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Bolton incident reinforces the Downing Street Memo

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— weldon berger @ 8:31 pm

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Associated Press is [reporting](#) that the Bush administration's nominee to the post of UN ambassador, John Bolton, flew to Europe early in 2002 to orchestrate the firing of Jose Bustani, the director of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, "because the Brazilian was trying to send chemical weapons inspectors to Baghdad," according to a Bolton associate.

At the time, Bolton was the US undersecretary of state for arms control.

The incident reinforces the statements made by British foreign minister Jack Straw and former British intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove, during a July 2002 meeting with British prime minister Tony Blair. Both Straw and Dearlove said that by then, president Bush had already decided to invade Iraq and that the US was "fixing the facts and intelligence" to support that decision.

A former Bolton deputy says the U.S. undersecretary of state felt Jose Bustani "had to go," particularly because the Brazilian was trying to send chemical weapons inspectors to Baghdad. That might have helped defuse the crisis over alleged Iraqi weapons and undermined a U.S. rationale for war.

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In May 2000, one year ahead of time and with strong U.S. support, Bustani was unanimously re-elected OPCW chief for a 2001-2005 term. Colin Powell, the new secretary of state, praised his leadership qualities in a personal letter in 2001.

But Ralph Earle, a veteran U.S. arms negotiator, told AP that he and others in Bolton's arms-control bureau grew unhappy with what they considered Bustani's mismanagement. The agency chief also "had a big ego. He did things on his own," and wasn't responsive to U.S. and other countries' positions, said Earle, now retired.

Both Earle and career diplomat Avis Bohlen, who retired in June 2002 as a top Bolton deputy, said the idea to remove Bustani did not originate with the undersecretary. But Bolton "leaped on it enthusiastically," Bohlen recalled. "He was very much in charge of the whole campaign," she said, and Bustani's initiative on Iraq seemed the "coup de grace."

"It was that that made Bolton decide he had to go," Bohlen said.

The July 2002 Downing Street meeting, with its damning minutes, came hard on the heels of Bolton's successful effort to remove Bustani from his position and prevent him from making any further efforts to get arms inspectors back into Iraq. Dearlove had just returned from meetings with top US officials regarding Iraq, and Straw too had been in close touch with his counterpart in the US, Colin Powell, and was about to travel to Washington for meetings with Powell and other US officials.

Bolton's actions were one among a series of events revealed after the invasion that, taken together, provide almost a step-by-step narrative of the US administration's early plans to invade Iraq and to short circuit any diplomatic efforts an intelligence that might interfere with the decision to go to war.

Bustani was eliminated as a possible roadblock in April of 2002. London's *Independent*, in an article reproduced [here](#), describes other British documents leaked last year that strongly suggest that in March of 2002, in meetings with president Bush at this Crawford residence, Blair committed his country to backing the US invasion. Throughout the fall of 2002, the Bush administration repeatedly used discredited intelligence to make its case for war, culminating in a Colin Powell UN presentation that consisted almost entirely of accusations that were either known to be untrue at the time or were later debunked.

Former Bush treasury Secretary Paul O'Neal said in his memoir that Iraq was a major topic at the new administration's first cabinet meeting. Former Bush administration counter-terrorism chief Richard Clarke described a brief meeting with president Bush immediately after the 911 attacks during which Bush told him to find evidence of Iraqi involvement in the attacks. And in March of 2002, Time Magazine's Daniel Eisenberg [reported](#) that during a meeting between three senators and then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, president Bush stated in no uncertain terms his plans for Iraq.

Two months ago, a group of Republican and Democratic Senators went to the White House to meet with Condoleezza Rice, the President's National Security Adviser. Bush was not scheduled to attend but poked his head in anyway—and soon turned the discussion to Iraq. The President has strong feelings about Saddam Hussein (you might too if the man had tried to assassinate your father, which Saddam attempted to do when former President George Bush visited Kuwait in 1993) and did not try to hide them. He showed little interest in debating what to do about Saddam. Instead, he became notably animated, according to one person in the room, used a vulgar epithet to refer to Saddam and concluded with four words that left no one in doubt about Bush's intentions: "We're taking him out."

The leaked documents, the new information on John Bolton's determination to forestall any inspections of Iraq's industrial facilities, the conversations related by Clarke, O'Neal and other former administration officials, the incident reported by Eisenberg, the numerous instances in which the administration continued to use discredited intelligence after being warned off it, the administration's decision to pull the inspectors out of Iraq before they continued to find nothing justifying an attack — all of these things demonstrate an administration determined to surmount any obstacle standing between them and Baghdad.

Throw in the July 2002 Downing Street meeting in which Straw and Dearlove flatly stated that president Bush was determined to invade Iraq, and all the statements advocating the invasion of Iraq made by Bush administration officials in the decade before they returned to power, and all the administrations protestations that war with Iraq was not a predetermined certainty become laughable.

This is one of the rare instances in which US journalists' proclivity for creating seamless narratives around events would be wholly warranted. And of course to this point that's exactly what they're not doing. But regardless whether the new information about John Bolton affects his nomination — and in a sane world it would be the death knell — one can hope it will awaken whatever meager investigative instinct survives in our press.

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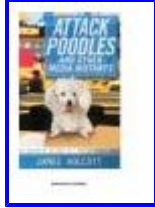
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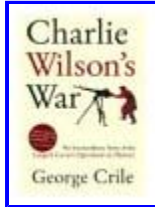


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