



## Bombshell E-mails: Bush, Blair Talked Peace in Iraq but Planned Invasion

Among the 30,000 e-mails found on former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's private server are some startling revelations that have now been leaked — including an e-mail that reveals how former President George W. Bush (right) and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (left) met at Bush's Crawford ranch near Waco, Texas, to discuss strategy on a military invasion of Iraq.



At the time, Bush and Blair were publicly assuring their respective nations and the world that diplomatic solutions were still being seriously pursued. “We’re not proposing military action,” Blair asserted — a statement that contrasts sharply with other e-mails at the time from former Secretary of State Colin Powell to President Bush.

Powell wrote Bush a few days before the Bush-Blair summit at the ranch, “Blair continues to stand by you and the U.S. as we move forward on the war on terrorism and on Iraq.” The words certainly do not sound like diplomacy: “as we move toward war on ... Iraq.”

Powell told Bush that Blair was “convinced on two points: the threat [from Iraq] is real; and success against Saddam will yield more regional success.” On the contrary, the removal of Hussein left a vacuum in the region, which is being filled by the forces of ISIS and the mullahs of Iran.

Still, supporters of the 2003 invasion of Iraq contend that even if Iraq did not turn out to be an example of “democracy” to the rest of the Middle East, Saddam’s possession of weapons of mass destruction — WMDs — was justification enough for the invasion. It certainly was the major argument proposed by Bush and Blair at the time of their meeting at Crawford and for the next several months leading up to the war.

It was important to President Bush to secure Great Britain as an ally in any military operations in Iraq, and fear of WMDs in the hands of a tyrannical dictator such as Saddam Hussein was the major selling point to obtain the support of the British government and its people. The British *Daily Mail*, however, has come into possession of secret e-mails held on Hillary Clinton’s private server that indicate the Bush administration used “spies” inside the Labour Party “to help him manipulate British public opinion in favour of the war.”

Former “shadow” Home Secretary David Davis, a Tory, expressed disgust at what he regarded as Blair’s duplicity in the lead-up to the Iraq War. (In the United Kingdom, the party out of power maintains a “shadow Cabinet” of government ministers, as a way of demonstrating to the British public who would hold such positions were they to come to power. The Conservative Party during the Blair years was the main opposition to his Labour Party). “This is one of the most astonishing documents I have ever read,” Davis said. “It proves in explicit terms what many of us believed all along. Tony Blair effectively agreed to act as a front man for American foreign policy in advance any decision by the House of Commons or the British Cabinet.”



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on October 20, 2015

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Davis accused Blair of subcontracting out British foreign policy to the United States in return for the getting George Bush to pretend Blair “was a player on the world stage to impress voters in the UK.”

Blair was “telling M Ps and voters back home that he was still pursuing a diplomatic solution while Colin Powell was telling President Bush: ‘Don’t worry, George, Tony is signed up for the war come what may — he’ll handle the PR for you, just make him look big in return.’”

Davis was particularly angry at the “casualness of it all,” specifically in the lack of thought Bush and Blair gave to “the day after” — meaning the day after Saddam would be toppled. “We saw the catastrophic so-called ‘de-Baathification of Iraq, with the country’s entire civil and military structure dismantled, leading to years of bloodshed and chaos. It has infected surrounding countries to this day and created the vacuum into which the Islamic State has stepped.”

The Powell Memo addressed the “domestic turbulence,” or political opposition that Blair faced in England, noting his “poll numbers have fallen to below 50 percent.”

“He is sharply criticized by the media for being too pro-U.S. in foreign and security policy, too arrogant and “presidential” (not a compliment in the British context) and too inattentive on issues of concern to voters.”

Another memo, drafted by the U.S. Embassy in London, concerned the use of Labour “spies” in an attempt to manipulate British public opinion. The memo addressed the concerns of many in Blair’s own Labour Party about any direct military action to oust Saddam Hussein, and what it would take to change their minds. “A majority indicate they would change their minds if they had proof of Iraqi involvement in September 11 or another terrorist atrocity. Some would favor shifting from a policy of containment of Iraq if they had recent (and publicly usable) proof that Iraq is developing WMD/missiles or that Iraq’s WMD status has changed for the worse.”

The memo concluded that bringing Blair’s party and the British people “onboard” was “the keystone of any coalition we seek to build”: “Labor Peers want evidence that Iraq promotes terror attacks, or that its WMD pose a clear and present threat.”

Many in the Labour Party expressed concern that action against Iraq would “undercut Arab cooperation in the war on terrorism,” that the United States was “looking for another fight,” and that Blair should consult Parliament before any military action was taken. The memo noted that neither Margaret Thatcher nor John Major asked Parliament to vote before taking military action in the Falklands and in Operation Desert Storm.

From these memos, it is quite clear that what Blair needed in the U.K., and Bush had to have in the United States, was something to convince their respective legislative branches and populace that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, that he was aiding terrorists, and that the ouster of Hussein would lead to a more stable Middle East.

As a consequence, the Bush administration pressured the intelligence community of the United States to bring him proof that Iraq possessed WMDs, and that Hussein was aiding terrorists. In language ominously reminiscent of the Kennedy-Johnson years in Vietnam, Bush and his allies in and out of the government began promoting the idea that Iraq could become an example of liberty and democracy in the Middle East.

Following the successful invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent overthrow of Saddam Hussein, American forces had difficulty locating any WMDs. Finally, David Kay, a former weapons inspector, concluded



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that Iraq probably did not have any. Kay admitted that the previous policy of containment, and the 1998 bombing of Iraq had destroyed whatever was left of potential WMD programs.

Throughout 2002, the CIA and other intelligence agencies warned Bush that it was selectively using intelligence to build a case for WMDs. According to the *Washington Post* of July 23, 2004, "The CIA sent two memos to the White House in October [of 2002] voicing strong doubts about a claim President Bush made three months later in the State of the Union address that Iraq was trying to buy nuclear materials in Africa." The Defense Intelligence Agency expressed the view in 2002 that "there is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons, or where Iraq has — or will — establish its chemical warfare agent production facilities."

A February 24, 2003 CIA report told the White House that they had "no direct evidence" that Iraq had succeeded in restoring its biological, chemical, or nuclear programs since UN weapons inspectors had left the country. Efforts to tie the Iraqi dictator in plots to help al-Qaeda were also fruitless. A 2008 Senate Intelligence Committee report, based on five years of investigations, said, "Postwar findings indicate that Saddam Hussein was distrustful of al-Qa'ida and viewed Islamic extremists as threats to his regime, and refused all requests from al-Qa'ida to provide material or operational support. No postwar information indicates that Saddam ever considered using any terrorist group to attack the United States."

Of course, the Senate committee is somewhat tainted by partisanship on the part of the Democrats (although two Republicans joined in the majority report), especially considering the report was issued during a presidential election year. Democrats such as John Kerry, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, and Jay Rockefeller all supported the Iraq War in 2003. Clinton said, in justifying her support of the war, "Saddam Hussein is a tyrant" who "used chemical weapons on Iraqi Kurds and Iranians.... Intelligence reports show that Saddam Hussein has worked to rebuild his chemical and biological weapons stock, his missile delivery capability, and his nuclear program," adding that that he had also given "aid, comfort, and sanctuary to terrorists, including al Qaeda members." Kerry, Biden, and Rockefeller all expressed similar views.

But the intelligence reports were produced in an atmosphere of pressure from key figures inside the Bush administration. None was more enthusiastic for the invasion of Iraq than Vice President Dick Cheney. He repeatedly visited CIA headquarters to pressure the agency to support the administration's claims. Former CIA counterterrorism chief, Vince Cannastaro, claimed the pressure was "unremitting." According to the *Dallas Morning News*, Cheney and other hard-liners in the Defense Department insisted that the CIA "paint a dire picture of Saddam's capabilities and intentions."

Writing in his recently published book in defense of an interventionist foreign policy (*Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Powerful America*), the former vice president said, "As we now know, Saddam did not have stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction." Despite that admission, Cheney still believes the invasion of Iraq was a good thing. "However, it requires a willing suspension of disbelief and a desire to put politics above safety to assert that the absence of stockpiles meant the absence of a threat to the United States."

In spite of the problems created in the Middle East as a result of America's intervention (with the help of the United Kingdom, led then by Tony Blair), Cheney argues in his book, "America's liberation of Iraq also sent a clear message to others in the region that we would take military action if necessary."

There is no doubt that such bellicose rhetoric is noted in the Middle East. Whether that is necessarily a



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good thing for the United States and its citizens is certainly debatable.

“History will be the ultimate judge of our decision to liberate Iraq,” Cheney wrote, asserting “it is important for future decision makers” to know the facts of the 2003 invasion.

On that, we can certainly agree. Tony Blair’s role in support of George Bush’s decision to invade Iraq will be closely scrutinized by historians and pundits. Perhaps it will be studied along with the decision of the Germans to give the Austrians a “blank check” in their confrontation with Russia in 1914, and the decision of the British to give a similar “blank check” to France, all of which led to the great disaster of World War I.

Out of that war we saw the rise of fascism in Italy, the rise of communism in Russia, the rise of national socialism in Germany, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East. Likewise, the choice to invade Iraq in 2003 has led to some very unfortunate consequences, as well. Those concerned about the menace of Iran and the rise of ISIS can trace these problems back to push for war in Iraq in 2003.



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