

Dramatic Recreation of the Downing Street Meeting

A One Act Play

The Players:

Prime Minister Tony Blair

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, a foreign policy advisor

Narrator Matthew Rycoft, a Downing Street foreign policy aide

NARRATOR: What you are about to hear is a dramatic recreation of the so-called Downing Street Memo. This two and a half page document is actually the minutes of a meeting that took place on July 23rd, 2002, at #10 Downing Street in London, England, the residence of Prime Minister Tony Blair. Attending the meeting were Blair's Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Attorney General, Chief of Secret Intelligence, Joint Intelligence Committee Chief, the head of Britain's armed forces, and a foreign policy advisor who has since become Ambassador to the United States.

The minutes were recorded by me, Matthew Rycoft, a Downing Street foreign policy aide. They are recreated here using the exact words I wrote down, but in a few places changing a past tense verb to the present tense, since this is not a report of what happened but a recreation of it. I will introduce each character for you before they speak, and at the end I will read the conclusions that were reached at this meeting, exactly as I recorded them in the minutes that have now become so famous.

The first to speak is Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee John Scarlett.

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.

NARRATOR: Sir Richard Dearlove, the Chief of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), reporting on his recent talks in Washington with top US intelligence officials.

DEARLOVE: 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.

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

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.

NARRATOR: Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon

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.

NARRATOR: Foreign Secretary Jack Straw

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.

NARRATOR: Attorney General Lord Goldsmith

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.

NARRATOR: Prime Minister Tony Blair

BLAIR: 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.

NARRATOR: Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of Defence Staff

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?

NARRATOR: Sir David Manning, a foreign policy advisor

MANNING: Saddam could also use his WMD on Kuwait.

NARRATOR: Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon

HOON: Or on Israel.

NARRATOR: Foreign Secretary Jack Straw

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.

NARRATOR: Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee John Scarlett

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

NARRATOR: Geoff Hoon again

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: And here are the conclusions reached as I wrote them at the end of the minutes:

(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.

Thus concludes the Downing Street Minutes. For more information, you can visit [After Downing Street Dot Org](http://AfterDowningStreetDotOrg).