

By David Swanson

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In May 2005 we launched AfterDowningStreet.org to publicize the Downing Street Minutes. By June we'd had great, if fleeting, success. During the following months and years, mountains of new memos and statements emerged on the Iraq War lies, many of them more damaging than the Downing Street documents. But increasingly nobody cared, because evidence of crimes was less interesting once Congress had dropped the pretense that it might take action. The single most powerful, and yet largely ignored, document yet to emerge, might, now in 2009, finally, produce results. And, of course, it is our friends over in England who are, as always, two steps ahead of us.

This document, or rather, reports of it, emerged in February 2006. We labeled it the White House Memo and began promoting awareness of it. We did not get far with the US corporate media. This is the same document that Vincent Bugliosi refers to as "the Manning Memo" in his book "The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder". Bugliosi rightly makes it central to his case. Part of the conversation recorded in the memo is recreated in Crawford, Texas, rather than the White House, in Oliver Stone's 2008 film "W."

The memo was first mentioned in Philippe Sands' 2005 book "Lawless World: America and the Making and Breaking of Global Rules." And it was Sands, an attorney from England, who publicized the memo in February 2006. Now the British media is questioning whether the British government's upcoming review of the Iraq War lies will include such damning pieces of evidence as the White House Memo. And Philippe Sands is advocating for its inclusion. Peace groups led by the Stop the War Coalition in England are planning a rally at Parliament on Wednesday to demand that the governmental inquiry be public. Secrecy, after all, is what allowed the war in the first place.

And what difference might it make if the public in the United Kingdom or (can you imagine it!) in the United States knew about this memo? Well, this is a document that goes beyond proving that Bush wanted war and lied about the reasons for it (That's /so/ 2002). This document proves that Bush was willing to provoke Saddam Hussein into attacking Americans.

On January 31, 2003, prior to the full-scale invasion of Iraq in March, President George W. Bush met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in the White House. After their meeting, they spoke to the media ([video](#)) and claimed not to have decided on war, to be working hard to achieve peace, and to be worried about the imminent threat from Iraq to the American people. They claimed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and had links to al Qaeda, and -- Bush implied, but avoided explicitly stating -- to the attacks of September 11, 2001. They also claimed to have UN authorization for launching an attack on Iraq. These were all blatant lies, as revealed in the White House Memo, which recorded what Bush and Blair had talked about behind closed doors just prior to the press conference. And yet, to my knowledge, not one of the reporters you see in the above video has made a peep about it.

Blair advisor David Manning took notes that day. The accuracy of his memo has never been challenged by Bush or Blair. According to Manning, Bush proposed to Blair a number of possible ways in which they might be able to create an excuse to launch a war against Iraq. One of Bush's proposals was "flying U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in UN colours [sic]. If Saddam fired on them," Bush argued, "he would be in breach" of UN resolutions. In other words, Bush wanted to falsely paint US planes with UN colors and try to get Iraq to shoot at them. This is what Bush really thought about the horrible, evil threat of Saddam Hussein: he wanted to provoke him. He wanted to get US pilots shot at in order to start a war that Congress would then fund for years, and perhaps decades, on the grounds that doing so would "support the troops."

Bush understood that the United Nations had not passed a resolution to legalize an attack on Iraq. The White House Memo describes Bush telling Blair that "the US would put its full weight behind efforts to get another resolution and would 'twist arms' and 'even threaten'. But he

had to say that if ultimately we failed, military action would follow anyway." (These are Manning's notes of what Bush said.) In other words, going to the United Nations was not actually an attempt to avoid war, but an attempt to gain legal cover for a war that would be launched regardless of whether that project succeeded. And Bush wasn't kidding about twisting arms; that very same day the [National Security Agency \(NSA\) launched a plan to bug the phones and e-mails of UN Security Council members.](#)

At this time, a month and a half before the full-on invasion of Iraq, the US military was already engaging in hugely escalated bombing runs over Iraq and redeploying troops, including to newly constructed bases in the Middle East, all in preparation for an invasion of Iraq, and all with money that had not been appropriated for these purposes. The reporters who questioned Bush and Blair on January 31, 2003, did not know about or ask about those activities.

That Bush was interested in provoking Iraq is confirmed by extensive covert operations called [DB/Anabasis](#) reported by Michael Isikoff and David Corn in their 2006 book "Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War." These operations "envisioned staging a phony incident that could be used to start a war. A small group of Iraqi exiles would be flown into Iraq by helicopter to seize an isolated military base near the Saudi border. They then would take to the airwaves and announce a coup was under way. If Saddam responded by flying troops south, his aircraft would be shot down by US fighter planes patrolling the no-fly zones established by UN edict after the first Persian Gulf War. A clash of this sort could be used to initiate a full-scale war. On February 16, 2002, President Bush signed covert findings authorizing the various elements of Anabasis. The leaders of the congressional intelligence committees -- including Porter Goss, a Republican, and Senator Bob Graham, a Democrat -- were briefed."

[A similar story came out about Dick Cheney with regard to Iran in 2008.](#) Journalist Seymour Hersh reported at a journalism conference in 2008 that at a 2008 meeting in the Vice President's office, soon after an incident in the Strait of Hormuz in which a US carrier almost shot at a few small Iranian speedboats, "There was a dozen ideas proffered about how to trigger a war. The one that interested me the most was why don't we build -- we in our shipyard --

build four or five boats that look like Iranian PT boats. Put Navy Seals on them with a lot of arms. And next time one of our boats goes to the Straits of Hormuz, start a shoot-up. Might cost some lives. And it was rejected because you can't have Americans killing Americans. That's the kind of -- that's the level of stuff we're talking about. Provocation. But that was rejected."

After the invasion of Iraq, with no weapons or ties to 9/11 having been found, Diane Sawyer asked Bush on camera (ABC News, December 16, 2003) about the claims he had made about "weapons of mass destruction," and he replied: "What's the difference? The possibility that [Saddam] could acquire weapons, if he were to acquire weapons, he would be the danger."

Iraqi deaths as a result of the invasion and occupation, measured above the high death rate under international sanctions preceding the attack, are estimated at 1.2 to 1.3 million by two independent sources (Just Foreign Policy's updated figure based on the Johns Hopkins / Lancet report, and the British polling company Opinion Research Business's estimate as of August 2007). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of Iraqis who have fled their homes has reached 4.7 million. If these estimates are accurate, a total of nearly 6 million human beings have been displaced from their homes or killed, as of August 2008. Many times that many have certainly been injured, traumatized, impoverished, and deprived of clean water and other basic needs.

That we can't prosecute torture is bad enough. That you have to cross an ocean to even find a discussion of accountability for war lies is worse.