



Tony Blair was offered a way out of attacking Iraq at a secret meeting with his foreign secretary Jack Straw eight days before the invasion, according to documents lodged with the Chilcot inquiry, which tomorrow will question the former prime minister for a second time.

An anonymous official told the inquiry: "I recall a meeting with the prime minister where the foreign secretary [Straw] made the argument ... for the UK military not being involved.

"The point the foreign secretary was making, in my view, was that this was the final opportunity to decide on a different track – advising the prime minister that he still had a chance to avoid it if he wanted to ... The argument he was making was more in terms of, 'If you want to avoid your own resignation, prime minister, you still have an opportunity and here it is. You have a way out and why don't you take it?'"

The note by the anonymous official continues: "It was offering the prime minister a way out if he wanted it ... The thing that I was absolutely struck by privately was the prime minister's response, the speed of it and the absolute insistence of it, and the fact that he had got his arguments all marshalled and all laid out."

The meeting between Blair and Straw, attended by officials at No 10, is described as "very personal" and was not officially recorded.

Tomorrow, Blair is expected to be questioned about conversations with his ministers, and about any private assurances to George Bush about Britain joining the US-led invasion.

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