

## **More Life on 'Downing Street' with Leak of New Documents on Iraq**

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**NEW YORK** - Just as the U.S. media -- albeit a month late -- scramble to get on top of the so-called "Downing Street Memo," the Sunday Times in London unveiled another leaked document which confirms and goes behind the message of the memo. Meanwhile, Walter Pincus of the Washington Post has a related, front-page report on Sunday.

"Ministers were warned in July 2002 that Britain was committed to taking part in an American-led invasion of Iraq and they had no choice but to find a way of making it legal," the Sunday Times reports.

The warning, in a leaked Cabinet Office briefing paper, said Prime Minister Tony Blair had already agreed to back military action to get rid of Saddam Hussein at a summit at the Texas ranch of President George W Bush three months earlier. The briefing paper, for participants at a meeting of Blair's inner circle on July 23, 2002, said that since regime change was illegal it was "necessary to create the conditions" which would make it legal.

This was required because the American military would be using British bases in any invasion, making England complicit in any illegal U.S. action. The paper was circulated to those present at the meeting, among whom was Blair.

"The briefing paper is certain to add to the pressure, particularly on the American president, because of the damaging revelation that Bush and Blair agreed on regime change in April 2002 and then looked for a way to justify it," the newspaper declared.

Meanwhile, Pincus in the Washington Post, in a front-page report on Sunday, reveals that a briefing paper prepared for Prime Minister Blair and his top advisers eight months before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, concluded that the U.S. military was not preparing adequately for what the memo predicted would be a "protracted and costly" postwar occupation of that country.

The eight-page memo, written two days before the July 23, 2002, Downing Street meeting on Iraq, shows how senior British officials "realized more clearly than their American counterparts the potential for the post-invasion instability that continues to plague Iraq," Pincus observes.

The memo "Iraq: Conditions for Military Action" notes that U.S. "military planning for action against Iraq is proceeding apace," but adds that "little thought" has been given to, among other things, "the aftermath and how to shape it."

This memo shows that Blair's aides were "not just concerned about Washington's justifications for invasion but also believed the Bush team lacked understanding of what could happen in the aftermath." The memo's authors point out, "A post-war occupation of Iraq could lead to a protracted and costly nation-building exercise."

That memo and other internal British government documents were originally obtained by Michael Smith, who writes for the London Sunday Times, Pincus notes. Excerpts were made available to The Washington Post, and the material was confirmed as authentic by British sources.

The Downing Street memo "burst into the mainstream American media only last week after it was raised at a joint Bush-Blair press conference," the Sunday Times noted, "forcing the prime minister to insist that 'the facts were not fixed in any shape or form at all.'"

By one count, only two questions about the memo had been raised at White House briefings (out of about 940 questions) since it first surfaced in the British press on May 1. Knight Ridder newspapers (and E&P) covered it early on, but USA Today, for example, mentioned the memo for the first time just this week.

A story in USA Today on that delay noted that while other major papers belatedly covered the memo, "None of the stories appeared on the newspapers' front pages. Several other major media outlets, including the evening news programs on ABC, CBS, and NBC, had not said a word about the document before Tuesday."

In a column on the memo on Sunday, Philip Gailey, editorial page editor at the St. Petersburg Times observed that, as with Vietnam, "The American people were had" on the Iraq war. Too late, he observed, 60% of them now tell pollsters the war was not worth fighting.

The Sunday Times observed: "The complaints of media self-censorship have been backed up by the ombudsmen of The Washington Post, The New York Times and National Public Radio, who have questioned the lack of attention the minutes have received from their organizations."