hard-ball with the UN.

BLAIR: Woof!

SCARLETT: I assess that Saddam will allow the inspectors back in only when he thinks the threat of military action is real.

BLAIR: Woof!

HOON: If the Prime Minister wants UK military involvement, he will need to decide this early. I caution that many in the US do not think it worth going down the ultimatum route. It will be important for the Prime Minister to set out the political context to Bush.

NARRATOR: Conclusions:

(a) We should work on the assumption that the UK will take part in any military action. But we need a fuller picture of US planning before we can take any firm decisions. Boyce should tell the US military that we are considering a range of options.

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

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

(d) Straw will send the Prime Minister the background on the UN inspectors, and discreetly work up the ultimatum to Saddam.

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

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

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