

Friday, 29 January 2010

(9.30 am)

RT HON TONY BLAIR

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. Today the Iraq Inquiry will be hearing from the Rt Hon Tony Blair, the Prime Minister until June 2007.

We have much to cover today and the Committee hopes we can go about our business in an orderly way and, in fairness to all, not be distracted by disruptions. As in all our hearings, the right of our witness to respond must be respected and those here today were selected through a free public ballot overseen by an independent arbiter. We remind them of the behaviour they are expected to observe.

Mr Blair will be giving evidence in two sessions, this morning and this afternoon, with a lunch break of about one and a half hours. This will help to ensure that all those who will be coming for the afternoon session are able to take their places before we start proceedings.

Good morning.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to start by welcoming our witness and the others who join us at the QE2 Conference Centre here today, as well as all those

1 who are watching this session, either on television or  
2 through the Internet.

3 Today's hearing is, understandably, much  
4 anticipated, and in the circumstances, the Committee  
5 thinks it important to set out what this hearing will  
6 and will not cover.

7 The UK's involvement in Iraq remains a divisive  
8 subject. It is one that provokes strong emotions,  
9 especially for those who have lost loved ones in Iraq,  
10 and some of them are here today.

11 They and others are looking for answers as to why  
12 the UK committed to military action in Iraq and whether  
13 we did so on the best possible footing.

14 Our questions aim to get to the heart of those  
15 issues.

16 Now, the purpose of the Iraq Inquiry is to establish  
17 a reliable account of the UK's involvement in Iraq  
18 between 2001 and 2009 and to identify lessons for future  
19 governments facing similar circumstances. That is our  
20 remit.

21 The Inquiry is not a trial.

22 The committee before you is independent and  
23 non-political. We come to our work with no  
24 preconceptions and we are committed to doing a thorough  
25 job based on the evidence. We aim to deliver our report

1 around the end of this year.

2 Now, this is the first time Mr Blair is appearing  
3 before us and we are currently holding our first round  
4 of public hearings. We shall be holding further  
5 hearings later in the year when we can return to  
6 subjects we wish to explore further. If necessary, we  
7 can speak to Mr Blair again.

8 Today's session covers six years of events that were  
9 complex and controversial. It would be impossible to do  
10 them all justice in the time we have available today.  
11 The Committee has, therefore, made a decision to centre  
12 its questioning on a number of specific areas. If  
13 necessary, we shall come back to other issues at a later  
14 date.

15 We plan to focus our questions, first, on the  
16 evolution of strategy towards Iraq up to 2002, including  
17 key meetings such as those with President Bush in April  
18 and September 2002, as well as the complex diplomatic  
19 processes at the United Nations.

20 We will then look at how the policy was presented to  
21 Parliament and the British people. That will be  
22 followed by the later stages of diplomacy in early 2003.  
23 We will then move on to the planning for the invasion of  
24 Iraq in March and April 2003, its aftermath, and the  
25 reality that confronted the coalition on the ground in

1 Iraq.

2 We plan to conclude with the deterioration of the  
3 security situation in Iraq, the high levels of sectarian  
4 violence in 2006 and 2007 and how the United Kingdom  
5 responded to this, followed, lastly, by how the  
6 British Government provided strategic direction.

7 I say, as I do on every occasion, we recognise that  
8 witnesses giving evidence based in part on their  
9 recollection of events, and we can cross-check what we  
10 hear against the papers to which we have access.

11 I remind every witness that they will later be asked  
12 to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that  
13 the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

14 I would like to begin the proceedings just by  
15 observing that the broad question by many people who  
16 have spoken and written to us so far is: why, really,  
17 did we invade Iraq, why Saddam, and why now  
18 in March 2003?

19 There have been many public speeches, statements,  
20 interviews and Parliamentary Committee hearings about  
21 Iraq. But in fairness to everyone concerned, and to our  
22 witness, we shall want, throughout today, to pursue this  
23 broad question which lies behind many of the very  
24 specific issues we shall be examining in the course of  
25 today's hearing.

1 I shall now turn to Sir Roderic Lyne to open the  
2 questions. Sir Roderic?

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Mr Blair, I would like to start with the  
4 first of the areas that Sir John has just mentioned, the  
5 way that the government, under your leadership,  
6 developed its broad strategy on Iraq in 2001 and into  
7 the early months of 2002, and if I can just summarise  
8 the situation at the beginning of this, since 1991,  
9 a strategy of containment operated internationally and  
10 with UN backing through an arms embargo, trade  
11 sanctions, No Fly Zones, Naval embargo, and stationing  
12 of coalition forces in the region, had prevented  
13 Saddam Hussein from threatening his neighbours or from  
14 developing nuclear weapons.

15 But at the same time, there were concerns by 2001,  
16 as there had been all along in many ways, about his  
17 aspirations, his efforts to break out, his missile  
18 development programme, intelligence about his CW, his  
19 chemical weapons and biological weapons capabilities,  
20 the leakage and the growing unpopularity of sanctions,  
21 which we have heard from number of previous witnesses,  
22 and the enforcement of the No Fly Zones.

23 We will come in detail on to the WMD issues later  
24 on. The policy that your government and the  
25 United States administration under the newly elected

1 President Bush adopted in 2001 through parallel reviews  
2 of Iraq policy was to reinforce this strategy of  
3 containment, to strengthen it, and the two governments  
4 led the way in putting forward what was called a smart  
5 sanctions resolution at the United Nations, didn't  
6 succeed in getting the UN Security Council to adopt that  
7 in the summer of 2001, though it was eventually adopted  
8 in May of 2002, as Security Council Resolution 1409.

9 Now, in that period, what was the view that you took  
10 of this strategy of containment, or perhaps I could  
11 divide the period: before 9/11, how did you view  
12 containment?

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is absolutely right to divide our  
14 policies, Sir Roderic, up into two separate parts; up  
15 to September 11, after September 11.

16 Up to September 11, Saddam was still a problem,  
17 a major problem, the sanctions framework was eroding,  
18 there were continual breaches of the No Fly Zone, we  
19 were actually worried about enforcing the No Fly Zone.  
20 You have probably seen correspondence from Robin Cook at  
21 the time to me about that. There was an attempt to put  
22 in place a different form of sanctions, these so-called  
23 smart sanctions, and perhaps we can come to that in  
24 a detail a little later, and, of course, the very first  
25 military action I had taken was from President Clinton,

1 back in 1998, against Saddam.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back to that later too.

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. That's actually a very important  
4 moment as well, but, however, I think I would fairly  
5 describe our policy up to September 11 as doing our  
6 best, hoping for the best, but with a different calculus  
7 of risk assessment; in other words, up to September 11,  
8 we thought he was a risk but we thought it was worth  
9 trying to contain it. The crucial thing  
10 after September 11 is that the calculus of risk changed.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I will come on to that in just a minute  
12 but in the period up to September 11, effectively, would  
13 it be right to say that containment, as a broad  
14 strategy, had been effective, was still sustainable,  
15 needed reinforcing, was expensive and difficult?

16 That's, roughly speaking, what we have heard from  
17 some earlier witnesses, including Sir John Sawers, who  
18 was working for you at the time. He said:

19 "I think it was working, but the costs of it were  
20 quite high and there were risks to the various elements  
21 of our policy that we wanted to reduce."

22 Would that be a fair summary?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the way I would put it is this:  
24 that the sanctions were obviously eroding, we couldn't  
25 get support for them. This so-called smart sanctions

1 framework, we actually, prior to September 11, couldn't  
2 get support for at that time. So we were in a bit of  
3 a difficulty there, and, of course, the fact is that  
4 Saddam -- as I say, we had taken military action in  
5 1998. There was a very long history, of course, of the  
6 dealings with Saddam. One of the things I have done for  
7 the purpose of the Inquiry is go back through my  
8 speeches prior to September 11 and -- I mean, I have  
9 actually got one or two of them here, but it is actually  
10 quite interesting.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I want to refer back to one or two of  
12 them later, as I am sure colleagues will.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me summarise their impact then.  
14 Their impact is, regularly, through 1997, 1998, 1999,  
15 2000 and 2001, I am saying Saddam must comply with the  
16 UN Resolutions and force is an option, but all of this,  
17 frankly, was in circumstances where this wasn't the top  
18 priority for us, and I remember at the very first  
19 meeting that we had, myself and President Bush,  
20 in February 2001, just after he had come to power as  
21 President of the United States, we dealt with Iraq with  
22 Colin Powell, but it was very much in the context of  
23 trying to get a different sanctions framework in place.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So if I put it in rather simple terms: he  
25 hadn't, at this point, broken out of the box that he had

1           been put in, although there were some holes in the box.

2           Would that be --

3   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  Yes, but the holes were quite  
4           substantial.

5   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  Yes, they needed attention.

6   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  Yes, but the critical thing --

7           Sir Roderic, forgive me for interrupting, but it is  
8           absolutely essential to realise this: if September 11  
9           hadn't happened, our assessment of the risk of allowing  
10          Saddam any possibility of him reconstituting his  
11          programmes would not have been the same.  But  
12          after September 11 -- and if you would like me to now,  
13          I will explain what a difference that made to the  
14          thinking -- after September 11, our view, the American  
15          view, changed, and changed dramatically.

16  SIR RODERIC LYNE:  That's precisely what I would now like to  
17          come on to, because we have heard from many witnesses --  
18          and I don't think anybody is in doubt about this,  
19          I don't think it is a point in question -- that 9/11 was  
20          a massive shock, which changed the international  
21          environment, and particularly, with regard to this  
22          question -- and your former Foreign Secretary spoke  
23          about this in detail, so we probably don't need to go  
24          over all this ground again -- it changed the way that  
25          the United States perceived the world.  It changed the

1 perception of risk. It changed attitudes towards  
2 perceived threats, and, as Jack Straw was later on to  
3 put it to you in his minute of 25 March 2002,  
4 summarising the situation with regard to Iraq:

5 "Objectively, the threat from Iraq has not worsened  
6 as a result of 11 September. What has, however,  
7 changed, is the tolerance of the international  
8 community, especially that of the United States."

9 I wonder if you could just tell us how your attitude  
10 to Iraq, not that of the United States, evolved in these  
11 months after 9/11?

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Straight after 9/11, in the statement of  
13 made to the House of Commons, just a few days after,  
14 I think on 14 September, I specifically deal with this  
15 issue, to do with weapons of mass destruction and the  
16 danger of the link with terrorism. Here is what changed  
17 for me the whole calculus of risk. It was my view then,  
18 it remains my view now.

19 The point about this terrorist act was that over  
20 3,000 people had been killed on the streets of New York,  
21 an absolutely horrific event, but this is what really  
22 changed my perception of risk, the calculus of risk for  
23 me: if those people, inspired by this religious  
24 fanaticism could have killed 30,000, they would have.

25 For those of us who dealt with terrorism from the

1 IRA, and, incidentally, I don't want to minimise the  
2 impact of that terrorism; each act of terrorism is  
3 wicked and wrong and to be deplored. But the terrorism  
4 that an organisation like the IRA were engaged in was  
5 terrorism directed towards a political purpose, maybe  
6 unjustified, but it was within a certain framework that  
7 you could understand.

8 The point about this act in New York was that, had  
9 they been able to kill even more people than those  
10 3,000, they would have, and so, after that time, my view  
11 was you could not take risks with this issue at all, and  
12 one dimension of it, because we were advised, obviously,  
13 that these people would use chemical or biological  
14 weapons or a nuclear device, if they could get hold of  
15 them -- that completely changed our assessment of where  
16 the risks for security lay, and just so that we make  
17 this absolutely clear, this was not an American  
18 position, this was my position and the British position,  
19 very, very clearly, and so, from September 11 onwards --  
20 we obviously had to deal with Afghanistan, but from that  
21 moment, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Iraq, the machinery,  
22 as you know, of AQ Khan, who was the former Pakistani  
23 nuclear scientist and who had been engaged in illicit  
24 activities and in distributing this material, all of  
25 this had to be brought to an end.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So that was your perception of the way in  
2 general the risks, the global risks, had changed; that  
3 one had to think about them differently. But Saddam  
4 himself was not a sponsor of Al-Qaeda, he hadn't been  
5 involved in 9/11 in any shape or form.

6 Had Saddam Hussein, at this point, become more of  
7 a threat than he was before 9/11?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think Jack puts it absolutely  
9 accurately in his letter to me. It wasn't that  
10 objectively he had done more, it is that our perception  
11 of the risk had shifted, and the reason for dealing with  
12 Iraq -- and I think I said this at the time -- was  
13 because it was Iraq that was in breach of the  
14 United Nations Resolutions, had ten years of defiance  
15 and I felt, we felt, it was important that we make it  
16 absolutely clear he has to come back into compliance.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back obviously to the  
18 details of this later on. I just want to follow the  
19 evolution of your strategy through a little further, if  
20 I may, and then I will hand over to colleagues.

21 At this point, now, let's say, in the first half of  
22 2002, where did that leave containment? Was it still,  
23 if one could reinforce it, a sustainable strategy?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think this is a really important  
25 point, actually, and I have looked at it quite

1           carefully, because I did at the time -- and it is really  
2           worth reflecting on for a moment now -- and that is the  
3           nature of this replacement sanctions framework.

4           We know Saddam had effectively corroded he support  
5           for the previous sanctions. He was -- on some accounts  
6           the sums of money varied, but there were billions of  
7           dollars that were basically being illicitly used by  
8           Iraq. Frankly, what he had done -- because we gave him  
9           the money to buy food and medicines for his people, but  
10          he was deliberately not giving them the food or the  
11          medicines in the way he should have, and this meant, for  
12          example, as I think Clare Short pointed out to me in  
13          early 2003, the mortality rate for children under five  
14          in Iraq was worse than the Congo.

15       SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, the sanctions had become very, very  
16          unpopular.

17       RT HON TONY BLAIR: Extremely unpopular, and he had been  
18          successful -- wholly dishonestly, I may say, but  
19          successful in blaming the west for the sanctions.

20          Now, the issue was whether this successor, so-called  
21          smart sanctions regime or framework would be a valid way  
22          of containing him. It is worth just going to the -- and  
23          I think -- but forgive me if I mention a document and if  
24          you haven't -- but I think you have got the options  
25          paper we got before --

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The March options paper is in the public  
2 domain. You can get it on the Internet. I'm not  
3 certain offhand whether or not it has been  
4 declassified --

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Right. Maybe I will just say what it  
6 told me.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- by the government which was elected  
8 under your leadership.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me just then summarise the effect of  
10 it, because it dealt specifically, as one of the  
11 options, with this issue of containment, and it  
12 described it as a least worst option.

13 If you read the paper, what they are saying is, it  
14 is possible it might work, but, equally, it is possible  
15 it won't. But here is a point that I think is really,  
16 really important on the so-called smart sanctions, that  
17 there was then, following that paper, a whole series of  
18 government discussions about these smart sanctions.

19 Each of them were indicating that they might work but  
20 they could give no guarantee of it working. The  
21 previous regime had obviously not yielded -- the  
22 previous sanctions framework had not yielded the  
23 benefits that we thought, in terms of sustainability,  
24 and the thing that I think is very important about this  
25 is the paper which I think has been declassified,

1 because I think that was done just yesterday, which is  
2 about Iraq, the new policy framework. This is the paper  
3 on 7 March 2001.

4 The Iraq new policy framework describes the  
5 arrangements that would apply on this so-called smart  
6 sanctions framework and, I just want to draw attention  
7 to one, because the whole issue about the previous  
8 sanctions eroding had been Saddam's ability to get stuff  
9 in through the borders of the surrounding countries,  
10 and, therefore, one very important part of this new  
11 sanctions framework was for border monitoring, a limited  
12 number of border crossings into Iraq from Jordan, Syria,  
13 Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran. So the idea was, in this  
14 new sanctions arrangement, to make sure that you sealed  
15 off the borders around Iraq so that it was more  
16 effective.

17 The important thing to realise is that, when we then  
18 came, post-September 11 and finally adopted this  
19 United Nations Resolution -- and I think it is  
20 United Nations Resolution 1409 -- the tightening of the  
21 borders had been dropped. We couldn't get the Russians  
22 on board unless we dropped it. So the very thing that,  
23 even back then, people were warning me, even with this  
24 tightening of the borders, it might work, it might not,  
25 that tightening restriction had been dropped by the time

1 you get to May 2002.

2 Therefore, you can still argue, I guess, that this  
3 sanctions framework would have been successful, but  
4 I think I would say it is at least as persuasive an  
5 argument that it wouldn't have been.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Trade sanctions were only, as I described  
7 earlier, one of many elements that comprised containment  
8 that were keeping Saddam in his box. You had some  
9 forces stationed in neighbouring countries in the  
10 region, the Americans had a lot of forces as  
11 a deterrent. We had the No Fly Zones. The arms embargo  
12 had been fairly effective, the trade sanctions were  
13 leaking. Parts of the border monitoring was effective,  
14 in the sense that there was a Naval embargo which we  
15 helped to operate through the Armilla patrol, I think.  
16 Other parts were leaking.

17 Was the totality of this containment -- I mean,  
18 this, I think, remained the official policy of your  
19 government in at least the first half of 2002, but, as  
20 a strategy -- and I'm still trying to stay on the  
21 strategic level -- did you see this as something at that  
22 time, the first half of 2002, as a strategy which could  
23 be sustained over the medium term or did you feel that  
24 it was a goner?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What I felt was exactly what I was being

1        advised, and I think the common sense of it might have  
2        worked, it might not have worked, but it was at least as  
3        likely, if not more likely, I would say, that it  
4        wouldn't work.

5                Sir Roderic, if I just make this point, because  
6        I think you very fairly draw attention to the range of  
7        different measures. The No Fly Zones were causing us  
8        difficulty and the trade sanctions were a vital part of  
9        stopping him getting material in to reconstitute WMD  
10       programmes, because, remember, the whole point about  
11       this new sanctions framework is that we were going to  
12       move from, effectively, "We will tell you what you can  
13       have in", to a different framework, which is actually,  
14       in many ways, much weaker, of course, which is to say,  
15       "You can have in whatever you like, apart from these 300  
16       items on the so-called goods review list".

17                So the trade sanctions part of this, which we know  
18        he had been breaking under the previous regime was not  
19        a peripheral, but an essential part of that sanctions  
20        framework being valid, and so the problem was -- I mean,  
21        an accurate summary of the position -- I don't think  
22        anyone could really dispute this at the time -- is that  
23        containment through sanctions had basically been  
24        eroding, we now had a new sanctions framework, but this  
25        new sanctions framework, to get it through the UN had

1           been watered down in the absolutely vital component of  
2           the trade restrictions.

3           I don't know whether it is maybe worth actually  
4           sending you -- there's this book by someone called  
5           Ken Pollock, who has written specifically on the  
6           sanctions framework and Saddam, and what he does when he  
7           comes to these so-called smart sanctions is he said  
8           there were seven pre-conditions for the smart sanctions  
9           to work, and then he goes on to explain why none of them  
10          would actually have happened.

11       SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's just summarise that then, and by  
12          all means send us the book, please. We have no shortage  
13          of material to read, but we are always ready for more.

14          Containment, therefore, is a policy which is in  
15          question at this point. You are clearly, as  
16          Prime Minister in the first half of 2002, and based on  
17          the advice coming to you, not very happy about the way  
18          it is working.

19          So what are your other strategic options at this  
20          point, and by what process did you review what your  
21          options were?

22       RT HON TONY BLAIR: That is the reason we called for the  
23          options paper. I mean, the options were basically  
24          these: we had taken a decision, post-September 11, that  
25          this issue had been to be confronted and there were

1 a number of different ways it could be confronted. It  
2 could be confronted by an effective sanctions framework,  
3 it could be confronted by Saddam allowing the inspectors  
4 back in to do their work properly and compliance with  
5 the UN Resolutions, or, in the final analysis, if he was  
6 not prepared -- if sanctions could not contain him and  
7 he was not prepared to allow the UN inspectors back in,  
8 then the option of removing Saddam was there.

9 That option, incidentally, had always been there.  
10 After September 11 what changed, as I say, was our  
11 calculation, mine and I think the Americans' as well,  
12 that we couldn't go on like this.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the options paper, looked, as you say,  
14 at containment strengthened as one broad course. An  
15 alternative strategy, the possibility of regime change,  
16 which by then was being much talked about in the  
17 United States, and then three different ways in which  
18 that might be effected.

19 I do not want to go into each of those at this  
20 particular point. I am, as I say, trying to think about  
21 the process of formulating strategy.

22 Having got that paper, what did you do in order to  
23 have it discussed and reviewed and looked at? What kind  
24 of meetings did you hold about it? Whom did you  
25 consult?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously we were talking -- I was  
2 speaking very closely with Jack Straw, with those who  
3 were advising me at the time, we were talking obviously  
4 to the Ministry of Defence people and the  
5 Defence Secretary as well, and we were trying to get an  
6 assessment -- that's why, as I say, there was a lot of  
7 discussion inside government: is this new sanctions  
8 framework really going to do it or not, is it going to  
9 be effective?

10 As I say, I think the conclusion was, in the end,  
11 you certainly couldn't rely on it.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you have an actual meeting to discuss  
13 the paper and take a decision on it?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had a meeting, I think -- the options  
15 paper was given to us before the meeting with  
16 President Bush, and then I think -- I'm not sure whether  
17 it was before or shortly after, but I can look it up for  
18 you. I think we then had a meeting of the key people to  
19 decide where we were then going to go.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think you got the paper in March, you  
21 were seeing President Bush in April, and before you went  
22 to see President Bush, you had a meeting at Chequers  
23 with number of people which was a sort of briefing  
24 meeting for Crawford, but you didn't have anything like  
25 a Cabinet Committee meeting which looked at this paper

1 and had a sort of structured debate about it?

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did have a very structured debate  
3 with the people. I mean, the fact that it happened at  
4 Chequers rather than Downing Street I don't think is  
5 particularly relevant to it, but I think the simple  
6 answer is: did we consider those other options?

7 Absolutely. That's why we had the paper drawn up.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you considered those options, how  
9 diverse was the range of advice you were getting on  
10 them? Were you getting advice fed into you from people  
11 with a real knowledge of the Middle East and Iraq, and  
12 were you having people challenging the paper and  
13 pointing out some of the possible downsides, if you went  
14 this way or that way?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The one thing I found throughout this  
16 whole matter from a very early stage is that I was never  
17 short of people challenging me on it.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you identify who they were?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There were people within the Cabinet,  
20 obviously; for example, Robin Cook and from time to time  
21 Clare Short.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But they weren't at the Chequers meeting?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they weren't, but we discussed this,  
24 obviously, prior to the invasion of Iraq. I think there  
25 were no fewer than 24 different Cabinet meetings. This

1           was a topic that was right through the mainstream --

2   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   But you didn't discuss the options paper  
3           in Cabinet?

4   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   We didn't discuss the options paper  
5           specifically in Cabinet.

6   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   It didn't even go to all the Cabinet.  
7           I mean, Clare Short didn't get a paper.  She complained  
8           that she hadn't got it in the first place.

9   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   But the discussion that we had in  
10           Cabinet was substantive discussion.  We had it again and  
11           again and again, and the options were very simple.  The  
12           options were: a sanctions framework that was effective;  
13           alternatively, the UN inspectors doing the job;  
14           alternatively, you have to remove Saddam.

15           Those were the options.

16   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   What were the downside arguments being  
17           put to you about removing Saddam?

18   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   Well, the downside arguments -- and this  
19           was partly from, for example -- you know, I was reading  
20           telegrams coming in from ambassadors abroad and so on.  
21           The downside arguments were obviously going to be that,  
22           not merely is military action always something that you  
23           should consider only as a last resort, but there were  
24           issues to do with relationships in the Muslim world,  
25           there were issues to do with what the effect would be in

1 the Arab world and so on.

2 But what you find in these situations is that you  
3 will get a range of different views. Some people were  
4 saying, "You must not, on any account, contemplate  
5 military action", other people were saying, "It is time  
6 you acted".

7 So, for example, in -- I think it was in mid-2002,  
8 the Conservative Party put out a paper saying, "This is  
9 why Saddam is a threat and we have to act". Other  
10 people were saying, I think the Liberal Democrats were  
11 saying, "He may be a threat but you should rule out  
12 military action".

13 So it is not as if we weren't getting the full range  
14 of views. We got the full range of views from the very  
15 beginning. The trouble was, we had to take a decision,  
16 and my decision was that we could not afford to have  
17 this situation go on. How we then dealt with it,  
18 however, was an open question.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were the views being put to you -- did  
20 they include people warning you that what happened after  
21 you toppled Saddam Hussein, if one did end up doing  
22 that, would raise some difficult questions and risks of  
23 sectarian strife within Iraq? How much was that spelt  
24 out in the advice from that time?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Most of the advice was a worry about

1 a humanitarian catastrophe if Saddam was removed. There  
2 was advice -- and I actually called for papers on this,  
3 I think a little bit later -- on what the Sunni Shia  
4 relationship would be. That was obviously an issue. It  
5 was an issue we raised within our own deliberations with  
6 the Americans and elsewhere.

7 So all of these things were factors that we had to  
8 take into account, but the primary consideration for me  
9 was to send an absolutely powerful, clear and  
10 unremitting message that, after September 11, if you  
11 were a regime engaged in WMD, you had to stop.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That brings me, I think, to the final  
13 points that I want to ask, because from the evidence  
14 that we have heard so far, from now a large number of  
15 witnesses, and from the documents we have read, it does  
16 begin to appear that by about March or April of 2002 you  
17 were strongly attracted to the idea of changing the  
18 regime in Iraq, and, in a sense, in doing so, you were  
19 building on a philosophy of humanitarian intervention  
20 that you had first, I think, set out in a very public  
21 way in your Chicago speech of April 1999, and you  
22 in April, of course, of 2002, after your meeting with  
23 President Bush, returned to it in your speech at the  
24 George Bush Presidential Library at College Station when  
25 you said, talking in general of regime change, not

1 specifically in this paragraph about Iraq:

2 "If necessary, the action should be military, and,  
3 again, if necessary and justified, it should involve  
4 regime change. I have been involved, as British  
5 Prime Minister, in three conflicts involving regime  
6 change: Milosevic, the Taliban and Sierra Leone."

7 Had you reached the point where you regarded, within  
8 this philosophy, removing Saddam's regime -- and I do  
9 not think anybody was ever in any doubt about the  
10 evilness of Saddam's regime -- as a valid objective for  
11 the government's policy?

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the absolutely key issue was the WMD  
13 issue, but I think it is just worth at this point -- and  
14 then I will come specifically to the text of this speech  
15 and deal with this notion that somehow in Crawford  
16 I shifted our position.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will talk about Crawford separately.  
18 I'm sticking on the strategy now. I'm referring to the  
19 speech.

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Wasn't that the day after the Crawford  
21 meeting?

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was the day after the Crawford meeting  
23 and it is in the context of your philosophy of regime  
24 change.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Okay. Let me make it quite clear. In

1 the Chicago speech, in 1999, what I was doing was  
2 setting out very clearly what I thought the consequences  
3 were of an interdependent world, and what I was really  
4 saying was this: that whereas in the past people might  
5 have thought that a security problem in one part of the  
6 world can be divorced from its impact on another part,  
7 in the world that was developing, we were no longer able  
8 to do that, not financially, not in terms of security,  
9 not in terms, actually, of the cultural issues.

10 In other words, as a result of an interdependent  
11 world, it then became in our self-interest, not as part  
12 simply of some moral cause, but in our self-interest to  
13 regard ourselves as affected by what was happening in  
14 a different part of the world.

15 I actually have the Chicago speech here if you want  
16 me to refer to it.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I have it too, and I have referred to it.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is quite important to make this  
19 point.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is an important speech.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, because, if you read the speech,  
22 you will see very clearly that the basis for what I'm  
23 saying is not that I now believe that we should apply,  
24 rather than a test of national interest, a moral test --  
25 I mean, I think there are moral issues to do with

1 dictators and so on. What I was saying was that, from  
2 now on, in the new world that is developing, we should  
3 realise that it is in our national interest to  
4 understand that the problem in a different part of the  
5 world can come back and hit us in ours.

6 The reason why I was so strongly in favour of action  
7 in Kosovo, action, incidentally, to rescue an  
8 essentially Muslim population from persecution by  
9 a country that was a Christian country, was not simply  
10 that I felt affronted, as I think people should and did  
11 do, about the prospect of ethnic cleansing, but also  
12 because I was convinced that the consequences of  
13 allowing such an action to go unchecked would never stay  
14 at the borders of the Balkans. So that's the basis of  
15 it.

16 When we then come to the Texas speech, it is not  
17 that I suddenly say, "Now it is regime change, rather  
18 than WMD". On the contrary, you quoted a passage --  
19 I then go on to say this:

20 "We cannot, of course, intervene in all cases, but  
21 where countries are engaged in the terror or WMD  
22 business, we should not shrink from confronting them.  
23 Some can be offered a way out, a route to  
24 respectability. I hope in time that Syria, Iran and  
25 even North Korea can accept the need to change their

1 relationships with the outside world. A new  
2 relationship is on offer. But they must know that  
3 sponsoring terrorism or WMD is unacceptable."

4 Then I go on to deal with Iraq:

5 "As for Iraq, I know some fear precipitate action.  
6 They needn't. We will proceed, as we did  
7 after September 11, in a calm, measured, sensible but  
8 firm way ..."

9 Then I go on:

10 "... but leaving Iraq to develop WMD in flagrant  
11 breach of no less than nine separate United Nations  
12 Resolutions, refusing still to allow weapons inspectors  
13 back to do their work properly, is not an option."

14 I then go on to describe the brutality of Saddam,  
15 but then I come back to the issue of WMD.

16 So, for me, the issue was very, very simple: it was  
17 about the need to make absolutely clear that from now on  
18 you did not defy the international community on WMD.

19 I would like, if I might, also to make one other  
20 point, because I have read obviously a lot of the  
21 evidence that has been given to you.

22 I think there is a danger that we end up with a very  
23 sort of binary distinction between regime change here  
24 and WMD here. The truth of the matter is that a regime  
25 that is brutal and oppressive, that, for example, has

1 used WMD against its own people, as Saddam did, and had  
2 killed tens of thousands of people by the use of  
3 chemical weapons, such a regime is a bigger threat, if  
4 it has WMD, than one that is otherwise benign.

5 So if you were to look at Iran today, the reason why  
6 I take, and still take, a very hard line on Iran and  
7 nuclear weapons is not just because of nuclear  
8 proliferation, it is because the nature of the Iranian  
9 regime makes me even more worried about the prospect of  
10 them with a nuclear device.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were making this dual argument at  
12 the time with regard to Iraq, both about the nature of  
13 the regime and about WMD, and as you quite rightly say,  
14 when you got on to Iraq in that speech, as on other  
15 occasions, you made that dual argument.

16 But, of course, in a recent television interview  
17 with Fern Britton you were asked then, "If you had known  
18 then that there were no WMDs, would you still have gone  
19 on?" and you replied:

20 "I would still have thought it right to remove him."

21 So even without the WMDs, you were saying  
22 in December, or very recently, that you would still have  
23 thought it right to remove him. What I'm trying to  
24 grope for is precisely that point.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me deal with the Fern Britton

1 interview. Sir Roderic, even with all my experience in  
2 dealing with interviews, it still indicates that I have  
3 got something to learn about it. This was an issue, let  
4 me just explain, that was given some weeks before your  
5 Inquiry began.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, we had been going for some weeks.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the actual interview was given some  
8 time before.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was recorded.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was recorded some time --

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was recorded before July of last year?

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, not before July of last year, but  
13 before you began your public hearings.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In November.

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly. The point that I'm making is  
16 very simply this: I did not use the words "regime  
17 change" in that interview, and I did not in any sense  
18 mean to change the basis. Obviously, all I was saying  
19 was you couldn't describe the nature of the threat in  
20 the same way, if you knew then what you know now,  
21 because some of the intelligence about WMD was shown to  
22 be wrong.

23 It was in no sense a change of the position, and  
24 I just simply say to you, the position was that it was  
25 the breach of the United Nations Resolutions on WMD.

1           That was the cause. It was then, and it remains.

2   SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in April -- this is my final point  
3           before I hand over -- of 2002, you were not taking the  
4           view that the need to change the regime in Iraq should  
5           be the main driver of your strategy because the  
6           situation on WMD essentially hadn't changed very much  
7           over the previous three or more years?

8   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, the position on WMD had changed  
9           dramatically as a result of September 11.

10   SIR RODERIC LYNE: The facts on WMD had not changed; the  
11           perception of the risk had changed, but not the risk  
12           itself.

13   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. Look, one of the things that you  
14           always have to do in this situation -- you are  
15           absolutely right to draw attention to it -- is you have  
16           to, when you are charged with the responsibility of  
17           trying to protect your country -- and that should be the  
18           job of the Prime Minister -- you have to take an  
19           assessment of risk.

20           Now, my assessment of risk prior to September 11 was  
21           that Saddam was a menace, that he was a threat, he was  
22           a monster, but we would have to try and make best.

23           If you had asked me prior to September 11, did  
24           I have any real belief in his good faith. No, I didn't.  
25           Did I really think that a new sanctions framework was

1 going to do the trick? No, I didn't.

2 On the other hand, precisely because the consequence  
3 of military action is so great, for me the calculus of  
4 risk was, "Look, we are just going to have to do the  
5 best we can".

6 After September 11, that changed, and that change,  
7 incidentally, I still believe is important for us today  
8 because it is the reason today, as I say, I do take such  
9 a strong line on Iran or any other nation that tries to  
10 develop WMD. We cannot afford, in my view -- look,  
11 other people may have different views, but in my view,  
12 we cannot afford the possibility that nations,  
13 particularly nations that are brutal, rogue states,  
14 states that take an attitude that is wholly contrary to  
15 our way of life, you cannot afford such states to be  
16 allowed to develop or proliferate WMD.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: My colleagues are going to come back in  
18 more detail to this later on, because it is crucially  
19 important, and I apologise for, as it were, interrupting  
20 the flow at this stage, but I think it is time that  
21 I pass the baton to Baroness Prashar so that she can  
22 carry the story forward before we get back in more  
23 detail to the theme of WMD, if you are content with  
24 that.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Just before Baroness Prashar comes on, the

1 government last night declassified two documents. We  
2 weren't proposing to put them up on the website because  
3 in themselves they only tell a very small part of the  
4 story, but since our witness has referred to one of  
5 them, we shall now put both of them up on the website.  
6 They are declassified.

7 Baroness Prashar?

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

9 Mr Blair, I want to pick up the more detailed  
10 developments in policy, particularly at the beginning of  
11 2002, because it was, I think, eight years ago to date  
12 when President Bush told the Congress in his annual  
13 State of the Union address about the "Axis of Evil", and  
14 I think your two advisers, Mr Jonathan Powell and  
15 Sir David Manning, said that, in a sense, there was  
16 a shift in emphasis, particularly when regime change had  
17 actually become an active policy for the USA, because  
18 although it had been -- there had been the  
19 Iraq Liberation Act and it was a policy, but it wasn't  
20 an active policy. It actually became an active policy  
21 at that stage.

22 When you sensed this shift in policy, what was your  
23 response? If you can briefly tell me, and then I want  
24 to go on to the preparation for the Crawford meeting.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I would say that the shift really

1 happened straight after September 11. I mean, I think,  
2 if I may just quote from -- straight after September 11,  
3 what I actually said on this issue, when I reflected on  
4 the terrorism was:

5 "We know these groups of fanatics are capable of  
6 killing without discrimination. The limits on the  
7 numbers that they kill, and their methods of killing,  
8 are not governed by any sense of morality. The limits  
9 are only practical and technical. We know that they  
10 would, if they could, go further and use chemical,  
11 biological or even nuclear weapons. We know also that  
12 there are groups of people, occasionally states, who  
13 will trade the technology and capability of such  
14 weapons."

15 Then I go on to say that we have been warned and we  
16 should act on this warning. I would say it is not  
17 really about the President Bush "Axis of Evil" speech or  
18 anything else. I think, after September 11, it was  
19 clear that this whole thing was in a different  
20 framework.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But my point was: how did we intend  
22 to respond to the change, the shift in the American  
23 policy? Not the shift in your thinking, which we have  
24 heard earlier, but how did we intend to respond that?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We intended to respond by saying, "From

1           now on we have to deal with it".

2   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   So the preparation for the meeting  
3           at Crawford that took place at Chequers, I think was  
4           a preparation meeting for Crawford, and according to  
5           Alastair Campbell's diaries, you told the Chequers  
6           meeting it was regime change in part because of WMD, but  
7           more broadly because of a threat to the region and the  
8           world.   That's true?

9   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   I think these things were sort of  
10           conjoined, really.   I mean, the fact is it was an  
11           appalling regime and we couldn't run the risk of such  
12           a regime being allowed to develop WMD.

13           Can I just make one point which I think is quite  
14           important as well?   Of course, it was President Clinton  
15           in 1998 that signed the Iraq Liberation Act and that  
16           policy of regime change became the policy of the  
17           government.

18   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   I am aware of that, because it  
19           became more active, as I said.

20   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   But can I just make this point?   Because  
21           I think it is very important.   If you study the detail  
22           of that Act, the reason he comes out for regime change,  
23           President Clinton, is because of the breach of the  
24           United Nations Resolutions on WMD.

25           So there is a way you can get a sense -- and some of

1 this has come in the evidence. As it were, the  
2 Americans are for regime change, we are for dealing with  
3 WMD. It is more a different way of expressing the same  
4 proposition. The Americans in a sense were saying, "We  
5 are for regime change because we don't trust he is ever  
6 going to give up his WMD ambitions". We were saying,  
7 "We have to deal with his WMD ambitions. If that means  
8 regime change, so be it".

9 So it wasn't that we kind of came at this from  
10 completely different positions.

11 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In preparation for this meeting at  
12 Chequers, what kind of conclusions did you reach and  
13 what advice were you being given by your advisers?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Basically, we were obviously now  
15 going -- we had the military action in Afghanistan, it  
16 was obvious that the American system, indeed our own  
17 system, were now going to look at this WMD issue and  
18 there was advice on options as to containment and regime  
19 change and so on and so forth.

20 So all those options were being explored, and, as  
21 I say, following that meeting and before I went to see  
22 President Bush, there was quite an intense interaction  
23 on this whole issue that Sir Roderic was raising with me  
24 about smart sanctions, because I needed to get a sense  
25 whether this policy was a -- was really going to be

1 a runner or not.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But why was the Chief of Defence  
3 Staff present at this meeting?

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because it was very obvious that the  
5 American system certainly wasn't going to rule out  
6 military action, and, you know, from a very early stage,  
7 I could see coming down the track -- I mean straight  
8 after September 11, frankly -- that there were going to  
9 be some very difficult decisions about this in the  
10 future.

11 So one of the things that I always tried to do,  
12 particularly if we were -- if military action was even  
13 a possibility and the paper had made it clear it was  
14 a possibility, to get the Chief of the Defence Staff  
15 right alongside the discussion and the planning and the  
16 policy.

17 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What advice did he give you at that  
18 meeting? Because I think you had asked the Foreign  
19 Secretary and the Defence Secretary to produce papers.

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, the defence --

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: These papers were discussed, but  
22 what advice did the Chief of the Defence Staff give you  
23 at that meeting?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: He was laying out again various options  
25 on the military side. He was expressing his views.

1 I think Mike Boyce told you about this in his evidence.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Mike Boyce doesn't remember being at  
3 that meeting, although it is in Alastair Campbell's  
4 diary, so I am afraid we don't have that information.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I remember him being at it. As  
6 I say, we got the paper from the Ministry of Defence and  
7 that was looking at the various options, but, you know,  
8 one of the things that was happening at this time, and  
9 I think it is quite important to reflect on this, is  
10 that this was very quickly becoming the key issue.  
11 People were moving on from Afghanistan. It was always  
12 going to be on the agenda, once you had September 11,  
13 and, as I say, a different sense from everybody that we  
14 had to act, and so we had, you know, a perfectly good  
15 discussion about it, and obviously I think from the  
16 defence point of view, what CDS and the  
17 Ministry of Defence were concerned about was to make  
18 sure we got alongside any planning that was going on and  
19 did it as quickly as possible.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was the Foreign Secretary at that  
21 meeting?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I believe he was, but let me go back and  
23 check.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Because we heard from Jack Straw  
25 about the advice he gave you in advance of that meeting,

1       which is the one that has already been referred to, but  
2       we have heard that, while there might have been some  
3       private differences at the time between you and the  
4       Foreign Secretary over the desired final objective,  
5       where the regime change was the objective, you were  
6       agreed on the tactics: namely, that it would be  
7       essential to go through the United Nations, because,  
8       without that, it would not be possible for the Cabinet  
9       or anyone else to support military action. Is that  
10      a correct --

11     RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, Baroness. I think the other  
12      thing that was very important to me at this time was to  
13      try to get the international community on the same page  
14      with the threat and how we dealt with it.

15             You know, straight after September 11, people came  
16      together behind America, but I was very aware, right  
17      from the early stages of this, that, although the  
18      American mindset had changed dramatically, and, frankly,  
19      mine had as well, when I talked to other leaders,  
20      particularly in Europe, I didn't get the same impression  
21      really, and so one thing I was really anxious to do,  
22      because we had put together a coalition on Afghanistan,  
23      was to try and put together a coalition again to deal  
24      with Saddam Hussein.

25             Therefore, the United Nations route, it wasn't just

1 that it was important for all sorts of political  
2 reasons, legal reasons and so on, it was -- I mean to do  
3 with the internal politics of the UK -- it was also  
4 important to me because I didn't want America to feel  
5 that it had no option but to do it on its own.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Are you saying to me that that was  
7 the kind of agreed policy with which you went to  
8 Crawford? On the eve of Crawford, is that what you  
9 intended to achieve at Crawford?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we intended to achieve at Crawford,  
11 frankly, was to get a real sense from the Americans as  
12 to what they wanted to do, and this would be best done  
13 between myself and President Bush, and really to get  
14 a sense of how our own strategy was going to have to  
15 evolve in the light of that.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we then come to Crawford?  
17 Because you had one-to-one discussions with  
18 President Bush without any advisers present. Can you  
19 tell us what was decided at these discussions?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was nothing actually decided, but  
21 let me just make one thing clear about this: one thing  
22 that is really important, I think, when you are dealing  
23 with other leaders, is you establish -- and this is  
24 particularly important, I think, for the Prime Minister  
25 of the United Kingdom and the President of the

1 United States -- you establish a close and strong  
2 relationship. You know, I had it with President Clinton  
3 and I had it again with President Bush, and that's  
4 important. So some of it you will do in a formal  
5 meeting, but it is also important to be able to discuss  
6 in a very frank way what the issues were.

7 As I recall that discussion, it was less to do with  
8 specifics about what we were going to do on Iraq or,  
9 indeed, the Middle East, because the Israel issue was  
10 a big, big issue at the time. I think, in fact,  
11 I remember, actually, there may have been conversations  
12 that we had even with Israelis, the two of us, whilst we  
13 were there. So that was a major part of all this.

14 But the principal part of my conversation was really  
15 to try and say, "Look, in the end we have got to deal  
16 with the various different dimensions of this whole  
17 issue". I mean, for me, what had happened  
18 after September 11 was that I was starting to look at  
19 this whole issue to do with this unrepresentative  
20 extremism within Islam in a different way, and I wanted  
21 to persuade President Bush, but also get a sense from  
22 him as to where he was on that broader issue.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what you are suggesting is that  
24 you were having general discussions in terms of getting  
25 views across to each other, trying to understand and

1           establish a rapport and a relationship?

2   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  Yes, but also, frankly --

3   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:  During the course of these  
4           discussions, do you think you gave many commitments?

5   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  The only commitment I gave, and I gave  
6           this very openly, at the meeting was a commitment to  
7           deal with Saddam.

8   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:  So you were at one that you had to  
9           deal with --

10  RT HON TONY BLAIR:  Absolutely, and that wasn't a private  
11           commitment, that was a public one.

12  BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:  So you were agreed on the ends but  
13           not on the means?

14  RT HON TONY BLAIR:  We were agreed on both, actually, as it  
15           came to finally, but we were agreed that we had to  
16           confront this issue, that Saddam had to come back into  
17           compliance with the international community, and, as  
18           I think I said in the press conference with  
19           President Bush, the method of doing that is open, and  
20           indeed he made the same point.

21           I just want to make one other point about this.  
22           This was about six months from September 11 and one  
23           major part of what President Bush was saying to me was  
24           just to express his fear, actually, that, if we weren't  
25           prepared to act in a really strong way, then we ran the

1 risk of sending a disastrous signal out to the world.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But there is -- so many people  
3 believed that you entered into a firm commitment because  
4 some undertakings were given that you would be with him  
5 no matter what, whatever the circumstances.

6 I mean, I think it is important, because these  
7 discussions were taking place without anybody being  
8 present, to understand what commitments did you make to  
9 him and why is there a feeling that this was quite  
10 a critical meeting?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I can't explain why people have come to  
12 a view that there was some different commitment given,  
13 because I read from time to time people saying things  
14 that this was what was agreed at this meeting.

15 What was agreed was actually set out in a very  
16 private note from David Manning afterwards, and what  
17 I was saying to President Bush -- and I wasn't saying  
18 this privately, incidentally, I was saying it  
19 publicly -- was: we are going to be with you in  
20 confronting and dealing with this threat. There was  
21 no -- the one thing I was not doing was dissembling in  
22 that position. In fact, I actually have here, at the  
23 press conference that President Bush and I gave  
24 afterwards, we talked about -- I think Israel actually  
25 came up first, but then we went on to Iraq and

1 President Bush says:

2 "The Prime Minister and I, of course, talked about  
3 Iraq. We both recognised the danger of a man who is  
4 willing to kill his own people and harbouring and  
5 developing weapons of mass destruction."

6 It then goes on to say that he has got to  
7 effectively prove that he is in compliance, and I then  
8 say:

9 "You know, it has always been our policy that Iraq  
10 would be a better place without Saddam. I don't think  
11 anybody should be in any doubt about that for all the  
12 reasons I have given", and, you know, the reasons are to  
13 do with weapons of mass destruction, also deal with the  
14 brutality and repression.

15 So what I say are the reasons are to do with weapons  
16 of mass destruction, also to do with the appalling  
17 brutality and repression of his own people, but how we  
18 proceed in this situation, how we make sure that the  
19 threat that is posed by WMD is dealt with. That is  
20 a matter that is open.

21 So -- and I go on to describe the UN Resolutions.  
22 So the position was not a covert position, it was an  
23 open position, and, of course, what subsequently the  
24 debate was about, in July and then in September at the  
25 crucial meeting --

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Before we move on to that, that's  
2 what you were saying, but what did President Bush  
3 understand, do you think, you meant by that? Because we  
4 heard from Alastair Campbell the tenor of your  
5 correspondence with him, but what was his understanding?  
6 What did he take it to mean?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think he took it to mean what I had  
8 said both at the press conference and in the meeting,  
9 which is that we would be with him in dealing with this  
10 threat, and how we dealt with it was an open question,  
11 and even at that stage, I was raising the issue of going  
12 the UN route.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Your Chief of Staff told us that at  
14 Crawford and subsequently you did not set any conditions  
15 for Britain's support for the US, but that your approach  
16 was to say, "We are with you in terms of what you are  
17 trying to do, but this is a sensible way to do it. We  
18 are offering you a partnership to try and get to a wide  
19 coalition."

20 But other witnesses who were also involved in the  
21 decision-making process have told us that you set  
22 a number of clear conditions for our support. Which was  
23 it?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was the former. Look, this is an  
25 alliance that we have with the United States of America.

1 It is not a contract. It is not, "We do this for you,  
2 you do this for us". It is an alliance and it is an  
3 alliance, I say to you very openly, I believe in  
4 passionately. I had been through with  
5 President Clinton, Kosovo, and just let me emphasise to  
6 you, 85 per cent of the assets we used in Kosovo were  
7 American assets. I had real difficulty persuading  
8 President Clinton that it was right to go all the way on  
9 Kosovo, and he was in a really difficult position and it  
10 was an immensely courageous decision he took, because  
11 the American people were saying to him, "Look, this  
12 place is thousands of miles away from America. Let the  
13 Europeans deal with it. It is on their doorstep". It  
14 is important to understand this.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Sir Christopher Meyer did say  
16 you were saying, "Yes, but", but the "but" was not being  
17 listened to.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't think he was there at the  
19 critical meeting.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But he had correspondence, he was  
21 briefed on all of that.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He was talking about a wider period in  
23 2002, not just about one meeting.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but the fact is, at that meeting --  
25 and it is, I think, the other evidence that has been

1 given to you, particularly by David Manning, is very  
2 clear about this -- we were setting out a position, and,  
3 as I say, that position was not a private position, it  
4 was a public position, but I was just explaining about  
5 the American line, because it is important and it is  
6 important in understanding my thinking on this.

7 So I had been through this process with  
8 President Clinton. When he, with a lot of courage, had  
9 committed America. September 11 happened. I never  
10 regarded September 11 as an attack on America,  
11 I regarded it as an attack on us, and I had said we  
12 would stand shoulder to shoulder with them. We did in  
13 Afghanistan and I was determined to do that again.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Fine. Now, I think the term used by  
15 Jonathan Powell was that you said that, for tactical  
16 reasons -- so granted you -- partly for tactical  
17 reasons, you set out for the US the issues you believed  
18 needed to be tackled for the policy to be pursued  
19 successfully, but I think at Crawford you did discuss UK  
20 participation in US military planning.

21 Now, when you discussed that, what conclusions do  
22 you think President Bush took from the meeting about  
23 your commitment of dealing with Saddam Hussein through  
24 military action?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think what he took from that is

1 exactly what he should have taken, which is that, if it  
2 came to military action because there was no way of  
3 dealing with this diplomatically, we would be with him,  
4 and that was absolutely clear, because, as I had set out  
5 publicly, not privately, we had to confront this issue,  
6 it could be confronted by a sanctions framework that was  
7 effective. For the reasons I have given, we didn't have  
8 one. It could be confronted by a UN inspections  
9 framework -- we will come to that -- or, alternatively,  
10 it would have to be confronted by force. I was going  
11 earlier -- but I won't do it, but I'm very happy to make  
12 available the comments I had made, even prior  
13 to September 11 2001, because we had been through this  
14 with Saddam several times, 1997, 1998, and so on and so  
15 forth. You know, the fact is force was always an  
16 option. What changed after September 11 was that, if  
17 necessary, and there was no other way of dealing with  
18 this threat, we were going to remove him.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So would you say that the commitment  
20 that you gave, let's say for tactical reasons, became an  
21 assumption in Washington, and then to some extent that  
22 reduced your leverage for negotiations?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you say -- did you say for tactical  
24 reasons?

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That is what Jonathan Powell said.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't so much for tactical reasons.  
2 What I believed was, if you wanted to make a real change  
3 to this whole issue -- again, this is very important to  
4 understanding certainly my strategic thinking, but  
5 I think the strategic thinking of many people who looked  
6 at this issue. I would probably have a far greater  
7 understanding of it today, actually, than even back  
8 then.

9 What I believed we confronted was a new threat that  
10 was based, not on political ideology, but on religious  
11 fanaticism. It was a complete perversion of the proper  
12 faith of Islam, but it was real and active, and they  
13 demonstrated their intent to kill very large numbers of  
14 us if they possibly could.

15 What I was trying to set out, not for tactical  
16 reasons, but for deep, strategic reasons, is: what did  
17 we need to do to make a successful assault on this  
18 ideology that was so dangerous? Therefore, the  
19 Middle East peace process for me was not a kind of  
20 tactical thing, it was absolutely fundamental, still is  
21 in my view, to dealing with this issue.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I think Sir Roderic wants to come  
23 in.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said a moment or two ago that you had  
25 agreed with President Bush, not only on the ends but

1           also on the means, but the Americans actually had  
2           a different view of the means, in that they were already  
3           planning military action, and they had an explicit  
4           policy of seeking regime change.

5           Did you, at Crawford, actually have a complete  
6           identity of view with President Bush on how to deal with  
7           Saddam?

8   RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were of course pushing the UN route.

9           So the American view was regime change, as I say,  
10          because they didn't believe Saddam would ever, in good  
11          faith, give up his WMD ambitions or programmes.

12   SIR RODERIC LYNE: You were insisting, ultimately  
13          successfully, that this should be done through the UN  
14          route. So actually, your view of the means was actually  
15          different from theirs because they would have been  
16          prepared -- they weren't that keen on the UN route. You  
17          had to persuade them very hard.

18   RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did have to persuade them, although  
19          I think it is fair to say that, even at that meeting,  
20          President Bush made it clear that America would have to  
21          adjust policy if Saddam let the inspectors back in and  
22          the inspectors were able to function properly.

23   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another thing --

24   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Incidentally, if I can just point this  
25          out, at several occasions over the next few months,

1 President Bush made it clear to me that, if the UN route  
2 worked, then it worked. We would have had to have taken  
3 yes for an answer.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You equally had said to him, as you have  
5 just repeated and as Alastair Campbell said earlier,  
6 that, if it came to military action and there had been  
7 no way of dealing with this diplomatically, that you  
8 would be with them.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: If we tried the UN route and it failed,  
10 then my view was it had to be dealt with.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back to the question of  
12 where that left you in terms of your legal base quite  
13 a lot later on, because I think it is best that we take  
14 that as a single subject in its own right. I think it  
15 will be easier for both of us.

16 Just one more point arising from Crawford, but not  
17 just from Crawford. You said -- you reminded us that  
18 the Arab/Israel problem was in a very hot state at  
19 Crawford. You said you may even have had some  
20 conversations with Israelis from there, and obviously it  
21 was something that was a large part of your  
22 conversations with President Bush.

23 I think it is right to say -- indeed, Jack Straw  
24 said it -- that you were relentless in trying to  
25 persuade the Americans to make more and faster progress

1 on the Middle East peace process. Ultimately,  
2 Jack Straw said it was a matter of huge -- in his  
3 evidence the other day -- it was a matter of huge  
4 frustration that we weren't able to achieve something  
5 which you had been seeking so strongly.

6 Now, given the support that you were giving to  
7 President Bush, saying, "I stand shoulder to shoulder  
8 with you", why didn't he repay that support by acting  
9 more decisively on the crucial issue of the Middle East  
10 peace process?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, first of all, as I say, I think we  
12 should certainly, in order to understand my mindset,  
13 avoid this language of trading this policy for that  
14 policy. I would not have done Iraq, if I hadn't have  
15 thought it was right, full stop, irrespective of the  
16 Middle East.

17 However, I believe that resolving the Middle East --  
18 this is what I work on now -- is immensely important,  
19 and I think it was difficult -- and this is something  
20 I have said before on several occasions -- it was  
21 difficult to persuade President Bush, and, indeed,  
22 America actually, that this was such a fundamental  
23 question. The Americans tended to regard these issues  
24 as somewhat separate.

25 Now, in mitigation of that, we did eventually,

1       although later than I wanted, get the road map adopted,  
2       and the road map was extremely important. Secondly,  
3       however -- and, again, I know more about this now  
4       probably than I would have known then, because of the  
5       work I do now -- I think, truthfully, with the Intifada  
6       still raging in Palestine, it would have been pretty  
7       difficult to have got this thing back together again.

8               However, having said that, no, I mean, I was  
9       relentless and I was always very frustrated about it,  
10      because I believed then, and I believe now, that these  
11      are not divisible problems; it is one problem with  
12      different facets, and one major facet of the whole  
13      problem is this Israel/Palestine conflict. Not because,  
14      incidentally, the existence of Israel has provoked this  
15      conflict. I totally disagree with people who say that.  
16      But the resolution of the conflict would have an  
17      enormously beneficial impact on relations with the  
18      Muslim world.

19      SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think, if I recall rightly, you were  
20      arguing very strongly throughout 2002 to the White House  
21      that making progress on this problem -- as you say, it  
22      wasn't a question of a trade-off, it was because  
23      achieving progress on this was going to make a huge  
24      difference to opinion in the region, to reactions in the  
25      region, to the reactions in the Muslim world if it came

1 to the point where you had to take military action  
2 against Iraq.

3 So, as you have just said, these two things were  
4 linked together, but the Americans were not able to see  
5 the logic of this in the same way?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, it was a debate that continued,  
7 and I think, you know, you have got a point actually,  
8 Sir Roderic. I think that they never -- this is  
9 something -- I think it is different with the American  
10 system now, and I think it was different actually at the  
11 end of President Bush's time, in fact. The reason he  
12 launched the Annapolis peace process was because of  
13 this.

14 But I think there was a tendency to see these things  
15 separately, and I regarded them, as I say, as all part  
16 of the one thing, and, you know, yes, I mean, I said  
17 this at the time and I would say it now -- I mean,  
18 I wished we would have made better and faster progress  
19 on the Israel --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you didn't make it a pre-condition  
21 with Bush?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, because it wouldn't be right to do  
23 that either. You should only take the action in respect  
24 of Iraq if you think it is intrinsically valid in its  
25 own terms.

1           Having said that, my whole construct was to get as  
2           broad a coalition as possible, and I thought that if we  
3           managed to get the peace process really pushing forward,  
4           we were more likely to get a broader and deeper  
5           coalition.

6   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   But surely you must have said to him,  
7           "Look, this thing is only really going to have a chance  
8           of working well if we can make this progress down the  
9           Arab/Israel track before we get there"?

10   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   Well I was certainly saying to him,  
11           "I think this is vital", and I mean, this was -- you  
12           could describe me as a broken record through that  
13           period, and actually, after September 11, I think that  
14           straight after September 11, again in the statement to  
15           the House of Commons in the speech I made to my party  
16           conference at the end of September 2001, you know, I had  
17           and I have a view.

18           It is why I think, if we want to deal with Iran  
19           today -- and you have got very similar issues to the  
20           ones we are discussing here, which is why learning the  
21           lessons of this is so important -- again, in my view, we  
22           are far better placed to deal with Iran if the  
23           Israel/Palestine issue is moving forward.

24   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   But was President Bush just then taking  
25           it for granted?   When you said, "This is vital", was he

1 just taking it for granted that we were going to support  
2 him on Iraq anyway? We were beginning now to join them  
3 in military planning, you said you were going to stand  
4 shoulder to shoulder with him, and so we would be there  
5 anyway, even if he didn't push hard and get the progress  
6 that you were asking for on the Arab/Israel question?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you say we would have been there  
8 anyway, I mean, we were wanting to go down the UN route,  
9 and I think, if we hadn't gone down the UN route, it  
10 would have been very difficult indeed.

11 However, in respect of the Israel/Palestine issue,  
12 you know, it is there and in the record, as to how  
13 important I thought it was. To be fair to him, he would  
14 say that getting the Israelis to agree to the road  
15 map -- admittedly, this didn't happen until, I think,  
16 April 2003 -- was a major step forward, and it was  
17 a major step forward. It is still the governing  
18 document for the peace process today, and I can assure  
19 you it was a big push to get that agreed, me with him,  
20 and him with the Israelis.

21 But there was also -- as I say, the Intifada was  
22 going on, the Intifada being the uprising on the  
23 Palestinian side. So Israel was -- you know, it was  
24 a difficult situation. Israel was losing a lot of  
25 people in terrorist attacks, there were retaliations

1           against the Palestinians. There was a very bloody  
2           situation.

3   SIR RODERIC LYNE: This was obviously inflaming emotions in  
4           the region, so when it actually came to the time that  
5           the coalition took action, did this disappointing lack  
6           of progress, notwithstanding the belated publications of  
7           the route map -- how much of an element was that in the  
8           difficult reactions, from the coalition's point of view  
9           in the region, and in the Muslim world, to the action  
10          that was actually taken? How much did it contribute, do  
11          you think?

12   RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is a difficult question. I don't  
13          know that it fundamentally would have altered things.

14   SIR RODERIC LYNE: But if I put it the other way round, it  
15          would have been much better if you had got that  
16          progress?

17   RT HON TONY BLAIR: That was why I was arguing for it at the  
18          time. But, having said that, I think that, had we --  
19          once the conflict occurred and gone into Iraq, had we  
20          been able at that point to drive forward, I think that  
21          issue would have been taken care of and just to say  
22          really, because I may not get another chance to say it,  
23          about the reactions of Arab leaders in the region: most  
24          of them were glad to see the back of Saddam.

25          Now, what they worried about was the consequences of

1 doing so, but there was no great support. In fact,  
2 when, as he is now, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, when  
3 he was then the Crown Prince, had launched the Arab  
4 peace initiative in 2002, I think Saddam was the one  
5 leader to come out and denounce him. He paid monies to  
6 the families of the Palestinian suicide bombers.  
7 I mean, he was a menace on the Middle East peace process  
8 too.

9 But, having said all of that, yes, of course, it  
10 would have been better if we had the Middle East peace  
11 process moving forward. The only thing I say in defence  
12 of President Bush was that it was a very difficult  
13 moment in that process. If you were trying to do it  
14 today, it would have been a lot easier than 2002, right  
15 in the middle of the Intifada.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was pretty disappointing to you  
17 that we couldn't push that one further down the road?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was always disappointed and frustrated  
19 on this.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: I think this is probably the right moment to  
21 take a break. If we break now and maybe come back at  
22 just about five past.

23 (10.47 am)

24 (Short break)

25 (11.10 am)

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you everyone. Let's resume and I'll  
2 ask Baroness Prashar to open the questions.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

4 Mr Blair, before the break, you said that the  
5 military options were discussed at Crawford.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was obviously a possibility that  
7 military action would be the outcome of what was going  
8 to happen, and so there was a general discussion of the  
9 possibility of going down the military route, but,  
10 obviously, we were arguing very much for that to be if  
11 the UN route failed.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I think, for reasons we will come to  
13 later, you were being pressed by the Ministry of Defence  
14 to decide in autumn 2002 what scale of package the UK  
15 would be prepared to contribute in the event of military  
16 action.

17 I think we have also heard that there were  
18 essentially four possible military packages under  
19 consideration, with the main discussion focused on the  
20 two larger possible packages, the key issue being  
21 whether we should contribute an armoured division.

22 I think your Chief of Staff told us that the MoD had  
23 advocated the largest package, the large land force  
24 option, because they felt this was important to their  
25 relations with the US military, and also because they

1 felt it would help army morale.

2 As you well know, a decision to commit troops to  
3 battle, put individual soldiers in harm's way, cannot be  
4 taken lightly. How do you weigh the risks of troops  
5 involved in a large-scale land operation as opposed to  
6 one of the other packages against the advice you were  
7 getting about the importance of military relations with  
8 the US and the morale?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Baroness, the first thing to do is to  
10 work out whether you believe that you are right to be in  
11 this at all. Then the next question is: if you are  
12 right to be in it, what is your level of support?

13 On any occasion -- and I ended up on several  
14 occasions taking military action -- Kosovo, Sierra  
15 Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq -- the first thing I do, in  
16 a sense, is to say to the military themselves --

17 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we be specific about Iraq,  
18 because I'm asking: how did you weigh up the risks to  
19 the troops involved in the situation in Iraq?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: As I was just explaining, when I come to  
21 take this decision, the very first thing I do is I ask  
22 the military for their view, and their view in this  
23 instance was that they were up for doing it and that  
24 they preferred to be right at the centre of things.  
25 That, actually -- I'm not hiding behind them, because

1           that was my view too. I thought, if it was right for us  
2           to be in it, we should be in it there alongside our  
3           principal ally, the United States, I thought that in  
4           Afghanistan and I thought that in Iraq also.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was your view too, so you were  
6           at one with what you were being advised on?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did President Bush at any stage  
9           request a particular form of scale of the UK  
10          contribution.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. He very much left this to us, to  
12          decide what we wanted to do, but I had taken a view that  
13          this was something that, if it was right to do, actually  
14          it mattered to have Britain there and it mattered not  
15          simply for reasons to do with --

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It mattered, but did the scale  
17          matter? Because there were different ways in which we  
18          could have contributed, but did it have to be on the  
19          large scale that we committed ourselves to?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It didn't have to be. You could have  
21          chosen one of the other two options. There were three  
22          basic options.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why did you choose -- you were  
24          advised, but you were of that view. Why were you of  
25          that view?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because, if you believe it is right and  
2 you are going to do it, my view was that it is best for  
3 Britain to be in there, right alongside, and I say that  
4 because I regarded this whole issue as a threat to our  
5 security, as well as a threat to the security of the  
6 United States of America.

7 It is not simply that I valued the alliance,  
8 although I do value the alliance. As I always say to  
9 people: you can distance yourself from America, if you  
10 want to, but you will find it is a long way back.  
11 I believe it is a vital part of our security, and I also  
12 believe this: if we think it is right, we should be  
13 prepared to play our part fully.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the reasons given by the Chief  
15 of Defence Staff was about the relations and the morale.  
16 Was there a question of how much influence we would be  
17 able to exercise if we contributed on a large scale?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't so much that. It is a matter  
19 of common sense, obviously. If you are there with  
20 a bigger force alongside the Americans than otherwise,  
21 then, of course, you will be more intimately involved,  
22 but that's not really the reason.

23 The reason was to say: here we have this situation,  
24 in which we believe there is a threat, America believes  
25 there is a threat, we are going to act jointly. We have

1 acted jointly before, we are going to act jointly again,  
2 and it does in part derive from the importance that  
3 certainly I attach, and I hope the country does, to the  
4 American alliance, and also to the fact that our armed  
5 forces -- and the thing that is extraordinary about them  
6 and magnificent about them, they are prepared to do the  
7 difficult things.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you are saying it was driven by  
9 your sense of what was the proper UK contribution to  
10 policy?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Influence wasn't an important part  
13 of it?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: You didn't, and shouldn't, do it for  
15 influence. Although, as I say, it stands to reason, if  
16 you are making a bigger contribution, you are going to  
17 have more of a say.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Right. Thank you very much.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Usha. Perhaps I can turn now to  
20 Sir Martin Gilbert. Martin?

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Mr Blair, I would like to turn now to  
22 the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

23 Once you decided, in 2002, that it was essential to  
24 pursue the UN route, it was weapons of mass destruction  
25 rather than human rights or any other issue that became

1 crucial in building the case and establishing a legal  
2 base for military action.

3 We have been told by earlier witnesses that the  
4 information available to you on Iraq's WMD in early 2002  
5 showed that the WMD programmes, Saddam Hussein's WMD  
6 programmes, had changed very little since 1998 and also  
7 came with strong caveats about their reliability.

8 Was that your understanding?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, the principal intelligence --  
10 I think this has been disclosed in the Butler Inquiry --  
11 in March 2002, was that our knowledge was "sporadic" and  
12 "patchy", I think were the words, but it went on to say,  
13 "but it is clear that Saddam continues his programme".

14 Sir Martin, can I just say one thing, though, in  
15 respect again of this? Because it somewhat troubles me  
16 this, this absolutely -- as I say, almost binary  
17 distinction between regime change and WMD.

18 It was always relevant to me, because I think that  
19 it gives -- it gives a different sense of the threat of  
20 the nature of Saddam's regime. The fact that there  
21 were, on some accounts, a million casualties in the  
22 Iran/Iraq war, 100,000 Kurds that had been killed,  
23 100,000 killed by political killing, we had had the  
24 Kuwait situation where, again, tens of thousands died.  
25 The actual use of chemical weapons against his own

1 people. So I think it is always important to remember  
2 from my perspective the nature of the regime did make  
3 a difference to the nature of the WMD threat.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That actually is my next question, and  
5 I put it in a slightly different way, that: given the  
6 information available to you, and given these caveats,  
7 was there no other aspect of the Iraqi regime that you  
8 felt could serve as a better basis for the UN route, as  
9 a better basis for the legality of action?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: You mean --

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of all the things that you had  
12 described in your speeches and about Saddam's brutality  
13 and what you were saying just now about his use of WMD  
14 on Kurds, on Shia?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think I actually said -- it may be in  
16 the Chicago speech, or it may be elsewhere -- that there  
17 are many regimes that I would like to see the back of,  
18 but you can't just go through, I am afraid, and remove  
19 all the dictatorships. People often used to say me  
20 about Mugabe in Zimbabwe and the Burma regime and so on,  
21 but you have to have a basis that is about a security  
22 threat.

23 So, yes, you are absolutely right, that -- my  
24 assessment of the security threat was intimately  
25 connected with the nature of the regime.

1 I don't know whether the members of the Committee  
2 understand this, but when you actually read the  
3 descriptions of what happened when Saddam Hussein used  
4 chemical weapons in the Halabja village, and by some  
5 accounts as many as 5,000 people died through chemical  
6 weapons, there are people in Iraq today still suffering  
7 the consequence of that, to me that indicated a mindset  
8 that was horrific.

9 It is horrific whether or not he then uses weapons  
10 of mass destruction, but if there is any possibility of  
11 him ever acquiring them or using them, it is a mindset  
12 that indicates this is a profoundly wicked -- I would  
13 say almost psychopathic man. We were obviously worried  
14 that, after him, his two sons seemed to be as bad, if  
15 not worse. So yes, it is absolutely true, this  
16 definitely impacted on our thinking.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So you were contrasting in a way what  
18 was known about Saddam's past use of WMD. You were sort  
19 of giving that a weight and not giving the same weight  
20 to the doubts and caveats about the actual situation in  
21 early 2002?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I would say very much that we did  
23 give weight to that, and that's why, by the time you get  
24 to September 2002, you have got a lot more information.  
25 But it is one of the things that is most difficult

1 sometimes, because people look at this in the light of  
2 what we know now. Saddam and weapons of mass  
3 destruction was not a counter-intuitive notion. You  
4 know, he had used them, he definitely had them. He was  
5 in breach of, I think, ten United Nations Resolutions on  
6 them, and so, in a sense, it would have required quite  
7 strong evidence the other way to have been doubting the  
8 fact that he had this programme.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Sir Lawrence Freedman will be asking  
10 you in a moment about the September dossier, but I would  
11 like to just move on for the moment to another aspect,  
12 and that is -- you said on a number of occasions in  
13 2002, and, indeed, in early 2003, that Iraq was a test  
14 of the international community's ability to deal with  
15 both WMD and terrorism. If I could just quote from your  
16 monthly press conference on 18 February 2003:

17 "The stance that the world takes now against Saddam  
18 is not just vital in its own right, it is a huge test of  
19 our seriousness in dealing with the twin threats of  
20 weapons of mass destruction and terrorism."

21 Can you tell us how you saw those links, and, again,  
22 what evidence you had that there were links? Because,  
23 as you know, the Butler Committee has established that  
24 there weren't direct links at that time between Saddam  
25 and Al-Qaeda.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The link was, in my mind, at that time,  
2 this: that there was a proliferation threat that was  
3 potentially growing, because we had Iran, we had  
4 North Korea, we had Libya, we had Iraq, obviously.  
5 I would put a lot of emphasis on the AQ Khan activities.

6 My fear was -- and I would say I hold this fear  
7 stronger today than I did back then as a result of what  
8 Iran particularly today is doing. My fear is that  
9 states that are highly repressive or failed, the danger  
10 of a WMD link is that they become porous, they construct  
11 all sorts of different alliances with people and, yes,  
12 it is true we did not have evidence that Saddam was, for  
13 example, behind the September 11 attacks, and part of  
14 the difference between ourselves and the Americans was  
15 we were always saying we don't accept that.

16 It is interesting -- and this is referred to in the  
17 Butler Report, however, that actually Zargawi did go  
18 into Iraq, in fact, prior to the invasion.

19 Now, when I look -- because I spent a lot of time  
20 obviously out in the region today. When I look at the  
21 way that Iran today links up with terror groups -- and  
22 this is a different topic for a different day, but  
23 I would say that a large part of the destabilisation in  
24 the Middle East at the present time comes from Iran.  
25 The link between Iran, having nuclear weapons

1 capability, and those types of terrorist organisations,  
2 it is the combination of that that makes them  
3 particularly dangerous.

4 So you are absolutely right, Sir Martin. We were in  
5 a position back then where we were actually saying to  
6 the Americans, "Look, Saddam and Al-Qaeda are two  
7 separate things", but I always worried that at some  
8 point these things would come together. Not Saddam and  
9 Al-Qaeda simply, but the notion of states proliferating  
10 WMD and terrorist groups. I still think that is a major  
11 risk today.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were there indications in the  
13 information you were getting that there were links, if  
14 not between Al-Qaeda and Saddam, but there were somehow  
15 links between other terrorist organisations and him and  
16 his potential WMD?

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was obviously Saddam and the  
18 funding of Palestine -- the families of Palestinian  
19 suicide bombers, and so on.

20 I think what's very interesting -- and we will come  
21 on to this later, but when you actually look at what  
22 happened in Iraq and what happens, indeed, in  
23 Afghanistan today, what happens in Yemen today, Somalia,  
24 many different countries round the region, there are  
25 very strong links between terrorist organisations and

1 states that will support or sponsor them.

2 The reason why I think this is a particular danger  
3 today is because there are these states, Iran in  
4 particular, that are linked to this extreme and, in my  
5 view, misguided view about Islam. So we still face this  
6 threat today, in my view, very powerfully.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Finally, in 2002, did you feel that  
8 this terror/WMD link was also a potential threat to the  
9 United Kingdom?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, because for the reasons that I have  
11 given, I think that these, as it happened before, if  
12 Saddam, freed from sanctions, was able to pursue WMD  
13 programmes, I was very sure that at some point we were  
14 going to be involved in the consequences of that.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I just want to follow up this  
17 question. You have mentioned quite a lot about Iran.  
18 You were reminded before the break about  
19 President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in which Iran was  
20 mentioned along with North Korea, as well as Iraq.

21 I believe -- I think it's clearly in the documents  
22 and elsewhere -- that in presentations of the problem of  
23 WMD, certainly when you get to the nuclear issue, Iran,  
24 Libya, North Korea, were put far ahead of Iraq. So  
25 given what you are saying about the Iran issue now,

1 I wonder why Iraq was chosen rather than Iran?

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely because they were the ones in  
3 breach of UN Resolutions. If you wanted -- I think  
4 I said this at the time. If you wanted to start  
5 somewhere on WMD, you started with the person who had  
6 used them and you started with the person who was in  
7 breach of UN Resolutions.

8 Now, we decided to take a very, very strong view on  
9 this back then, and, as a result of that, countries  
10 actually, I think, did adapt their behaviour, at least  
11 for a time. Iran certainly did change its behaviour to  
12 begin with in relevant of its nuclear weapons programme,  
13 Libya, as you know, at the end of 2003, gave up its WMD  
14 programme.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That had a long history before.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I had been working on this from  
17 President Clinton's time, but I think it is fair to  
18 say --

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: They had been rumbled on the AQ Khan  
20 network.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: They had been rumbled on the AQ Khan  
22 network, but it was interesting, when they finally gave  
23 it up, and it was at the end of 2003, we then discovered  
24 that they actually had a more extensive programme than  
25 we had thought, and I think AQ Khan at some point within

1 the next couple of years was then put under house  
2 arrest. North Korea went back into six party talks.

3 One of the things that is most difficult in this  
4 whole area, is people sometimes say to me today, "It is  
5 not Iraq, it is Afghanistan", or someone else says, "It  
6 is Pakistan", or someone else says "It is Iran". Today,  
7 now -- yesterday, we had a conference on Yemen. I am  
8 afraid my view is they are all part of one picture.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I just want to clarify, because it  
10 is quite important what you have just said.

11 As I understand it, you basically said, of course,  
12 there were a number of countries that were serious  
13 threats and were further ahead, particularly on the  
14 nuclear side, indeed much further ahead, as it now turns  
15 out, on the nuclear side.

16 What was important about Iraq was we had a route to  
17 get at them through the United Nations. So it was  
18 partly for the exemplary effect that we had the route to  
19 deal with it, rather than necessarily it was the most  
20 important. In other circumstances, you might have got  
21 to deal, say, with Iraq.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had to deal with all of them, but you  
23 are absolutely right, the reason why we focused on Iraq  
24 was of the history of UN Resolutions being breached and  
25 also -- and I think this is a pretty important point --

1 he had used them. Probably not merely his own people,  
2 but thousands of people in the Iran/Iraq war.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, and you have also indicated  
4 that what had changed since 9/11 was the calculus more  
5 than the specifics of intelligence. You now think you  
6 can go down the UN route to get Iraq by focusing on the  
7 weapons of mass destruction.

8 Does that not make the specifics of the intelligence  
9 on WMD more important than if it was just sort of part  
10 of this broader sense of the dangers of regime?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's absolutely correct, Sir Lawrence,  
12 and that's why it was important obviously -- we came  
13 under pressure in the lead-up to the publication of the  
14 dossier in September 2002. We came under enormous  
15 pressure to say what is our intelligence actually  
16 telling us.

17 That's why, between March 2002 and the actual  
18 publication on 24 September 2002, we had further  
19 intelligence reports, and obviously the Joint  
20 Intelligence Committee was incredibly active during that  
21 period in assessing what the threat was and the evidence  
22 was.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This leads us naturally to  
24 the September dossier. We have heard a lot in these  
25 hearings about the origins of the production of the

1 dossier, and I don't want to go into all of that now,  
2 but two issues do stand out: the particular question of  
3 the 45-minute claim; and the more general assertion that  
4 the intelligence was beyond doubt.

5 The 45-minute claim is very specific and very  
6 controversial. Is it fair to say that the intelligence  
7 referred to chemical, possibly biological, munitions for  
8 short-range battlefield use, but that specificity was  
9 lost in the document?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is absolutely right that that was  
11 what it was to do with. In respect of the 45 minutes,  
12 as you know -- and it is just worth pointing out. This  
13 was a headline I think in the Evening Standard newspaper  
14 the next day.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the Sun and the Express.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I have said on many occasions, not least  
17 to the Butler Inquiry, it would have been better to have  
18 corrected it in the light of the significance it later  
19 took on, but can I just point one thing out,  
20 Sir Lawrence: she did an analysis between the  
21 publication of the dossier on 24 September 2002 and the  
22 BBC broadcast at the end of May 2003, which alleged that  
23 we, Downing Street, had inserted this into the dossier,  
24 probably knowing it was wrong. Then, of course,  
25 obviously that then kicked off a huge controversy that

1 goes on to this day.

2 Between September 2002 and the end of May 2003 there  
3 were 40,000 written Parliamentary questions on Iraq; it  
4 was mentioned twice. There were 5,000 oral questions;  
5 it was not mentioned at all. In the 18 March nobody  
6 mentions it.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I can think of a speech by  
8 Jack Straw in February where he does mention it.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: All I'm saying is --

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I appreciate --

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- ex post facto this has taken on a far  
12 greater significance than it ever did at the time.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it has taken on that  
14 significance possibly because it is taken as an  
15 indication of how evidence that may be pointed was given  
16 even more point in the way that the dossier was written.

17 So there is a question about its impact, and we may  
18 agree that it was an immediate impact that then  
19 declined, but the fact of the way that it was developed  
20 and reported was misleading. It suggested that it was  
21 something more than battlefield munitions.

22 Did you understand the difference between the  
23 45 minutes relating to battlefield munitions and, say,  
24 a long-range missile?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I didn't focus on it a great deal at the

1 time, because it was mentioned by me, and then, as  
2 I say, it was never actually mentioned again by me.

3 As I indicated to the Butler Inquiry, in the light  
4 of what subsequently happened and the importance it  
5 subsequently took on, it would have most certainly been  
6 better to have corrected it.

7 However, if I could just make this point about  
8 the -- you know, where you quite rightly say, of course  
9 it is not surprising it takes on significance because of  
10 all the controversy, quite rightly, over the  
11 intelligence that was wrong. It was for that very  
12 reason that we held the Hutton Inquiry, which was  
13 a six-month Inquiry, precisely into whether we had  
14 inserted this from Downing Street into the dossier, and  
15 of course we didn't, and the JIC was the --

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it has been established  
17 that, in that sense, the dossier wasn't doctored by any  
18 improper insertion of false intelligence. It is more  
19 a question of how a particular bit of intelligence was  
20 interpreted and presented, losing its specificity and  
21 gaining a broader meaning.

22 So just to clarify from what you said, you seem to  
23 be saying that you hadn't actually paid a lot of  
24 attention to this, so that, when it appeared in the  
25 foreword -- the phrase is well-known about the

1 45 minutes -- you weren't particularly aware yourself  
2 that you were saying something that went beyond what the  
3 intelligence would really allow?

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct, and as I say, I mentioned it,  
5 I think, in my statement of 24 September, but  
6 I mentioned it without any great emphasis and  
7 I mentioned it, I think, in reasonably sensible terms.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have already mentioned, not just  
9 the Standard, but a number of newspaper reports the next  
10 day headlined this. It wasn't just a question of it  
11 appearing as one part of a long discussion.

12 Presumably, at this point, it must have struck you  
13 that something had hit home. Were you at all concerned  
14 that in a issue of such moment that intelligence --  
15 intelligence of a certain nature was getting  
16 an exaggerated sense of importance?

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: You know, the thing that strikes me most  
18 now, when you go back and look at the dossier and how it  
19 was received, it was actually received as somewhat dull  
20 and cautious at the time.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, we have been told.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It really assumed a vastly greater  
23 importance at a later time, precisely because of the  
24 allegation, which was an extraordinarily serious one,  
25 that we, Downing Street, had deliberately falsified the

1 intelligence, which of course we hadn't.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The importance of the dossier, of  
3 course, is in terms, in part, of its immediate political  
4 impact, and no doubt you are right to say that -- the  
5 general view that this was telling us what we already  
6 knew, but if it was, it was saying quite important; that  
7 we had detailed intelligence on Iraqi WMD that led you  
8 to certain conclusions, and, therefore, in a sense, if  
9 it was considered old news, it was because you had  
10 already been successful in establishing that point of  
11 view.

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't think it was us that were  
13 successful in establishing that point of view. I think  
14 you would have been hard pushed to have found virtually  
15 anybody who doubted he had WMD and a WMD capability and  
16 programme, because we had been through this whole saga,  
17 ten years of military action.

18 As I say, I took the first military action in  
19 respect of Baghdad with President Clinton in 1998. So  
20 it wasn't that so much, and, incidentally, I just point  
21 out that in the statement with the dossier, which  
22 I think, to be frank, it was the statement people would  
23 have heard rather than the foreword, I actually say  
24 specifically:

25 "'Why now?' people ask. I agree, I cannot say that

1           this month or next, even this year or next, Saddam will  
2           use his weapons."

3           So the issue was not he is about to launch an  
4           attack --

5   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I appreciate that. What I'm trying  
6           to get at is the quality of the intelligence, because  
7           just to take an example, President Chirac, certainly  
8           in September 2002, seemed to believe that Iraq had  
9           weapons of mass destruction, but I think he also said,  
10          "But I have seen no proof".

11          The issue that is now important because you have  
12          decided to go down the UN route, is that that detail is  
13          going to be tested. Indeed, you had a press conference  
14          with President Yeltsin (sic) in October, where he said  
15          he didn't believe in it, and you said, "Well, that's for  
16          the inspectors to find out". I think you did.

17   RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I was merely reflecting on the fact  
18          that there was a whole issue to do with Russia and its  
19          view of how to proceed.

20   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is indeed an issue, but the  
21          point -- just to keep focused on it at the moment -- is  
22          that the actual quality of the intelligence that the  
23          British had and the Americans had was more important  
24          about whether this was a shared assumption, because we  
25          were now proposing, or you were hoping, indeed, as the

1 dossier was published, the President had promised to  
2 take this through the UN route. So the quality of the  
3 information was important.

4 This brings us to the -- it has been pointed out to  
5 me I said "Yeltsin" rather than "Putin".

6 This is important -- we get to the foreword. You  
7 said in the foreword that:

8 "The assessed intelligence has established beyond  
9 doubt that Iraq has continued to produce chemical and  
10 biological weapons."

11 Now, you have already mentioned the JIC reports  
12 about "patchy", "sporadic", "limited", et cetera. Given  
13 that, was it wise to say that intelligence is ever  
14 beyond doubt? Wasn't this setting yourself up for  
15 a higher standard of proof than it might be possible to  
16 sustain?

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think what I said in the foreword was  
18 that I believed it was beyond doubt. What:

19 "What I believe the assessed intelligence has  
20 established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to  
21 produce chemical and biological weapons."

22 I did believe it. I think that was the -- and I did  
23 believe it, frankly, beyond doubt.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Beyond your doubt, but beyond  
25 anybody's doubt?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: If you -- if I had taken, for example,  
2 the words out of -- even the 9 March 2002 or  
3 the March 2002 JIC assessment, it said, "It was clear  
4 that ..."

5 Now, if I said, "It was clear that" in the foreword,  
6 rather than "I believe, beyond doubt", it would have had  
7 the same impact. I actually think now -- and this is,  
8 incidentally, I think, a lesson that came out of the  
9 Butler Inquiry but I think it is relevant to this as  
10 well, and I said this at the time, now, I would take  
11 government right out of this altogether. I would simply  
12 have published, if the intelligence services had been  
13 willing, the JIC assessment, because they were  
14 absolutely strong enough on their own, and if you look  
15 at the dossier itself -- and, of course, the dossier  
16 itself, if you just take the executive summary --  
17 I mean, I won't go through and read it, but this  
18 executive summary wasn't drawn up by me. It was drawn  
19 up by the Joint Intelligence Committee and they did it  
20 perfectly justifiably on the information they had before  
21 them.

22 It is hard to come to any other conclusion than that  
23 this person has a continuing WMD programme, and I mean,  
24 we will come at a later point in this to the issue of  
25 what the truth was about Saddam, because the

1 Iraq Survey Group, which is, in my view, an extremely  
2 important document, has actually resolved the conundrum  
3 and the riddle of what Saddam was up to, and we  
4 therefore can see what happened.

5 But if you go back to that time, if you read the  
6 executive summary and the information that follows,  
7 I can't see how anyone could come to a different  
8 conclusion.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is possibly a problem, maybe  
10 another lesson. Intelligence is often described as  
11 joining up the dots, because your information is  
12 limited, and there was a very powerful hypothesis that  
13 allowed you to join up the dots in a particular way, but  
14 there were alternative hypotheses and they were around  
15 at the time. So it is partly a question almost of due  
16 diligence. Was there a challenge to the intelligence?  
17 Are you absolutely sure that there isn't another way of  
18 explaining all this material?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you are Prime Minister and the JIC  
20 is giving this information, you have got to rely on the  
21 people doing it, with experience and with commitment and  
22 integrity, as they do. Of course, now, with the benefit  
23 of hindsight, we look back on the situation differently.

24 But let me say what was troubling me at the time  
25 was -- supposing we put it the other way round and it

1 was correct and I wasn't going to act on it, that was  
2 the thing that worried me, and when I talked earlier  
3 about the calculus of risk changing after  
4 September 11th, it is really, really important, I think,  
5 to understand this, so far as understanding the decision  
6 I took, and, frankly, would take again: if there was any  
7 possibility that he could develop weapons of mass  
8 destruction, we should stop him. That was my view.  
9 That was my view then and it's my view now.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this is a different standard to  
11 the one that you are going to have to take to the  
12 United Nations, and we will come to that in a moment.

13 Just to conclude on this for the moment, because we  
14 have other questions to get to, I just want to put to  
15 you -- and this is a comment made to us by  
16 Sir David Omand -- he observed that:

17 "SIS overpromised and underdelivered."

18 In some ways were you too trusting of some of the  
19 material you were getting?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The most difficult thing, when you are  
21 faced with a situation like this, is that it all depends  
22 what happens afterwards as to how people regard your  
23 behaviour at the time, and I have also been in  
24 situations where, for example, when we had the July 2005  
25 bombings, where people were saying, "Well, look at this

1 little snatch of intelligence here", or the Americans  
2 indeed, for September 11, they had entire Congressional  
3 hearings into, "Look at this bit of intelligence here".

4 So your worry is not simply: is the intelligence  
5 correct, so that I can act? Your worry is also: if it  
6 is correct, what am I going to do about it? So I don't  
7 disagree with you at all. I think these things  
8 obviously now look quite different and, as I say, the  
9 Iraq Survey Group has resolved some of these riddles,  
10 frankly, as to what Saddam was up to.

11 But I think it was at least reasonable for me at the  
12 time, given this evidence and given what the Joint  
13 Intelligence Committee were telling me, to say, "This is  
14 a threat that we should take very seriously."

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Finally just on this point, I think  
16 the Butler Committee referred to group think as  
17 a phenomenon which is quite well-known in these sort of  
18 discussions where the hypotheses that we have talked  
19 about is reinforced.

20 Did you get a sense that the intelligence community  
21 were also reinforcing your hypotheses as well as moving  
22 in the other direction?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I certainly got a sense that they were.  
24 I think John Scarlett, in his evidence to you, explained  
25 about he was firming up the assessments he made. But

1 when we actually came to the November UN Resolution, in  
2 fact nobody disputed the issue of Saddam's WMD. People  
3 disputed what we should do about it, we can come on to  
4 all of that. But it really wasn't something that people  
5 disputed at the time, and, you know, it is just  
6 interesting, I was looking back over the debates that we  
7 had on the publication of the dossier and just  
8 recognising that -- of course, everyone now has  
9 a different perception of this, but at the time there  
10 were people saying to me, "I don't want military action  
11 under any set of circumstances". There were also people  
12 saying, "You are wasting time. You are not acting fast  
13 enough".

14 For example, in the statement on the dossier of  
15 24 September 2002, William Hague says:

16 "Does the Prime Minister recollect that in a half  
17 century of various states acquiring nuclear  
18 capabilities, in almost every case their ability to do  
19 so has been greatly underestimated and understated by  
20 intelligence sources. Estimates today of Iraq taking  
21 several years to acquire a nuclear device should be seen  
22 in that context within that margin of error, and, given  
23 that --"

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Firstly, could you go more slowly  
25 and, secondly, there is a difference between a statement

1 being made by a member of the opposition, and it is  
2 clear that the opposition at the time did take the  
3 threat very seriously.

4 I come back to -- and I'm going to stop at this  
5 point: by going to the UN, where the pressure would be  
6 for the inspectors to test this out, a higher standard  
7 of proof was now going to be required for these  
8 assertions. It was not good enough to have reasonable  
9 confidence on the basis of Saddam's past behaviour, but  
10 you really did now have to be very sure of your case.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. Of course we should have  
12 been very sure of our case. All I'm saying is that all  
13 the intelligence we received in, even after  
14 the September dossier, was to the same effect, that it  
15 wasn't against that.

16 The reason I simply was -- I won't -- I'll spare the  
17 stenographer and not go back over reading out the  
18 quotes. What I'm saying to you, however, is that there  
19 were people, perfectly justifiably and sensibly, also  
20 saying -- and this gives you some idea of the context of  
21 the time, "Look, you can't sit around and wait for this.  
22 You know, you have got to take action and to take action  
23 clearly and definitively", and so one of the most  
24 difficult aspects of all of this in Iraq is that people  
25 often say to political leaders, quite understandably,

1 "Listen to the people", and what you find in  
2 circumstances of great controversy is that actually  
3 there are different views, and in the end you have to  
4 decide, and I decided that this intelligence justified  
5 our considering Saddam as a significant and continuing  
6 WMD threat and that we had to act on it.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, I think Sir Martin --

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Could I just make a couple of quick  
10 requests to try to help us understand the, "Why Iraq?  
11 Why now?" questions?

12 Obviously we, like you, have read through the  
13 assessments of the JIC. Was the intelligence telling  
14 that you the WMD threat from Iraq was growing?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was telling me that in two  
16 respects, because I know you have asked other witnesses  
17 about this and I just want to make this clear as to why  
18 I believed it was growing.

19 First of all, there were the September JIC  
20 assessments that talked of continuing production of  
21 chemical weapons. In other words, this was a continuing  
22 process. But secondly -- and this did have an impact on  
23 me at the time, although this particular piece of  
24 intelligence turned out later to be wrong, but at the  
25 time, obviously, we didn't know that -- on 12 September,

1 in other words, after the 9 September JIC assessment but  
2 before we did the dossier, I was told and specifically  
3 briefed about these mobile production facilities for  
4 biological weapons. So this was an additional and new  
5 factor and this was very much linked to whether and how  
6 Saddam might conceal his activities.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In terms of his nuclear programme?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: In terms of the nuclear programme, what  
9 was set out in the dossier, and set out in very detailed  
10 form, incidentally, were all the different items that he  
11 had been trying to procure, which could indicate  
12 a continuing interest in nuclear weapons.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it would have taken quite a long time  
14 to get from that point to having a useable nuclear  
15 weapon.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Here is the problem, Sir Roderic, and we  
17 face again exactly the same problem in Iran today. If  
18 you say to people, "How long will it take them to  
19 get --"

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Iran is much further down the track.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There are debates about that, actually,  
22 but if you ask people about the nuclear weapons  
23 capability, for example, in respect of Iraq, some people  
24 would say, "Yes, if they are doing it on their own, it  
25 is going to take significant amount of time, but you can

1 foreshorten that time if you buy in the material".

2 So one of the reasons -- and I emphasise again this  
3 whole proliferation issue and AQ Khan in particular --  
4 was that it always worried me that any of these  
5 countries, if they were so minded, could step up very  
6 quickly and get --

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is these "ifs", isn't it? When  
8 Sir Martin Gilbert asked you about threat to the  
9 United Kingdom, you said that if Saddam, freed from  
10 sanctions, were to have been able to pursue WMD  
11 programmes, you were pretty sure that the United Kingdom  
12 would have been involved, in which obviously you are  
13 right.

14 But hadn't, at the time we are talking about,  
15 Saddam -- he hadn't been freed from sanctions or from  
16 a pretty effective arms embargo or from all the other  
17 apparatus of deterrence, and other countries, which were  
18 just as opposed to the idea of Saddam having WMD as us,  
19 and many of which were much closer to Iraq, clearly  
20 didn't agree that military action was needed or  
21 justified by the level of threat at that time. So they  
22 didn't accept the "Why Iraq? Why now?" questions, or at  
23 least they didn't give two yes's to that. I'm trying to  
24 work out why you did and they didn't.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There is a judgment you have to make,

1 and you are right in saying, "If this and if that", but  
2 you see, for me, because of the change  
3 after September 11, I wasn't prepared to run that risk.  
4 I really wasn't prepared to take the risk --

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's up to them, but my view, the view  
7 of the US, I think the view of many other countries --  
8 after all, when the Iraq action took place, half of the  
9 members of the European Union were also with America,  
10 Japan was with America, South Korea was with America,  
11 but I think there is an interesting point, I think you  
12 are absolutely right to raise the judgment. In the end,  
13 this is what it is.

14 As I sometimes say to people, this isn't about a lie  
15 or a conspiracy or a deceit or a deception, it is  
16 a decision, and the decision I had to take was, given  
17 Saddam's history, given his use of chemical weapons,  
18 given the over 1 million people whose deaths he had  
19 causes, given ten years of breaking UN Resolutions,  
20 could we take the risk of this man reconstituting his  
21 weapons programmes, or is that a risk it would be  
22 irresponsible to take?

23 I formed the judgment, and it is a judgment in the  
24 end. It is a decision. I had to take the decision, and  
25 I believed, and in the end so did the Cabinet, so did

1 Parliament incidentally, that we were right not to run  
2 that risk, but you are completely right, in the end,  
3 what this is all about are the risks.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The reason why it is so important, the  
6 point you have made, is because, today, we are going to  
7 be faced with exactly the same types of decisions and we  
8 are going to have to make that judgment on risk, and my  
9 judgment -- it may be other people don't take this view,  
10 and that's for the leaders of today to decide -- my  
11 judgment is you don't take any risks with this issue.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have made that, I think, very clear.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Martin?

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have one more question of  
15 intelligence. At the time of the September dossier,  
16 were there aspects of Iraq's WMD programme that you knew  
17 of that could not be revealed to the public at that  
18 time?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think practically everything that was  
20 relevant to this was in the JIC statement, you know, the  
21 actual body of the dossier. So I can't think of  
22 specific items, but there were various things.

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the growing threat, this  
24 was something which essentially rested upon the  
25 information that was published in the dossier?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, and in particular the information  
2 that came in shortly before the dossier was published.

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We are going to come shortly to the  
4 question of military planning. But I would like, before  
5 we do, to put a rather more general question to you  
6 about presentation of government policy in 2002.

7 When you were asked from mid-2002 whether the UK was  
8 preparing for possible military action, your public  
9 statements suggested that it was not; for example, you  
10 told the House of Commons Liaison Committee  
11 in July 2002, when they asked, "Are we preparing for  
12 possible military action against Iraq?" you replied,  
13 "No, there are no decisions that have been taken about  
14 military action", but we have heard from other witnesses  
15 that, while no operational decisions were taken on  
16 military action, a whole range of decisions were being  
17 taken about military options, including, of course,  
18 joint planning with the United States on a contingency  
19 basis.

20 My question is: would it not have been reasonable  
21 for you, and indeed expedient, to have explained  
22 publicly, much earlier than you did, that while the UK  
23 hoped for a peaceful outcome in disarming  
24 Saddam Hussein, we were also preparing for all  
25 eventualities including military action?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is a perfectly fair point, I think,  
2 Sir Martin. Let me just explain our problem, though.  
3 We had not decided we would take military action at that  
4 point. On the other hand, you couldn't say it wasn't  
5 a possibility. You know, in the part you have just read  
6 out, you will notice I choose the words quite carefully.  
7 I say, "No, no decisions have been taken", and the  
8 trouble was people kept writing, "They have decided.  
9 They are off on a military campaign and nothing is going  
10 to stop them".

11 So we were in this difficulty that, had I said --  
12 and maybe, in retrospect, it is better just to say it --  
13 but, had I said, "Yes, we are doing military planning",  
14 our fear was people would push you into a position where  
15 you appeared to be on a kind of irreversible path to  
16 military action, and that wasn't our position. Our  
17 position was we wanted to get America down the UN route  
18 and get a resolution through the United Nations.

19 Now, because it was so obvious with the history of  
20 this that you couldn't be sure that the United Nations  
21 route was going to work -- in fact, the likelihood is  
22 that it wouldn't -- nonetheless we had to do military  
23 planning for it.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yet several military witnesses have  
25 told us that the need for this secrecy was proving quite

1 an impediment to various aspects of preparation. Didn't  
2 you have the skill to explain to Parliament what you  
3 have just said to me, that we were still determined on  
4 the UN route and a peaceful resolution?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Parliament can be quite a tricky forum  
6 in which to engage in a nuanced exercise, is my  
7 experience after ten years of Prime Minister's  
8 Questions, but it is a perfectly fair point, and  
9 actually, towards the end of October, I think Geoff Hoon  
10 said to me, "You have got to come and take certain  
11 decisions".

12 I do want to emphasise this, because it is very  
13 important: if at any point the military had said, "Look,  
14 you are really going to inhibit our ability to do this  
15 if we can't have visible planning", then obviously --  
16 and that's what happened in October -- we would have had  
17 to have changed that, but my worry was you are going to  
18 be in a situation where people assume that which has  
19 not, in fact, been decided.

20 So we had to, for prudent and sensible reasons,  
21 carry on doing this military planning. We were doing it  
22 kind of as much as we could under the radar, as it were,  
23 but I can't frankly say it made much difference in the  
24 end, so it is a perfectly fair point you are making.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to now move on to diplomacy.

2 Now, we have had a lot of evidence on the  
3 negotiation of Resolution 1441, clearly getting  
4 President Bush to agree to go to the United Nations was  
5 game changer in many ways because it meant that your  
6 basic need in taking it forward in British politics had  
7 been met. It had had to go through the United Nations.

8 We have heard a lot about the difficulties of the  
9 negotiations, the work of Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and so  
10 on, and we have been through the resolution itself in  
11 what some might say is arcane detail. So we have done  
12 all of that.

13 I would like, therefore, to fast forward, if I may,  
14 to your meeting with President Bush in Washington on  
15 31 January 2003. Was your main objective at that  
16 meeting to convince the President that, just as you had  
17 convinced him that it was important to go through the UN  
18 to get the first resolution, that now it was necessary to  
19 get a second resolution?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. The second resolution was  
21 obviously going to make life a lot easier politically in  
22 every respect. The difficulty was this: that 1441 had  
23 been very clear -- and I know you have gone through this  
24 in enormous detail with Peter Goldsmith, but just to  
25 emphasise the point, it was a very strong resolution.

1 It declared Iraq was in material breach, it said that it  
2 had fully and unconditionally and immediately to  
3 cooperate and cooperate with the inspectors and so on.

4 It was a strong resolution. It specifically  
5 mentioned the previous resolutions, 678, 687 and so on.

6 But, as you have heard, the truth is there was an  
7 unresolved issue, because some people -- some countries  
8 obviously wanted to come back and only have a decision  
9 for action with a specific UN Resolution specifically  
10 mandating that action. We took the view that that was  
11 not necessary, but, obviously, politically, it would  
12 have been far easier.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sir Roderic will be talking to you  
14 later about the legal case, but perhaps just to note  
15 from the evidence we heard from Lord Goldsmith, the last  
16 advice you had from him, before you went off from  
17 Washington, was that, at that time, he believed that the  
18 legal position was that we did need a second resolution.

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct. So there was that issue as  
20 well and that was another reason why getting a second  
21 resolution would have been important, although Peter was  
22 not, I don't think, saying that that resolution had to  
23 be in those terms, but that we needed to come back for  
24 a further decision, as it were.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A further decision. Exactly.

1           We have also heard from Jack Straw that politically  
2           at home it seemed to be important to get it because it  
3           would make life easier for you and the Parliamentary  
4           party and the Cabinet and so on.

5   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   Yes, absolutely.

6   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:   What was the President's view of the  
7           need for a second resolution?

8   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   President Bush's view and the view of  
9           the entire American system was that, by that time,  
10          Saddam had been given an opportunity to comply. I think  
11          the Resolution 1441 said it was a final opportunity --

12   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:   A final opportunity.

13   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   -- to comply, and he hadn't taken it.

14          Indeed, what we now know is that he was continuing to  
15          act in breach of the UN Resolutions even after the  
16          inspectors had gone back in there.

17          So the American view was -- the American view  
18          throughout had been, you know, "This leopard isn't going  
19          to change his spots. He is always going to be  
20          difficult". So that was their concern about the UN  
21          route, in a sense, that they'd get pulled into a UN  
22          process, you'd never get to a proper decision and then  
23          you'd never get the closure of the issue in the way that  
24          you should.

25          The problem, obviously, from our perspective, was

1 that we had gone down the UN route, we wanted to carry  
2 on going down the UN route, but the Americans had taken  
3 the view -- and in a sense we took the same view of the  
4 Iraqi behaviour up to that period at the end  
5 of January -- that they weren't complying.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So to be clear, the President's view  
7 was that it really wasn't necessary, but was he prepared  
8 to work for one?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: His view was that it wasn't necessary  
10 but he was prepared to work for one.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, it has been reported in the  
12 New York Times in 2006 that the President said at that  
13 meeting that the Americans would put the work behind the  
14 effort but, if it ultimately failed, military action  
15 would follow anyway. Is that correct?

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The President's view was that if you  
17 can't get a second resolution because, in essence,  
18 France and Russia are going to say no, even though in  
19 fact I don't think they were really disputing that Iraq  
20 was in breach of Resolution 1441, then we were going to  
21 be faced with a choice I never wanted to be faced with:  
22 did you go then without a second resolution?

23 My view very strongly was that, if he was in breach  
24 of 1441, we should mean what we have said. It was  
25 a final opportunity to comply, he wasn't complying --

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So your position at the time was  
2 that, if couldn't get a second resolution, you would  
3 agree with the Americans, go with the Americans, on  
4 military action?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was then the legal question, which  
6 was very important, because Peter had drawn my attention  
7 to that. So there were all sorts of factors that were  
8 going to be in play there. There was the political  
9 question as to whether we would get the support for it.

10 But my own view, and I was under absolutely no doubt  
11 about this, was that, if you backed away, when he was  
12 playing around with the inspectors in precisely the way  
13 he had done before, then you were going to send a very,  
14 very bad signal out to the world.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So your position at the time, end  
16 of January, was that politically, legally, for a variety  
17 of reasons, you would like a second resolution. You  
18 thought it was very important to work for it, but if you  
19 didn't get it, you were prepared with the Americans to  
20 take military action, supposing the legal and political  
21 issues --

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct. My view was that, if, in the  
23 end, you could not get a second resolution, even in  
24 circumstances where there was plainly a breach of  
25 Resolution 1441, and there was, and at some point we can

1 go through the Blix reports --

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will.

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR: You can see Blix himself was clear in  
4 each one of his reports there was not full and  
5 unconditional compliance.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come to that in a moment.  
7 It has also been reported, and I don't think it's a big  
8 secret, that you were informed that the proposed start  
9 date for military action at that time was March 10th.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Hm-mm.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Is that your recollection?

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was at that meeting or around about  
13 that time, certainly, yes.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the date eventually slipped back  
15 just over a week.

16 Is it also fair to say that the President was  
17 adamant that this military planning set the terms for  
18 the diplomatic strategy rather than the other way round?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, this was a debate that continued,  
20 frankly, and you see, what I tried to do, as you know,  
21 before the military action, is I had one last attempt to  
22 get a consensus in the Security Council around  
23 a resolution I drafted, effectively with Hans Blix, to  
24 lay down a series of tests that Saddam had to comply  
25 with.

1           You see, the problem was this: there was no doubt he  
2 was in breach because he wasn't complying fully and  
3 unconditionally and immediately. On the other hand,  
4 people were saying, "Well, but give the inspectors more  
5 time", which is perfectly -- you know, understandable.  
6 I was thinking, "How do we actually get to the point  
7 where you force people to understand and, in a sense,  
8 Saddam finally to decide, whether he is going to comply  
9 or not?"

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are getting a bit forward,  
11 although you raise issues that are obviously important.

12           I think it is fair to say, at that time, the  
13 American view was that the military timetable, with  
14 a little bit of give, had to be adhered to. My point is  
15 simply this -- this is the question -- from the end  
16 of January, you had perhaps six weeks, maybe more, maybe  
17 seven, how did you think you could get a resolution  
18 through in such a short period of time? Wasn't the  
19 danger of this situation that, in a sense, not only were  
20 you giving Saddam an ultimatum, but you were almost  
21 giving yourself an ultimatum as well?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that I was giving myself an  
23 ultimatum, because our position had been clear. We had  
24 to resolve this through the UN. If we couldn't resolve  
25 it through the UN inspectors, we had to resolve it by

1 removing Saddam.

2 What actually happened was we had time enough to do  
3 it. The problem was very simple: in the end, after  
4 1441, in a sense France and Germany and Russia moved to  
5 a different position and they formed their own power, in  
6 a sense, essentially saying to America "We are not going  
7 to be with you on this".

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come to that in a moment.

9 Just on the military timetable, we have heard from  
10 a number of witnesses the American concern that it was  
11 unrealistic to keep the troops, once mobilised and  
12 deployed, out in Kuwait in the Gulf, the weather getting  
13 hotter, for a prolonged period of time. So the military  
14 planning was, one way or another, bearing down hard on  
15 the diplomatic process.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that is correct, and in this sense:  
17 I think it is fair to say that the only reason why  
18 Saddam was having anything much to do with the  
19 inspectors at all -- and they were getting dribs and  
20 drabs of more cooperation -- was because we had 250,000  
21 troops down there, with all their machinery, sitting on  
22 his doorstep.

23 So you are always in a position where you have got  
24 to be very careful then, and I think the -- many of the  
25 witnesses have said this to your Inquiry. Not just the

1 Americans, I think our own military were concerned, if  
2 you then had months with the troops down there, you  
3 know, as inspections went on but nothing really was  
4 being resolved, I think that would have been difficult  
5 to have done. So in that sense you are right. Of  
6 course, it is always -- you have got to -- you come to  
7 a point of decision.

8 The only thing I would say to you is, and I think  
9 this is absolutely vital in understanding again the  
10 mindset at the time, had Saddam, after 1441, in a sense  
11 done a Colonel Gaddafi, if he had come forward and said  
12 "Right. I accept it. We are going to full and  
13 unconditional compliance. Here is the declaration. It  
14 covers everything we have. Come in, interview our  
15 scientists, take them out of the country and interview  
16 them, if you wish. We are going to completely  
17 reposition ourselves", had he done that, we would have  
18 been in a different situation. He didn't.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: He would have had a difficulty in  
20 that though, wouldn't he? Because, if he had done that,  
21 he would have said, "We have no weapons of mass  
22 destruction", because that, in fact, turns out to have  
23 been the case. But he wouldn't have been believed.

24 Indeed, when the head of IAEA said at the end,  
25 "There is no evidence of a nuclear programme",

1 Vice-President Cheney said, "You are wrong". There is  
2 still a problem here that, given the hypothesis and the  
3 mindset as you describe, it would have actually been  
4 quite difficult, given all his background, for  
5 Saddam Hussein to have been convincing on this score.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I totally understand the point you are  
7 making. Let me explain to you why, Sir Lawrence,  
8 I don't believe it is correct.

9 If you look at Iraq Survey Group report now, this  
10 report -- we will get to the detail of it a bit later,  
11 but this report is very, very important indeed, because  
12 what it is effectively is what Hans Blix could have  
13 produced, had Saddam cooperated with him. What that  
14 report shows is actually the extent to which Saddam  
15 retained his nuclear, and, indeed, chemical warfare  
16 intent and intellectual know-how.

17 Now, what Saddam could have done perfectly easily is  
18 to have provided the proper documentation and he could  
19 have cooperated fully in the interviews of the  
20 scientists.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If you look at the report, one of  
22 the problems that the Iraqis had got themselves into is  
23 when they had dismantled a lot of this stuff, they had  
24 not maintained proper documentation. So you are almost  
25 in an audit trail problem here.

1           Indeed, Jack Straw raised this when he was talking  
2           about why he thought there was stuff there, and it goes  
3           back to the 1998 documents. Actually, it would have  
4           been quite hard in the circumstances and beliefs of the  
5           time for a convincing case to be made. I don't want to  
6           belabour this point, but --

7   RT HON TONY BLAIR: But it is a very important point, if you  
8           don't mind me saying so.

9   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is. I'm happy for you to  
10          respond.

11   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because, actually, if you look, both at  
12          the Blix reports -- and we can come to the detail of  
13          that -- and the Iraq Survey Group, he was deliberately  
14          concealing documentation, and what is more, he was  
15          deliberately not allowing people to be interviewed  
16          properly.

17          Indeed, in December 2002 -- this is after  
18          Resolution 1441 -- we received information, and this  
19          information remains valid, that Saddam called together  
20          his key people and said that anybody who agreed to an  
21          interview outside of Iraq was to be treated as a spy.

22          Now, the reason for that is very simple, and it  
23          emerges from the Iraq Survey Group report. He retained  
24          full intent to restart his programme, and, therefore, it  
25          was very important for him that the interviews did not

1 take place, because the interviews with senior regime  
2 members were precisely what would have indicated the  
3 concealment and the intent.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, and this indicates, perhaps,  
5 a problem going back to the dossier and the specificity  
6 there. If it had been said that there was a continued  
7 intent of Saddam Hussein to have a weapons of mass  
8 destruction programme, then that might have -- that  
9 would undoubtedly have had a degree of credibility, but  
10 the problem was that the specificity was that it was  
11 there, it had been reconstituted and the weapons were  
12 there.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But this is, as I say -- and I think,  
14 Sir Lawrence, you are absolutely right. This is  
15 absolutely at the crux of it.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is a problem, and I do want to  
17 get on to Dr Blix now because it is a problem -- and we  
18 discussed this a lot with Lord Goldsmith as well -- that  
19 it is true that the issue of material breach was around  
20 the question of non-cooperation with the inspectors,  
21 rather than hiding particular weapons --

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, sorry. Just -- it is really very  
23 important to get this right. It is absolutely clear  
24 from the Iraq Survey Group, and indeed the Butler Report  
25 deals with this, that he was concealing material he

1           should have delivered up to the UN, that he retained the  
2           intent, not merely in theory, but was taking action on,  
3           for example, dual-use facilities that were specifically  
4           in breach of the United Nations Resolutions.

5   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm not actually disagreeing that  
6           there were significant elements of material breach in  
7           Saddam's behaviour. This is really as much about the  
8           diplomacy and what is going on in New York as it is  
9           about what is going on in Iraq.

10           To get a second resolution, which is where our  
11           discussion started, you needed the evidence that Saddam  
12           had not taken up the final opportunity, the evidence of  
13           material breach. Now, where was this going to come  
14           from? Who was going to provide the statement?

15   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Dr Blix and his reports are obviously  
16           the key documents here, and you will see from his  
17           reports -- he goes through them, I think, on  
18           19 December, then he has got one on 9 January, I think  
19           again on 27 January, then --

20   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it is important that he is  
21           providing his reports.

22   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

23   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was the strategy, as you had  
24           discussed it around the time of the White House meeting  
25           at the end of January, dependent upon Dr Blix being

1       rather firm in his assertions of material breach, as he  
2       had appeared to be, in terms, at least, of talking about  
3       non-cooperation -- he didn't declare a material breach  
4       but his discussion of non-cooperation is the January 27  
5       report. So were you sort of hoping, expecting, that he  
6       would reinforce your view by continuing to take that  
7       position?

8   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, the whole point was that his view  
9       was that Iraq was complying somewhat, but not fully and  
10      unconditionally, and, as time went on, I became  
11      increasingly alarmed, actually, that we were just back  
12      into a game-playing situation with Saddam. I think we  
13      were, incidentally. I think it is very clear from what  
14      we know now that he never had any intention of his  
15      people cooperating fully with the inspectors.

16   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is just worth noting, in terms of  
17      what the inspectors could do, that he was able to report  
18      that they were dealing with the Al Samoud missile,  
19      which, actually, if you go back to the intelligence, was  
20      the area where a step change in Iraqi capabilities had  
21      correctly been reported by British intelligence and put  
22      in the dossier, was the firmest bit of the threat, and  
23      that was actually dealt with by the inspectors in March.  
24      So it wasn't that this was necessarily a wholly passive  
25      role that they were playing?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, that's true, and obviously, as the  
2 prospect of military action and the troop build-up was  
3 there, he started to give more cooperation.

4 But I would just draw your attention to something  
5 that I think, as I say, is of fundamental importance and  
6 that is that Resolution 1441 -- it decided in  
7 paragraph 5, operational paragraph 5, not just that he  
8 had to give unrestricted access to all sites and so on,  
9 but it specifically focused on the issue to do with  
10 interviews and gave --

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this was always a very  
12 controversial issue. Dr Blix was always very reluctant,  
13 precisely because of the risks he knew there would be  
14 in, to take them out. He was never himself that  
15 enthusiastic about that.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly, Sir Lawrence, but let me tell  
17 you -- this is a really important point here. He wasn't  
18 enthusiastic. I used to have these conversations with  
19 Hans Blix, where Hans would say to me, "I agree we  
20 should interview these people, but you don't understand,  
21 they may be killed, or their relatives may be killed",  
22 and I would say to him, "Well, what does that tell us  
23 about the nature of the person we are dealing with and  
24 the nature of his compliance?"

25 Yes, he was -- he kept saying to me, "I feel deeply

1 personally responsible if I ask for these interviews to  
2 be conducted outside of Iraq because I believe these  
3 people may be killed", but that, to me, was not --  
4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was an illustration of the  
5 problems of dealing with Saddam Hussein.  
6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.  
7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: On 14 February, when Dr Blix gave  
8 a presentation to -- he gave a report, which was not  
9 long after Colin Powell's very significant speech of  
10 5 February, were you disappointed by the line he was  
11 taking there, which seemed to row back somewhat from the  
12 position he had taken on 27 January?  
13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that I was disappointed.  
14 I was getting confused as to what he was really trying  
15 to tell us. Because what he kept doing is saying, "Yes,  
16 there is a bit of cooperation here, but then there is  
17 not cooperation there", and what particularly struck me  
18 about the 14 February Blix report, and this then had  
19 a huge significance in what I then tried then to  
20 construct as a final way of avoiding the war, is, on  
21 page 26 of his briefing, he deals with this issue of  
22 interviews and he says that the Iraqi side of -- because  
23 they are starting to move on interviews because he is  
24 beginning to press on it -- they have made a commitment  
25 that they will allow it, but then, when he actually

1 comes to the interviews themselves, people are very  
2 reluctant to do it.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that's an inherent problem with  
4 this regime, because of the reasons you have given, and  
5 we knew that beforehand.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but it is precisely the reason,  
7 therefore, why, even if Dr Blix had continued, the fact  
8 is he would never have got the truth out of Saddam and  
9 the leading people in the regime. The people who did  
10 get the truth out of them were the Iraq Survey Group,  
11 and what they found was that Saddam retained the  
12 intent --

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we have got --

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I know, but it is incredibly important.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we have got the idea that  
16 the intent was there --

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: And the know-how.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- and the know-how, and this isn't  
19 an issue of disagreement.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Blair, did you want to make more of that,  
21 in fairness to you? I think we have taken the point.  
22 It is not in contention.

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is just sometimes -- I will do this  
24 very briefly, but sometimes what is important is not to  
25 ask the March 2003 question, but to ask the 2010

1 question. Supposing we had backed off this military  
2 action, supposing we had left Saddam and his sons, who  
3 were going to follow him, in charge of Iraq, people who  
4 used chemical weapons, caused the death of over  
5 1 million people, what we now know is that he retained  
6 absolutely the intent and the intellectual know-how to  
7 restart a nuclear and a chemical weapons programme when  
8 the inspectors were out and the sanctions changed, which  
9 they were going to be.

10 I think it is at least arguable that he was a threat  
11 and that, had we taken that decision to leave him there  
12 with the intent, with an oil price, not of \$25, but of  
13 \$100 a barrel, he would have had the intent, he would  
14 have had the financial means and we would have lost our  
15 nerve.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence?

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You had a phone call with Dr Blix on  
18 20 February. He has written about this and he has  
19 written about it again this morning. We have obviously  
20 seen the record.

21 Now, one of the things that people were commenting  
22 on by this time was that this smoking gun, as it has  
23 been called, that had been searched for, had not been  
24 found. A number of sites had been suggested and nothing  
25 had been turned up. I'm quoting what he said he said,

1 words to the effect:

2 "It would be paradoxical and absurd if 250,000 men  
3 were to invade Iraq and find very little."

4 What was your response to that?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: My response to that was to say, "What  
6 you have to tell us is as to whether he is complying  
7 with the resolution. Is he giving immediate compliance  
8 and full compliance or not?"

9 His answer to that was, "No, but, you never know, it  
10 may be that, if we are given more time, he will". It  
11 was re-arising out of that conversation that I worked  
12 with him to try and get a fresh UN Security Council  
13 Resolution. I kept working on that right up until the  
14 last moment.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: As we know. But four days later, in  
16 fact, on 24 February, you tabled a draft resolution,  
17 which stated that Iraq had failed to take the last  
18 opportunity to cooperate.

19 But at that point, Dr Blix was not saying to the  
20 United Nations, to the Security Council, that his --  
21 let's compare the position of Richard Butler  
22 in December 1998 who was absolutely clear that he was  
23 not getting the cooperation he sought from  
24 Saddam Hussein. The last report that Dr Blix had given  
25 had been that he was getting, in principle, cooperation

1 on process. That's what he was saying.

2 Now, you may disagree with that and think it is not  
3 necessarily a proper interpretation of the evidence that  
4 you could see, but that's what he said.

5 So in a sense, you are having now to make the  
6 judgment to the Security Council on material breach at  
7 that time without the support of a statement by  
8 Hans Blix, that explicit support.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Whether he thought the action was  
10 justified or not, his reports were clear that the  
11 compliance was not immediate and the cooperation  
12 unconditional. It plainly wasn't. Indeed, actually, on  
13 his 7 March document, where he was obviously moving  
14 further along the road, he says this at page 31:

15 "It is obvious that while the numerous initiatives  
16 which are now taken by the Iraqi side with a view to  
17 resolving some longstanding, open disarmament issues can  
18 be seen as active or even proactive. These initiatives,  
19 three to four months into the new resolution, cannot be  
20 said to constitute immediate cooperation. Nor do they  
21 necessarily cover all areas of relevance. They are  
22 nonetheless welcome."

23 So what I felt was that we had got to a situation  
24 where he was very much, "On the one hand ... and on the  
25 other", and here was the decision we had to take really

1 at this point: and I think, in the light of what the  
2 Iraqi Survey Group have found, I actually think this  
3 judgment was right, which is why personally I don't  
4 believe, if Hans Blix had another six months, it would  
5 have come out any differently.

6 We had to reform this judgment. If you have got  
7 a regime that you believe is a threat, in the end you  
8 may choose -- you may change them through sanctions, but  
9 they have to be sustainable. You may change them by  
10 military force with all the problems there. The  
11 simplest way of change is that there is a change of  
12 heart on behalf of the regime.

13 Now, we had to decide: did all this that he was  
14 doing with Dr Blix really indicate to us -- I mean, he  
15 was definitely in material breach of the UN Resolution,  
16 but did it really indicate that this was someone who had  
17 had a change of heart?

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think the issue, though, that was  
19 now developing in the Security Council was that Dr Blix  
20 did indeed seem to think more weeks and months would be  
21 helpful, and because nothing had been found so far in  
22 the inspections process other than the Al Samoud  
23 missiles which were being dealt with, that confirmed the  
24 intelligence picture that had been presented over the  
25 previous months, that people did feel there was a need

1 for more time. It wasn't time an unreasonable request.

2 So was there a risk that by putting down the second  
3 resolution at this point, that it appeared as if you  
4 were trying to curtail this process because of the  
5 demands of the military planning?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was more, actually, Sir Lawrence, the  
7 other way round, that what we were trying to do was to  
8 say: how do you resolve what, on any basis, is  
9 a somewhat indistinct picture being painted by Dr Blix?  
10 Because it is clear they are not cooperating fully, that  
11 they are giving a little bit of cooperation, and I come  
12 back to the fact that, of course, the only cooperation  
13 that was being given was because of this huge military  
14 force sitting on Saddam's doorstep.

15 What I tried to do was find a way -- and that's why  
16 I did this with Dr Blix himself. We sat down and we had  
17 a conversation -- I think actually we had a long  
18 conversation on the phone. I remember Jack Straw was  
19 very much involved in this. Jeremy Greenstock, I think,  
20 at the UN, was very much involved in this. We tried to  
21 construct these tests, and the most important one, to  
22 me, was this ability to get the scientists out of the  
23 country.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It seems to me that the issue -- and  
25 indeed, this was a very serious effort, but you didn't

1           have the time, because, if you were going to do that,  
2           maybe it would have taken until April, maybe until May,  
3           but the sense within the Security Council was that this  
4           was indeed a way it could go forward, but that the view  
5           of the United States is that you couldn't have much more  
6           time. Jonathan Powell told us that you asked for more  
7           time and you weren't given it.

8   RT HON TONY BLAIR: The reason for constructing the  
9           resolution was to try and get us into the situation of  
10          having more time. The problem, however, was this: we  
11          could have got the resolution together. I was having  
12          discussions late into the night every evening with --  
13          I think it was the Chileans and the Mexicans and I was  
14          speaking to the French. We were speaking to everybody.  
15          We were trying desperately to get this last route out,  
16          and there were other things that were being talked about  
17          at the time.

18                 I had -- I won't go into the details of it, but  
19                 there was a group of Arab countries that came to us and  
20                 they were quite keen, I think, on actually, if we got  
21                 a fresh resolution, pushing Saddam out. So there were  
22                 ways, even then, when we could have tried to resolve  
23                 this.

24                 The problem was it became very clear that, whatever  
25                 their position had been in November 2002, the position,

1 particularly of France and Russia, really changed. They  
2 had decided they weren't going to agree any new  
3 resolution that had in it any authority for action if  
4 Saddam didn't comply.

5 The reason why that then made our position very  
6 difficult was, if you tabled another resolution, but  
7 said, "Even if he doesn't comply with that resolution,  
8 we will come back and have yet other discussion --"

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we will probably want to  
10 explore that particular question after lunch in terms of  
11 whether the French were the absolute block on getting  
12 something, but I just want -- because time now is  
13 pressing and I think we have done quite a lot on this.  
14 Let me just sum up where it seems to me that we are  
15 as February is turning into March.

16 First, Sir Jeremy Greenstock has told us, through  
17 this time, he never felt that he was close to having  
18 nine positive votes in the bag. He had some at one  
19 point, some at another, but we never really lined them  
20 all up together, which would have put the pressure on  
21 the French and the Russians.

22 Despite the quality of our intelligence passed to  
23 UNMOVIC, there hasn't been a smoking gun. There hasn't  
24 been a real find of chemical or biological stocks,  
25 perhaps for reasons that have nothing to do with whether

1 it is there or not, but it hasn't been found.

2 The inspectors were not saying that they couldn't do  
3 their job. They were -- and El-Baradei was saying that  
4 his job was almost done and that there was no nuclear  
5 programme. So the view was moving away on this issue  
6 within the Security Council.

7 Was this not a good time to take stock and to  
8 question whether or not more time would have been  
9 helpful? Again, just to quote the evidence we have had  
10 from Sir David Manning and from Sir Jeremy Greenstock,  
11 both of whom have come to this conclusion: it would have  
12 been good to have more time.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's why we tried to construct this  
14 arrangement, in order to get us some more time. I think  
15 I would make two points, however.

16 First of all, I think we would have got the nine  
17 votes, were it not for the fact that those members in  
18 the middle group -- I mean, they were called the  
19 "undecided six" at a certain point -- they were getting  
20 such a clear and vehement message from France and Russia  
21 that they weren't going to accept any resolution that  
22 was an authority for action, that that's really what  
23 disintegrated that possibility.

24 The second thing is, though, even if we had got more  
25 time, Hans Blix would never have been able to conduct

1 the interviews with the key members of the regime and  
2 they be honest with him.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But if he had been given the chance  
4 and failed again, wouldn't you then have had more of  
5 a chance of having the Security Council behind you,  
6 which had been one of your objectives going back to  
7 2002?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I'm not really sure about that,  
9 Sir Lawrence. By then, we had been four months with  
10 Saddam and, you know, you can take different views  
11 and -- of the Blix reports, and Hans Blix obviously  
12 takes a certain view now. I have to say in my  
13 conversations with him then it was a little different.  
14 But you have to make a judgment: is this person really  
15 seriously cooperating with the international community  
16 or not? As we now know, incidentally, he wasn't.

17 I do emphasise also the fact that he -- and there is  
18 also evidence in the Iraq Survey Group, which is  
19 actually quite important, about what Iraqi scientists  
20 were being told by the Vice-President of Iraq. He  
21 gathered them all together as the inspectors went in  
22 and, as you know, the inspectors were supposed to be  
23 given all the information, any materials they had. What  
24 he was saying was, "If you have any materials in your  
25 possession, you had better not have". Now --

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I understand -- you are right that  
2 this is indeed what happened. The question is whether  
3 or not it was -- it would be possible to create the  
4 consensus that would have been so much help behind you  
5 in the United Nations.

6 My final question: did you ask President Bush for  
7 more time and did he say, "No, military action has got  
8 to go ahead on 19 March"?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. What he actually did, much to the  
10 consternation of his system, was he said, "Okay, if you  
11 can get this new resolution down with the tests that  
12 I can" -- because I constructed them with Blix, so  
13 I thought "Here you are, you are constructing these  
14 tests with the UN inspector", so I thought that would  
15 give them a certain persuasive quality obviously with  
16 the other members of the Security Council.

17 What President Bush actually said to me was, "If you  
18 can get that, do it", but, you know, you have got to  
19 understand from the American perspective, they had gone  
20 down the 1441 route, he obviously wasn't cooperating.  
21 We had been through the 8 December declaration. We then  
22 went through the January report, the February report,  
23 and they had their forces down there ready to take  
24 action. It was difficult situation, but actually he  
25 did, to be fair, say, "If you can put it together, put

1           it together".

2   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:  But he wanted to get on with it?

3   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  I think there was a judgment being  
4           made -- and I honestly, in retrospect, can't disagree  
5           with this judgment, that, you know, more time was not  
6           going to solve this.

7   THE CHAIRMAN:  It is clearly time to break for lunch.  Can  
8           I just say I would like to thank everyone in the room  
9           who has sat through this morning, and, as you won't be  
10          able to be in this room this afternoon, thank you for  
11          your very attentive and, if I may say so, well-mannered  
12          response to this session.  I thank our witness and we  
13          will resume again at 2 o'clock.

14   (12.40 pm)

15                                   (The short adjournment)

16   (2.00 pm)

17   THE CHAIRMAN:  Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome.  This  
18          afternoon, the Iraq Inquiry will be hearing again from  
19          the Rt Hon Tony Blair, Prime Minister until June 2007.  
20          We still have much to cover today.

21           The Committee hopes we can go about our business in  
22          an orderly way and, in fairness to all, not be  
23          distracted by any disruptions.  As in all our hearings,  
24          the right for our witness to respond must be respected,  
25          and those here today, this morning and now yourselves

1 this afternoon, were selected through a free public  
2 ballot overseen by an independent arbiter, and I remind  
3 everyone of the behaviour expected to be observed.

4 Welcome back, Mr Blair. For the benefit of those  
5 who were not able to be in the room this morning, can  
6 I just repeat two things that were said this morning at  
7 the start of the proceedings.

8 We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence  
9 based in part on their recollection of events, and we,  
10 of course, cross-check what we hear against the papers  
11 to which we have access.

12 I remind every witness that they will later be asked  
13 to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that  
14 the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

15 I would now like to continue the proceedings and  
16 turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman -- I beg your pardon, to  
17 Sir Roderic Lyne.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would just like to pick up a couple of  
19 points from where you and Sir Lawrence left it before  
20 lunchtime, just to finish off the diplomatic and  
21 political decisions that you faced in the days before  
22 you had to take the decision that we should start  
23 military action. There are only two on this I think  
24 I want to ask about now.

25 The first one concerns the position of the

1 French Government, which you did refer to before lunch.  
2 In your final speech before the conflict to the House of  
3 Commons on 18 March, you told the Commons that -- and  
4 I will quote here:

5 "France said it would veto a second resolution,  
6 whatever the circumstances...Those on the Security  
7 Council opposed to us...will not countenance any new  
8 resolution that authorises force in the event of  
9 non-compliance."

10 Had the French been on to us after  
11 President Chirac's interview of 10 March in the days  
12 after that, before you made that statement? Had they,  
13 indeed, told Number 10 through diplomatic channels that  
14 we were misinterpreting President Chirac's words by  
15 misinterpreting the context of his statement, "Whatever  
16 the circumstances". Had they told us that, in the view  
17 of the French Government, Chirac had not been saying  
18 that France would vote no against any resolution, he was  
19 referring to this resolution at this time?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I believe I spoke to President Chirac  
21 myself. I think it was on 14 March. So this is  
22 actually, you know, after that time. The French  
23 position was very, very clear. It wasn't that they  
24 would veto any resolution, it is that they would veto  
25 a resolution that authorised force in the event of

1 breach.

2 The point was this: that, if we were going to come  
3 back to the United Nations and get another resolution,  
4 it had to be a resolution that said something stronger  
5 and tougher than 1441, and, therefore, the idea was to  
6 say, because we had been through 1441, Saddam was not in  
7 compliance, "Okay, if we come back for another  
8 resolution, then this has got to authorise action".

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you didn't feel that there was any  
10 possibility that if we pursued inspections for a longer  
11 period to the point where the French and perhaps  
12 Hans Blix was reporting that the process was exhausted,  
13 that, at that stage, the French would have been prepared  
14 to vote for a resolution authorising military action?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: My judgment, having spoken to  
16 Jacques Chirac -- and we kept perfectly good lines open,  
17 actually, through this, and I was very anxious to make  
18 sure for the aftermath situation that we came back  
19 together again in the UN Security Council. So I wasn't,  
20 you know, trying to be in a position where France and  
21 Britain, as it were, fell out, but it was very, very  
22 clear to me the French, the Germans and the Russians had  
23 decided they weren't going to be in favour of this and  
24 there was a straightforward division, frankly, and  
25 I don't think it would have mattered how much time we

1 had taken, they weren't going to agree that force should  
2 be used.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In any circumstances, at any time, on  
4 this track?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Unless there had been something  
6 absolutely dramatic that the inspectors had uncovered.  
7 That might have made a difference to them, but the mere  
8 fact that he was in breach of 1441, despite this being  
9 his final opportunity, my judgment, I have to say -- and  
10 I think this is pretty clear -- is that there was by  
11 then a political divide on this, of a pretty fundamental  
12 nature.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As we hadn't got nine positive votes in  
14 the bag, a French vote against wouldn't actually have  
15 been a veto. Is there any substance in the charge that,  
16 by making so much of the French veto, we were actually  
17 using it as an excuse to withdraw the resolution, which  
18 wasn't going to succeed anyway, so that we could meet  
19 the American timetable and go into action?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the actual situation -- because  
21 I had many conversations with other leaders at the time,  
22 and most of those were with President Lagos of Chile,  
23 whom I knew well and had a very good personal  
24 relationship with. He was in a tough situation, as we  
25 were all at that time, and what President Lagos was

1 effectively saying to me was, "Look, if you can get to  
2 a stage where you can loosen the French opposition, then  
3 it is a lot easier for us to come along with you".

4 So it was very bound up with, as it were, what was  
5 then becoming in the Permanent 5 a disagreement; UK and  
6 America on one side, France and Russia on the other.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you hadn't really reached a point in  
8 the week or so or the resolution was withdrawn where you  
9 had effectively had to give up your hopes of getting  
10 President Lagos and maybe your hopes that President Bush  
11 could persuade the Mexicans to come on side and decide  
12 that you would have to plan an end-game in which our  
13 position was presented in the best way it could be?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think it was more that -- I thought  
15 there was -- it was worth having one last-ditch chance  
16 to see if you could bring people back together on the  
17 same page. So in a sense, what President Bush had to do  
18 was agree to table a fresh resolution. What the French  
19 had to agree was you couldn't have another resolution  
20 and another breach and no action. So my idea was define  
21 the circumstances of breach -- that was the tests that  
22 we applied with Hans Blix -- get the Americans to agree  
23 to the resolution, get the French to agree that you  
24 couldn't just go back to the same words of 1441 again,  
25 you had to take it a stage further.

1           Now, that was the idea I had. I thought it might be  
2 possible to bring everyone back together again. It  
3 wasn't possible to do that, and I was also very  
4 conscious by that time as well of the need to bring the  
5 UN back into the situation after a conflict, and so that  
6 was a factor in my mind as well.

7           As I say, I wanted to try, as far possible, to make  
8 sure that you didn't end up with, as it were, really  
9 a political disagreement becoming a really ugly  
10 political situation between the major countries in the  
11 Security Council.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just move on to my other point,  
13 which is a slightly wider point?

14           At this really critical moment, and obviously a very  
15 difficult moment in your life, you had reached the stage  
16 where you weren't going to get a second resolution,  
17 military action was imminent. Now, you had been working  
18 intensively for months, indeed for a year, to try to  
19 create a supportive environment, and we have discussed  
20 elements of that already, but you hadn't actually got  
21 a clear and strong international consensus for this  
22 action. Public opinion here in the UK was divided. No  
23 really major progress had been made on the Middle East  
24 peace plan, which you and I discussed earlier. We  
25 hadn't got the second resolution, and you were also,

1 I think by this stage, starting to hear warnings from  
2 people like Brigadier, as he was, I think, Tim Cross,  
3 who came to see you in Downing Street and saw  
4 Alastair Campbell, I think, that the post-conflict  
5 preparations being made by the Americans didn't look at  
6 all good.

7 At this point, you must, I suppose, have had some  
8 pause for thought. Did President Bush at this point,  
9 when you hadn't really satisfied the pre-conditions you  
10 wanted to achieve, offer to go it alone and offer you  
11 a way out?

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the Americans would have done  
13 that. I think President Bush actually at one point  
14 shortly before the debate said, "Look, if it is too  
15 difficult for Britain, we understand". But I took the  
16 view very strongly then, and do, that it was right for  
17 us to be with America, since we believed in this too,  
18 and it is true that it was very divisive, but it was  
19 divisive in the sense that there were two groups. There  
20 was also a very strong group in the international  
21 community, in Parliament, I would say even in the  
22 Cabinet, who also thought it was the right thing to do.

23 So, for example, in the European Union at the time  
24 I think 13 out of the 25 members were with America.  
25 Japan and South Korea were with America, major allies

1 lining up with America.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly, there was support, but I suppose  
3 this was a long way short of what you would have hoped  
4 to have had.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would have hoped to have had  
6 a United Nations situation at which everywhere was on  
7 the same page and agreed. Sometimes that doesn't  
8 happen.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In Kosovo, one didn't have unanimity,  
10 because the Russians threatened to veto, but you had  
11 much stronger support. The first Gulf War, there was  
12 pretty much universal support, Afghanistan and so on.  
13 So this was a much more difficult situation for you.

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was a really tough situation, yes,  
15 and in the end, as I say, what influenced me was that my  
16 judgment ultimately was that Saddam was going to remain  
17 a threat and that in this change in the perception of  
18 risk after September 11 it was important that we were  
19 prepared to act, our alliance with America was  
20 important, and, to put this very clearly, we had been  
21 down a UN path that I genuinely hoped would work.  
22 I hoped that 1441 would avoid conflict happening.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although, I think you said this morning  
24 you weren't terribly confident it was going to work.  
25 You hoped it would work.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I did hope it would work. I wasn't  
2 confident about Saddam, I think for perfectly good  
3 reasons. He was someone who had been defying the UN for  
4 ten years, and, as we know now, he hadn't really changed  
5 his intent. So I could see a situation in which you  
6 might be faced with this tough choice, but I was doing  
7 absolutely everything I could to try and avoid having to  
8 do it.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Jack Straw the other day referred to  
10 a plan B that he had floated with you. I think --  
11 I don't remember his exact words, but implying that he  
12 saw a case for it, which would have involved only  
13 partial involvement by us in the military action, but  
14 not sending the ground troops in, as I understand it.

15 What was your view of his advice?

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, that was a possibility. As  
17 I think we discussed this morning -- in fact, our own  
18 military, in a sense, to their great credit, were in  
19 favour, if we were going to be part of this, to be  
20 wholehearted.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They are bound to, they are out there  
22 ready to go, and troops in that situation don't want to  
23 have to come back again, do they?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: This was even back in October. I think,  
25 if you look at the record back in October 2002, the

1 military were saying what their preferences were for the  
2 three options.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm now thinking of the last week before  
4 the action.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I'm sorry, I thought you were meaning to  
6 suggest it was just because the troops were down there.  
7 I think, to be fair -- and I think Mike Boyce would say  
8 this to you -- that they wanted to be a wholehearted  
9 part of this, and I thought that was right as well, as  
10 I discussed.

11 It would have been a very big thing for us to have  
12 kept out of the aftermath as well, and, of course, it  
13 was in the aftermath that some of the most difficult  
14 things happened, and the British forces performed  
15 absolutely magnificently, both during the invasion and  
16 afterwards.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Some have argued the opposite. Some of  
18 our earlier witnesses have said that, by going in with  
19 a large force, we actually hoped we could then take the  
20 fighting -- the combat troops out at a fairly early  
21 stage in the hope that other people would come in and  
22 take up some of the load in the aftermath.

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Which they did, of course.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, reversing that, if we had not sent  
25 the force in at this stage, for this variety of reasons,

1 we could then still have said, in a very respectable  
2 way, that we are ready to come in and do the sort of  
3 peace building, nation building stuff that we have got  
4 a lot of experience in, in the aftermath.

5 So it wasn't keeping us out of the aftermath by not  
6 going in at this stage, was it?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, I meant precisely the opposite,  
8 exactly what you are saying, Sir Roderic. In other  
9 words, we would have been as part of the aftermath and,  
10 actually, as it turned out -- for reasons that we didn't  
11 foresee, as it turned out, it was the aftermath that was  
12 the most difficult and toughest part of this.

13 What I'm saying is: to have kept out of the  
14 aftermath as well as the initial action, I think would  
15 have been very hard for Britain, but having said all of  
16 that, look, again, this is a judgment. You could have  
17 decided to do option 1 or 2. In the end, we decided to  
18 do option 3, and I think that was, I would say, the  
19 consensus view between political and military at the  
20 time.

21 Just to say this to you, one of the things that  
22 I have done in every single piece of military action  
23 I advocated as Prime Minister is the first thing, in  
24 a sense, I do is get a sense from our armed forces as to  
25 whether they are committed and keen to do it, and, of

1 course, they are, because that's the type of people they  
2 are and they are fantastic. But it was very much  
3 a conversation we had back in -- I think beginning  
4 actually in July time, and then building up  
5 through October, and then, by the time we came to March,  
6 yes, it is true, we could have pulled back at that  
7 stage, but I believe that that would have been wrong and  
8 I think it would have not indicated the strength of support  
9 that I felt was right for us to exhibit.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to change the subject now,  
11 if I may, if my colleagues have got nothing further that  
12 they want to raise on this point.

13 This morning, I registered that we would want to  
14 deal with all the legal issues, as it were, in one  
15 chapter. I think that's easier. I hope it is easier  
16 for you, I think it is easier for us.

17 Of course, in the course of this week alone, we have  
18 had some ten hours of evidence on this from the  
19 Attorney General and from three senior Civil Service  
20 legal advisers who were involved in the question.

21 For that reason, we don't propose to try to go  
22 through the issues point by point again, which would  
23 take probably another ten hours. We really would now  
24 like to focus on the questions that most directly  
25 concerned you, as Prime Minister, and the Committee have

1 suggested that the easiest way of tackling this  
2 extremely complex subject with all of this ten hours of  
3 background behind us would be if I tried to summarise  
4 first what we, as a Committee, have heard and read on  
5 this subject, and if you will forgive me, it will allow  
6 you to rest your voice for a minute or two.

7 This will take me a few minutes, but I think  
8 ultimately it will also save us some time. So if you  
9 are content, I will try to wrap up what we have absorbed  
10 on this subject in a number of points.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Before -- just to interject -- then coming to  
12 specific questions based on that. Is that satisfactory  
13 to you?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I will go through the summary. If you  
16 are not content with any points in it, please tell me,  
17 and then I have got one or two questions I would like to  
18 ask arising from that.

19 Firstly, there wasn't a legal basis, as  
20 Lord Goldsmith repeated to us the day before yesterday,  
21 for regime change as an objective in itself.

22 Secondly, lawyers in the US administration favoured  
23 what was called the revival argument and that meant that  
24 the authorisation for the use of force during the first  
25 Gulf War, embodied in Resolution 687, was capable of

1 being revived as it had been revived in 1993 and 1998.

2           However, the UK's lawyers did not consider that this  
3 argument was applicable without a fresh determination by  
4 the Security Council, and they felt that, not only  
5 because of the passage of time since resolutions 678 and  
6 687, but also because, in 1993 and 1998, the Security  
7 Council had formed the view that there had been  
8 a sufficiently serious violation of the ceasefire  
9 conditions and also because the force that had been used  
10 then had been limited to ensuring Iraqi compliance with  
11 the ceasefire conditions. Even in 1998, the revival  
12 argument had been controversial and not very widely  
13 supported. So the British argument was that you needed  
14 a fresh determination of the Security Council.

15           If we turn then to the precedent of Kosovo. Over  
16 Kosovo, Russia had threatened to veto a proposed  
17 Security Council Resolution and our lawyers believed  
18 that this precedent did not apply to these circumstances  
19 in Iraq, because, in Kosovo, we had had an alternative  
20 legal base to rely on, which was intervention to avert  
21 an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe.

22           So what that led to was consistent and, I think,  
23 united advice, by the FCO's legal advisers and, also,  
24 insofar as it was at this stage sought or proffered by  
25 the Attorney General up to November 2002, that a fresh

1 UN authorisation under chapter 7 would be required for  
2 the military action contemplated against Iraq,  
3 contemplated at that stage as a contingency, to be  
4 lawful.

5 Such an authorisation, in their view, would provide  
6 the only grounds on which, in these circumstances, force  
7 could be used.

8 So the UK and the USA went to the United Nations and  
9 obtained Security Council Resolution 1441, passed  
10 unanimously. However, in the words of Lord Goldsmith,  
11 that resolution wasn't crystal clear, and I think you,  
12 yourself, this morning referred to the fact that there  
13 were arguments. It didn't resolve the argument, I think  
14 was the way you put it.

15 The ambiguous wording of that resolution immediately  
16 gave rise to different positions by different  
17 Security Council members on whether or not it of itself  
18 had provided authorisation without a further  
19 determination by the Security Council for the use of  
20 force.

21 So up until early February of 2003, the  
22 Attorney General, again, as Lord Goldsmith told us in  
23 his evidence, was telling you that he remained of the  
24 view that Resolution 1441 did not authorise the use of  
25 force without a further determination by the Security

1 Council that it was his position that a Council  
2 discussion -- the word "discussion" was used in the  
3 resolution -- would not be sufficient and that a further  
4 decision by the Council was required.

5 I think perhaps, as I'm about halfway through the  
6 summary and I have just reached the point before  
7 Lord Goldsmith gives you his formal advice, it might be  
8 sensible if I pause at half time just to ask if, up to  
9 now, you think I have got it right in your own  
10 understanding?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think that's a fair summary.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If you are content, then I will continue  
13 and I hope to do as well with the second half but I'm  
14 not the lawyer and you are.

15 On 7 March, Lord Goldsmith submitted his formal  
16 advice to you, a document which is now in the public  
17 domain. In that he continued to argue that:

18 "The safest legal course", would be a further  
19 resolution. But in contrast to his previous position,  
20 and for reasons which he explained to us in his  
21 evidence, he now argued that, "a reasonable case" could  
22 be made, "that Resolution 1441 is capable in principle  
23 of reviving the authorisation in 678 without a further  
24 resolution."

25 But at the same time he coupled this with a warning

1 that, "a reasonable case does not mean that if the  
2 matter ever came before a court, I would be confident  
3 that the court would agree with this view."

4 So at that point, Lord Goldsmith had, to a degree,  
5 parted company with the legal advisers in the Foreign  
6 and Commonwealth Office, who have also given evidence to  
7 us through Sir Michael Wood and Ms Elizabeth Wilmshurst.  
8 They were continuing to argue that the invasion could  
9 only be lawful if the Security Council determined that  
10 a further material breach had been committed by Iraq.  
11 I emphasise the word "further", of course, because 1441  
12 established that Iraq was already in breach, but then  
13 the argument was about the so-called firebreak and  
14 whether you had to have a determination of a further  
15 material breach.

16 Lord Goldsmith told us that, when it became clear  
17 that we were not likely to get a second resolution,  
18 a further resolution, he was asked to give what he  
19 described as a "yes or no decision", especially because  
20 clarity was required by the armed forces, CDS had put  
21 this to him, and by other public servants. He had  
22 received also an intervention from a senior Treasury  
23 lawyer.

24 So having given you that advice on 7 March, by  
25 13 March, he had crucially decided -- and this is from

1 a minute recording a discussion between himself and his  
2 senior adviser, David Brummell, who has also given  
3 evidence to us and which is also on the public record --  
4 he had decided that:

5 "On balance, the better view was that the conditions  
6 for the operation of the revival argument were met in  
7 this case; ie, that there was a lawful basis for the use  
8 of force without a further resolution going beyond  
9 Resolution 1441."

10 Now, there is one further stage in the process and  
11 then I will get to the end.

12 This view now taken by the Attorney General still  
13 required a determination that Iraq was "in further  
14 material breach of its obligations."

15 The legal advisers in the FCO considered that only  
16 the UN Security Council could make that determination,  
17 but the Attorney took the view that individual member  
18 states could make this determination and he asked you to  
19 provide your assurance that you had so concluded; ie,  
20 you had concluded that Iraq was in further material  
21 breach, and on 15 March, which is, what, five days  
22 before the action began, you officially gave the  
23 unequivocal view that Iraq is in further material breach  
24 of its obligations.

25 So it was on that basis that the Attorney was able

1 to give the green light for military action to you, to  
2 the armed forces, to the Civil Service, to the Cabinet  
3 and to Parliament.

4 But it remained the case, as Sir Michael Wood made  
5 clear in his evidence, that while the Attorney General's  
6 constitutional authority was, of course, accepted by the  
7 government's Civil Service advisers on international  
8 law, headed by Sir Michael Wood -- although  
9 Ms Wilmshurst herself decided to resign at this point  
10 from government service -- they accepted his authority  
11 but they did not endorse the position in law which he  
12 had taken, and it remains to this day Sir Michael's  
13 position -- he said this in his witness statement --  
14 that:

15 "The use of force against Iraq in March 2003 was  
16 contrary to international law."

17 Now, my first question is: have I given a fair  
18 summary of the legal background?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think that is a fair summary of  
20 the legal background. I would say, however, just one  
21 point, Sir Roderic, which is that what was so important  
22 to me about Resolution 1441 was not simply that it  
23 declared Saddam in breach, gave him a final opportunity,  
24 but it said also, in op 4, that a failure to comply  
25 unconditionally and immediately and fully with the

1 inspectors was itself a further material breach.

2 This was extremely important for us to secure in  
3 that resolution, and we did secure it, and what we kept  
4 out of 1441 was an attempt to ensure that we had to go  
5 back for another decision.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I went through that in considerable  
7 detail, as you probably saw, with the Attorney General  
8 just to make sure that we clearly understood the  
9 different positions and the weight that was being given  
10 to evidence received from private conversations and what  
11 was said on the public record.

12 So if you will allow me, I will not go over all of  
13 that ground again, if you are content with the way that  
14 we discussed it with the Attorney General, and I would  
15 really move on to my next question, which is that: going  
16 back to the first half of 2002, which we discussed right  
17 at the beginning of today, the period when your strategy  
18 was evolving away from containment for the reasons you  
19 explained, and towards the American position, and,  
20 therefore, you were beginning to discuss the possibility  
21 or the contingency of having to use force, in that  
22 period of the first half of 2002, when you were having  
23 these discussions, did you seek legal advice from the  
24 Attorney, or, indeed, from anyone else?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We got a paper, I think it was

1 an 8 March paper, which set out the legal position, and  
2 that set it out in the terms that you have just  
3 summarised. I was obviously not just very interested in  
4 it for obvious reasons, but interested in it for this  
5 reason as well: that we had taken action in 1998 and we  
6 had taken action on the basis of the revival of  
7 Resolution 678.

8 So it was very important to me because we had  
9 already taken military action, and, indeed, as you  
10 rightly point out, military action had been taken in  
11 1993 as well, but we had that before us and one of the  
12 things that was most important in us going down the UN  
13 route was precisely the legal advice that we got.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you wanted, at that early stage, to  
15 know the legal parameters. Do you remember where that  
16 advice came from? Was it from the Foreign Office's  
17 legal advisers or ...?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't, but I may be able to to --

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If I put it another way, I think from our  
20 discussion with the Attorney General, it didn't come  
21 from him, because, if I'm not misremembering his  
22 evidence, I don't think at that stage he had been  
23 consulted.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, it came from the Foreign Office,  
25 actually.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It came from the Foreign Office.

2           Could you say why, given that this was pretty  
3 serious territory you were beginning to get on to, you  
4 didn't at that stage think it necessary to consult the  
5 Attorney General?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I mean, we were, in my view, a long way  
7 at that point from taking a decision. Had we come  
8 closer to the point of taking a decision, of course we  
9 would have needed to have taken the formal advice of the  
10 Attorney General, as indeed we did.

11           At that stage, we had the advice of the  
12 Foreign Office, and, actually, the Foreign Office advice  
13 was pretty much in line with what Peter Goldsmith then  
14 later advised me.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was 100 per cent in line, as we  
16 understand from both of them. So at that point,  
17 building the Attorney General into the process of  
18 forming policy, having him at meetings, like, say, the  
19 meeting at Chequers that you discussed, wasn't something  
20 you felt a need to do?

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Not at that stage, because we were, as  
22 I say, at a very preliminary point. But what I took  
23 from the advice that we were given was that we needed  
24 a fresh resolution.

25           I do point out that -- because this was why, at

1 a later stage, I became concerned as to what the legal  
2 problem was, because, of course, we got a further  
3 resolution.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just stick a little bit for  
5 a couple of minutes with the Attorney General's role in  
6 this because his evidence is very fresh in our minds?

7 In previous governments it was quite frequently the  
8 practice for Attorneys General to attend Cabinet, and,  
9 indeed, in some War Cabinets. You didn't have  
10 a War Cabinet before the conflict began here, but you  
11 had groups of advisers who met --

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, and ministers.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Ministers and advisers. Attorneys  
14 General, sometimes in the past, quite frequently in the  
15 past, would have been there.

16 Now, Lord Goldsmith told us that he had only  
17 attended Cabinet twice, up to the time the conflict  
18 began, to discuss Iraq, although, as you said this  
19 morning, the Cabinet discussed Iraq over 20 times.

20 It was clear from his evidence, I think, that he was  
21 rarely included in the other discussions you were having  
22 around this subject and that he had relatively few  
23 face-to-face meetings you in 2002 and the early part of  
24 2003, particularly in 2002, to discuss this subject,  
25 which, I think, raised the question in our minds as to

1           why you hadn't thought it right to include him more  
2           closely.

3   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  He was very closely involved in this, in  
4           the sense that he, himself, and on his own initiative,  
5           actually -- and after that time, we obviously had  
6           a pretty close interaction on it -- at the end  
7           of July 2002, wrote to me about his legal advice.

8           It is correct -- and I think this is in accordance  
9           with tradition -- he didn't attend Cabinet until we got  
10          to the point when we were actually going to take the  
11          decision, but back then we were a year off military  
12          action in March 2002.

13          Now, had we got close the point of military action,  
14          of course Peter would have been very closely involved  
15          and actually began to be involved some -- I think it is  
16          right to say eight months before the military action  
17          began.

18   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  But you actually got to the point, quite  
19          close to the point, with him only having been to the  
20          Cabinet twice, the second time being on the eve of  
21          conflict.

22   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  The issue is not how many times he comes  
23          to the Cabinet, the issue is whether he is giving his  
24          advice to the Prime Minister and the ministers, and  
25          Peter was.

1           Just to say this about Peter Goldsmith. As you will  
2           have seen from his evidence, Peter is absolutely  
3           a lawyer's lawyer. He is somebody of extraordinary  
4           integrity. He is somebody who actually, as a lawyer, is  
5           in the very top rank of the legal profession, and Peter  
6           made it quite clear from a very early stage of this that  
7           if he felt he had advice to give, he would give it, and  
8           in a sense he would give it whether people wanted it or  
9           they didn't want it, but he was going to give it and he  
10          did give it.

11       SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. Indeed, he told us that he  
12          volunteered it after your meeting of 23 July when you  
13          were about to go off and see President Bush and he had  
14          volunteered written advice to in a minute of 30 July,  
15          the text of which is not in the public domain, but he  
16          commented to us that this advice, he felt had not been  
17          particularly welcome. We wondered why it wasn't  
18          particularly welcome to get advice then.

19       RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that it was not particularly  
20          welcome, it was -- obviously, I was dealing with what  
21          was already a difficult situation, and now I became  
22          aware we had to take a whole new dimension into account.

23                Of course, we had at an earlier stage of this, but  
24                once we got into discussions with the Americans, I was  
25                well aware of the fact from -- really from March

1           onwards, that if we wanted to be legally secure on this,  
2           we had to go down the UN route, and that was one major  
3           part of why we decided to do this.

4   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   So basically, you had got the point, you  
5           didn't need to be constantly reminded of it?

6   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  No, but having said that, it actually  
7           was then very helpful for him to do this, because he  
8           focused our minds, quite rightly, on the need to get the  
9           right resolution in 1441.

10   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  So he just got the wrong vibes from the  
11           reaction at Number 10?

12   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  I don't know, but I know Peter very well  
13           and he's someone I have a great respect for, and I'm  
14           sure --

15   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  No, it's just he made this remark, so it  
16           is natural, indeed, for me to ask you about it and --

17   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  I think, to be frank, and to be fair to  
18           him, he was deciding, before I go to President Bush --  
19           and I think he worried about statements that had been  
20           made by various ministers.

21   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  Later on, he was, yes.

22   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  He wanted to make it absolutely clear  
23           that it wasn't merely -- I think his point was: it is  
24           not merely going down the UN route, it is getting the  
25           right resolution that will be important.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's turn to that resolution. Just  
2 after it was adopted -- it was adopted on 8 November,  
3 Resolution 1441 and on 11 November Lord Goldsmith talked  
4 to your Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell. He was a bit  
5 concerned that he was hearing second-hand views of his  
6 own opinions and he wanted, I think, to get that  
7 straight, and he made clear to Jonathan Powell that he  
8 was not optimistic that Resolution 1441 would provide  
9 a sound legal basis for the use of force if Iraq were  
10 found in breach at a future stage but without a second  
11 resolution.

12 He suggested that it was desirable for him to  
13 provide advice at that point, but he wasn't encouraged  
14 to do so. The response instead was that he should -- he  
15 could have a meeting some time before Christmas at  
16 Downing Street, and that meeting duly took place on  
17 19 December with some of your officials.

18 At that meeting, he was again told that he wasn't  
19 being called on to give advice at this stage, "this  
20 stage" being a stage at which he felt that 1441 had  
21 created an unclear situation. But what he was invited  
22 to do was to put a paper to you in draft of his advice,  
23 and he handed that, I think, personally, to you on  
24 14 January.

25 Now, by then we are into a period in which the armed

1 forces had actually been instructed to prepare for  
2 military action and in which you were moving along the  
3 track towards an intended second Security Council  
4 Resolution, though that wasn't tabled until  
5 late February, I think about the 24th, from memory.

6 Don't you think that it would have been useful, as  
7 he obviously felt, if you had had the formal advice of  
8 the Attorney General ahead of these now increasingly  
9 important developments?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. I think what was important for him  
11 to do was to explain to us what his concerns were and,  
12 look, all the way through this there was a -- you know,  
13 as I know myself, lawyers take different views of issues  
14 and an issue such as this they were bound to take very  
15 different views. Peter was quite rightly saying to us,  
16 "These are my concerns. This is why I don't think 1441  
17 in itself is enough".

18 Now, we had begun military preparations even before  
19 we got the first resolution, the 1441 resolution. We  
20 had to do that, otherwise we would never have been in  
21 a position to take military action. But let me make it  
22 absolutely clear, if Peter in the end had said, "This  
23 cannot be justified lawfully", we would have been unable  
24 to take action.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But if you had known that he was going to

1 say that, it would have been helpful to have known that  
2 as soon as possible, because it could have prevented you  
3 from deploying a large force into the region and having  
4 to bring it back. That's why I ask: wouldn't it have  
5 been helpful to have known our options at this --

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did know our options. We didn't get  
7 formal, in a sense, legal advice at that point, but  
8 Peter had made it clear what his view was, and then  
9 there was a whole iteration because the whole of the  
10 legal interpretation really revolved around a bit like  
11 a statutory construction point for lawyers: what was in  
12 the minds of the people who passed the resolution?

13 As you rightly said earlier, the resolution in one  
14 sense was unclear as to what people intended. On the  
15 other hand, I certainly felt where it was absolutely  
16 clear was that there had to be immediate, full and  
17 unconditional compliance, and any lack of that  
18 compliance was a further material breach.

19 So in my view, there had to be at least a strong  
20 prima facie case if you could show material breach, that  
21 this justified the revival argument, since, otherwise,  
22 you know, you couldn't have justified it in respect of  
23 1998 --

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At this stage, before the middle  
25 of February, he is not offering you options, nor are the

1 Foreign Office legal advisers. They are saying, "We  
2 have to have a further determination by the Security  
3 Council". Later on, it turned out that he was able to  
4 find an alternative option.

5 In planning the policy, my point is: wouldn't it  
6 have been much easier for you to have known at this  
7 early stage that there was an alternative option that  
8 didn't involve a second Security Council Resolution?

9 You might then have decided not to make the huge  
10 effort that you then did make to get a second  
11 Security Council Resolution, because by making this  
12 effort and then not getting it, it could be argued that  
13 you had then actually weakened the argument that you  
14 subsequently -- or the position that you subsequently  
15 took on the revival argument.

16 Wouldn't it have been helpful to have known that  
17 earlier?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, we did know, because Peter made it  
19 clear, the best thing to do is to get another  
20 resolution. So we were well aware that this was his  
21 advice. The issue was really this --

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But he was saying it is the only thing to  
23 do at this stage. He didn't offer you the alternative  
24 until after he had been to Washington on 11 February.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Actually, it was two things, I think, to

1 be fair to him. I think it is very important that this  
2 is seen in its proper context. It all revolved around  
3 the interpretation of 1441 and the question was: what  
4 did the Security Council mean?

5 We were obviously arguing very strongly that the  
6 Security Council had agreed that he was in breach, given  
7 him a final opportunity, and any further breach was  
8 a material breach and he had to comply fully, and what  
9 is more --

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But that had to be determined by the  
11 Security Council.

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The issue as to whether -- because some  
13 people wanted, actually, that the Security Council had  
14 to take a decision, that was excluded. We refused to  
15 allow that precisely because we did not want to be in  
16 a situation where we were forced as a matter of law to  
17 come back for another decision, and people had  
18 nonetheless agreed 1441. So that was why there was at  
19 least as powerful an argument on the side of one  
20 resolution only as there was against it.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's where you ended up in March, but  
22 until 12 February you were not being told by the  
23 Attorney or the Foreign Office legal advisers that you  
24 had the option of not getting a further decision out of  
25 the Security Council. They were telling you, both of

1           them, that their reading of that resolution, which, as  
2           you rightly say, was unclear, but the British reading of  
3           that resolution, unlike the American resolution, was  
4           that the determination had to to be made by the Security  
5           Council.

6   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  Yes, so there was a disagreement between  
7           where our legal position was at this stage and the  
8           American position.  I think it was at our suggestion,  
9           actually, that Peter then went to talk to  
10          Jeremy Greenstock.

11  SIR RODERIC LYNE:  Yes, it was then that his position  
12          changed.

13  RT HON TONY BLAIR:  Yes, but it is not just because of the  
14          Americans.  What happened was he had a discussion with  
15          Jeremy Greenstock --

16  SIR RODERIC LYNE:  After which he wrote to you saying his  
17          position hadn't changed.

18  RT HON TONY BLAIR:  But he said it had been a very useful  
19          discussion and that had obviously moved him somewhat.

20  SIR RODERIC LYNE:  He told us that there were three things  
21          that moved him:  Sir Jeremy Greenstock got him part of  
22          the way there; the negotiating history provided by the  
23          Foreign Secretary got him a further part of the way  
24          there; and going to Washington and talking to the  
25          Americans got him yet another part of the way there.

1           That was his evolution.

2   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  It is fair to say, because I think it is  
3           important to say this --

4   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  It's very important.

5   RT HON TONY BLAIR:  -- it was always a very, very difficult  
6           balance to judgment, but the important thing was, in the  
7           end, that Peter came to the view -- and I think anybody  
8           who knows him knows that he would not express this view  
9           unless he thought it and believed it -- he came to the  
10          view that, on balance, the breach by Saddam Hussein of  
11          Resolution 1441 was sufficient, provided it was a breach  
12          of the obligations set out in op 4.

13  SIR RODERIC LYNE:  He asked you to say that it was  
14          sufficient, but that's at the end of the game.

15                 Can I just go to the point where he has given you  
16          his formal advice of 7 March, but that didn't give the  
17          yes or no clear answer that the Chief of the Defence  
18          Staff and others wanted.  That didn't come until  
19          13 March, when he had had a period of further  
20          reflection.

21                 What discussions did you, or others under your  
22          instruction, if any, have with Lord Goldsmith between  
23          7 March, when you received his formal advice, and  
24          13 March, when he decided that his position had evolved  
25          further?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I can't recall any specific discussions  
2 that I had. I don't know whether others would have had  
3 with him before 13 March, but essentially what happened  
4 was this: he gave legal advice, he gave an opinion  
5 saying, "Look, there is this argument against it, there  
6 is this argument for it. I think a reasonable case can  
7 be made", and obviously we then had to have a definitive  
8 decision, and that decision is: yes, it is lawful to do  
9 this or not. So --

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: A huge amount hung on that decision.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Of course. A lot hung on that decision,  
12 and it was therefore extremely important that it was  
13 done by the Attorney General and done in a way which we  
14 were satisfied was correct and right, and that's what he  
15 did.

16 If I can just point this out, too: if you go back  
17 and read Resolution 1441, I think it is quite hard to  
18 argue, as a matter of common sense -- leave aside there  
19 are issues to do with the precise interpretation of some  
20 of the provisions. 1441, the whole spirit of it was: we  
21 have been through ten years of Saddam Hussein breaching  
22 UN Resolutions. We finally decide that he is going to  
23 be given one last chance. This is the moment when, if  
24 he takes that chance, there is no conflict, we resolve  
25 the matter, but if he doesn't take that chance and

1 starts messing around again, as he started to do, then  
2 that's it.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So it is quite hard to argue what? Quite  
4 hard to argue that a further resolution is necessary?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The further resolution was clearly  
6 politically preferable. For us, if you can get  
7 everybody back on the same page again, it is clearly  
8 preferable, but if you actually examine the  
9 circumstances of 1441, the whole point about it and --  
10 and this is the argument I used with the Americans  
11 successfully to get them to go down this route -- and by  
12 the way, I should just point out, at the end  
13 of October 2002, I remember specifically a conversation  
14 with President Bush in which I said, "If he complies,  
15 that's it". There is no --

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, I think you mentioned this  
17 earlier --

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But this is important, because people  
19 sometimes say it was all kind of cast in stone from --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But wasn't Number 10 saying to the  
21 White House in January and February, even into March,  
22 that it was essential, from the British perspective,  
23 because of our reading of the law, to have a second  
24 resolution?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was politically, we were saying --

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not merely preferable, but essential.

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. Politically, we were saying it was  
3 going to be very hard for us. Indeed, it was going to  
4 be very hard for us.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Weren't we saying it was legally  
6 necessary for us, because that was his advice?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we said was, legally, it resolves  
8 that question obviously beyond any dispute.

9 On the other hand, for the reasons that I have  
10 given, Peter, in the end, decided that actually a case  
11 could be made out for doing this without another  
12 resolution, and, as I say, did so, I think, for  
13 perfectly good reasons.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, it must have been of considerable  
15 relief to you, on 13 March, when he told you that he had  
16 come to the better view that the revival argument  
17 worked, because, at that point, he had given you,  
18 subject to you making the determination, the clear legal  
19 grounds that you needed.

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, and the reason why he had done that  
21 was really very obvious, which was that the Blix reports  
22 indicated quite clearly that Saddam had not taken that  
23 final opportunity.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But he had done it in disagreement with  
25 the international lawyers, all of them, as we understand

1 from Sir Michael Wood, then in the government's employ.

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I seem to remember -- but I may be wrong  
3 on this; if I am, forgive me -- but I think that he had  
4 also sought the advice of Christopher Greenwood QC.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He had, and we discussed that, and it  
6 didn't appear from our discussion that there were many  
7 other people outside government arguing in the same  
8 direction that Lord Goldsmith eventually argued.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously, other countries, of course,  
10 were having the same issues as well and having to decide  
11 this and it wasn't -- I don't think it is right to say  
12 it was irrelevant that the American lawyers had come to  
13 a different view.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly not irrelevant, because it had  
15 a big impact on him, but, apart from America, were there  
16 other countries in which -- we have heard recently what  
17 a Dutch review has found on this, but were there other  
18 countries in which people were arguing in favour of the  
19 revival argument?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think all countries who took the  
21 military action believed they had a sound legal basis  
22 for doing so.

23 All I am pointing out is, actually, when you analyse  
24 1441, it is less surprising as a conclusion to come to  
25 than as sometimes is made out today, because the fact is

1 1441 was very deliberately constructed. It had, if you  
2 like, a certain sort of integrity as a resolution to it.  
3 It basically said, "Okay, one last chance. One last  
4 chance, Saddam, to prove that you have had a change of  
5 heart, that you are going to cooperate", and he didn't.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We are not lawyers, we have simply  
7 listened to the views of lawyers, Lord Goldsmith,  
8 Sir Michael Wood, Ms Wilmshurst, Mr Brummell, and looked  
9 at what they told us about the balance of legal opinion  
10 on this subject.

11 Lord Goldsmith obviously was not in a position in  
12 which he had wide support within the international legal  
13 fraternity within the government, indeed any, I think,  
14 in the UK, when he made his judgment. But he is  
15 a lawyer of the highest eminence and they accepted his  
16 authority, even if they didn't agree with it. So that  
17 was the final position.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, forgive me, Sir Roderic. All I'm  
19 trying to say is, when you actually go back and read  
20 1441, it is pretty obvious that you can make a decent  
21 case for this.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, let me not pass judgment on that.  
23 I'm asking questions and I do not have an opinion to  
24 state on it. I would just like to ask one final  
25 question to wrap up this legal chapter, and this is

1 really -- you were in the position, ultimately, where  
2 you had to give this determination. You had to go  
3 through with the action, Lord Goldsmith was preparing  
4 with the assistance of Christopher Greenwood for the  
5 possibility of legal challenge. He knew that he had  
6 taken a decision that some others, many others, perhaps,  
7 were arguing with and were going to argue with, and he  
8 had put something to you that was described as  
9 a reasonable case, but, nevertheless, not one that he  
10 would have confidently put before a court.

11 You then had to decide whether you were convinced  
12 that this was a strong enough legal basis to take a very  
13 serious action of participating in a full-scale invasion  
14 of another country.

15 How convinced were you, at this point, that you had  
16 a strong legal case for doing what you did?

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would put it in this way. What  
18 I needed to know from him was, in the end, was he going  
19 to say this was lawful? He had to come to conclusion in  
20 the end, and I was a lawyer myself, I wrote many, many  
21 opinions for clients, and they tend to be, "On the one  
22 hand ... on the other hand", but you come to  
23 a conclusion in the end and he had to come to that  
24 conclusion.

25 Incidentally, I think he wasn't alone in

1 international law in coming to that conclusion, for very  
2 obvious reasons, because, as I say, if you read the  
3 words in 1441 it is pretty clear this was Saddam's last  
4 chance.

5 So that was what he had to do. He did it. As  
6 I say, anybody who knows Peter knows he would not have  
7 done it unless he believed in it and thought it was the  
8 correct thing to do, and that was -- for us and for our  
9 armed forces, that was sufficient.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You weren't worried by him saying that he  
11 wouldn't expect to win in a court with this one.

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I do not know that he said "not to win",  
13 he simply said, you know, there is a case either way,  
14 and there always was a case either way. That's why it  
15 would have been preferable, politically, and -- and to  
16 have removed any doubt, to have had the second  
17 resolution, but in the end, we got to the point in the  
18 middle of March when, frankly, we had to decide. We  
19 were going either to back away or we were going to go  
20 forward, and I decided, for the reasons that I have  
21 given, that we should go forward.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: There was a case either way: one he  
23 described as the safest legal course, but that was no  
24 longer available, and the other he said was:

25 "If the matter ever came before a court ..."

1 Well:

2 "A reasonable case does not mean that, if the matter  
3 ever came before a court, I would be confident that the  
4 court would agree with this view."

5 But I think, unless you have a further comment to  
6 make, I have finished, I think, with all the questions  
7 that I had on the legal case. I do not know if any of  
8 my colleagues have. Otherwise, we will move on to the  
9 next subject.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: I think that bring us to the question of  
11 preparations and planning, the decision having been  
12 taken. So can I turn to Baroness Prashar to start us  
13 off?

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

15 This morning you said that your decision to  
16 contribute to a full division was driven by your sense  
17 of what the proper UK contribution should be to policy.

18 At that stage, did you weigh up the implications of  
19 that decision; for example, the time that would be  
20 required to acquire equipment and such like?

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, of course. Part of the purpose of  
22 asking for papers that describe the different levels of  
23 military commitment that you might give is precisely in  
24 order to be able to learn what it is that you will be  
25 required to do. But in these situations, you know, you

1 are very, very dependent, rightly, on the advice that  
2 you are given from the Ministry of Defence and from the  
3 military.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But a fundamental underlying  
5 assumption of the strategic defence review, which your  
6 government initiated in 1997, was that there would  
7 always be sufficient warning time for any operation at  
8 medium or large scale to build up equipment, stores and  
9 ammunition, and in the case of a large-scale operation,  
10 it said:

11 "... such a substantial contribution to invading  
12 Iraq, the necessary lead time would be six months."

13 This was necessary to allow for call-up and  
14 preparation of reserves, including medics, and to take  
15 account of the industry's capacity to build up stocks.

16 Now, on the basis of your government's planning  
17 assumptions, therefore, in order to prepare for the  
18 possibility, however slim, a large-scale military action  
19 in the spring of 2003, that six-month clock would have  
20 started ticking in autumn 2002.

21 But David Manning had told us that you sought to  
22 delay the decision as long as possible, and we have also  
23 heard from Lord Boyce and, of course, from Mr Hoon about  
24 the restrictions placed on the visible military  
25 preparations in December 2002.

1 I mean, were you aware what the implications of that  
2 would be, or had anybody made you aware of the  
3 implications of the delay?

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. What was important was to  
5 be very clear that you could not do this unless the  
6 military were ready to do it, and, yes, it is true, as  
7 I think I have explained this morning, for a time we  
8 were worried about the visibility of all the planning.

9 We were doing a certain amount of planning, but you  
10 then reach another level when you have to make it very  
11 visible and very clear. We didn't want to do that for  
12 fear of triggering an assumption that we were actually  
13 going to do military action irrespective of what was  
14 going to be happening at the United Nations.

15 However, I think it was at the end of October 2002,  
16 Geoff Hoon said to me, "We have really got to get on  
17 with this now", and we did, and I know Mike Boyce said  
18 to you in his evidence that he was confident that the UK  
19 military was fully ready by the time we took the  
20 military action.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But was that assurance given to you  
22 because they wanted to give you a view that they had  
23 a "can do" approach?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the one thing about the military, in  
25 my experience, is they tell you very bluntly, quite

1           rightly, what their situation is, what they want, what  
2           they don't want, and what they think about things, and  
3           Mike was very, very clear that they had the readiness.

4           I think there were something like 250 different  
5           urgent operational requirements that went into this.  
6           All of them -- I think Kevin Tebbitt told you this --  
7           were properly met, and, incidentally, had anyone at any  
8           stage come to me and said, "It is not safe to do this  
9           because of the lack of proper military preparation",  
10          I would have taken that very, very seriously indeed, but  
11          they didn't, and they got on with it, and they did it  
12          magnificently, as they always do.

13        BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: They did, but I think you will  
14          appreciate that they only actually had -- it was  
15          in January, I think, that there was a formal approval  
16          given. So that was only about, I think, a couple of  
17          months.

18        RT HON TONY BLAIR: I thought that -- sorry, Baroness.  
19          I thought that Geoff Hoon had come to me at the end  
20          of October -- there had been a lot of work going on.

21        BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but there was no  
22          visible preparedness, and things like the provision of  
23          essential kit, medical supplies, combat boots, body  
24          armour -- very important in a situation where there  
25          could be a threat of nuclear, biological and chemical --

1 protection clothing, ammunition.

2 As it happened, the kit did not arrive until late  
3 and that was the case.

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But it was very important -- just let me  
5 emphasise to you, on these issues to do with logistics,  
6 and there is an expertise that the army has on this,  
7 I needed to know from them that they could do it and  
8 they would be ready, and that's what they assured me,  
9 and they were.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What you are saying to me is that  
11 nobody spelt out to you the implications of not being  
12 prepared in time, given the fact the lead time needed  
13 for this kind of large-scale operation was six months?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they were absolutely spelling out  
15 the implications, which is why Geoff Hoon came to me and  
16 said, "We have now got to get this visible and get  
17 a move on with it". We had a meeting with the Chief of  
18 Defence Staff and others, and -- I just want to  
19 emphasise one thing: my attitude has always been --  
20 I don't think I refused a request for money or equipment  
21 at any point in time that I was Prime Minister.

22 My view, very, very strongly, is, when you are  
23 asking your armed forces to go into these situations,  
24 you put everything to one side other than making sure  
25 that they have the equipment they need and they have the

1 finance there to back it up. As far as I am aware, and,  
2 as I say, I think this was their evidence to you, they  
3 got it ready and they got it ready in time.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the point is the formal approval  
5 did not come until January anyway, and, in fact, we do  
6 know that that was the case, the equipment was late.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I didn't know -- I mean, as I say, there  
8 are, as it were, issues to do with logistics that they  
9 are far better able to tell you about. All I know is  
10 that they regard themselves as ready, and what is more,  
11 they performed as ready. They did an extraordinary job.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But can I ask another question?  
13 Because, if the view was that you are going through the  
14 United Nations route and there was a military threat,  
15 why were you reluctant to have any visible preparation?

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, we changed and we did have the  
17 visible preparation.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that came late, that's my point.

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly, but there was always a concern,  
20 if you like, in the middle part of 2002, because people  
21 were constantly saying, "They have made up their minds,  
22 nothing is going to alter it. We are now set on  
23 a military course". So we were anxious to make sure  
24 people did not think there was an inevitability about  
25 this, because one of the things I would emphasise to you

1 is there really wasn't.

2 If the UN route had worked successfully, however  
3 many doubts you could have on the past behaviour of  
4 Saddam, if it had worked successfully, the whole thing  
5 would have been -- would not have happened. We would  
6 have taken the UN path and made it work.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I now want to turn to the sort of  
8 general aftermath planning, because, on 21 January 2003,  
9 you were giving evidence to the Liaison Committee. You  
10 said:

11 "We cannot engage in military conflict and ignore  
12 the aftermath. In other words, if we -- at this stage  
13 of military conflict, we also have to get a very proper  
14 worked out plan as to what happens afterwards and how  
15 the international community supports that ..."

16 Several witnesses have told us that the planning and  
17 the resources for the aftermath of war was important, if  
18 not more important than the planning for resourcing the  
19 war itself. Now, what happened? Because you know, this  
20 was inadequate and a lot of people have said it didn't  
21 quite work.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: First of all, I think we have got to  
23 divide it into two sections here. Actually, we did an  
24 immense amount of pre-war planning. I think Mike Boyce  
25 said to you in his evidence that they spent as much time

1 on Phase 4 as the other phases of the operation. We had  
2 the officials meeting obviously. We had the ad hoc  
3 meetings, we had Cabinet meetings, actually, that were  
4 discussing these issues.

5 The real problem was that our focus was on the  
6 issues that, in the end, were not the issues that caused  
7 us the difficulty. It wasn't an absence of planning, it  
8 was that we planned for certain eventualities and, when  
9 we got in there, we managed to deal with those  
10 eventualities, but we discovered a different set of  
11 realities and then we had to deal with those.

12 So the vast bulk of the pre-war planning was focused  
13 on the humanitarian, number one, I think probably more  
14 than anything else. Indeed, I think there was a House  
15 of Commons Select Committee report on 6 March 2003  
16 saying you have got to do even more on the humanitarian  
17 side. All the focus was on that. Then there was --

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But we also have evidence, and  
19 I think these letters have been declassified, that  
20 Clare Short was writing to you for a pretty long time on  
21 the level of involvement that DFID and she had, and she  
22 was drawing this to your attention from a pretty early  
23 time.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I think, if you analysed those  
25 letters, they focused especially on the humanitarian

1 side. They focused on --

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: They do, but what she was  
3 complaining about was the preparedness and the timing  
4 when it was done, attention wasn't being paid to that.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly so, and that's why we were  
6 trying to make sure that we doubled our focus, and, when  
7 we went in there, I would simply say that on the  
8 humanitarian side -- and that was the main thing people  
9 were warning about, we didn't end up with a humanitarian  
10 disaster. In fact, we avoided, and we avoided in many  
11 ways because of the work that DFID and the other  
12 agencies did.

13 The other things she was warning about were the oil  
14 fields being set on fire and the use of chemical and  
15 biological weapons. So there was an immense amount of  
16 planning going on, but we planned with one assumption  
17 that turned out to be wrong, and then we also ended up  
18 with a fresh problem that I don't think people foresaw.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that raises another issue: how  
20 adequate was the planning, and had you ensured that  
21 planning covered all the full range of situations you  
22 may have faced post-conflict Iraq?

23 This is not only the issues that you might face  
24 directly linked to military action, but it is about  
25 security, political and economic challenges that you

1           might face, because, in a way, the whole idea was to  
2           kind of reconstruct Iraq. So had you planned adequately  
3           for these eventualities?

4   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, for what we thought we were going  
5           to encounter in Iraq, I think we did plan adequately.  
6           We had a perfectly sensible plan, which was to make sure  
7           that -- because from January onwards it was clear that  
8           we were going to have responsibility in the south, that  
9           we would be able, for example, to put together very  
10          quickly a group of Iraqis in Basra that would be able to  
11          take over greater responsibility, but one of the  
12          planning assumptions -- and I was just looking this up  
13          now, and I think Andrew Turnbull gave you evidence to  
14          this effect. The planning assumption that the MoD, the  
15          Foreign Office, I think DFID, everybody, made, was that  
16          there would be a functioning Iraqi Civil Service.

17                 In other words, that you would remove the top level  
18                 but you would have a functioning system underneath it,  
19                 and I think one of the major lessons of this is to  
20                 understand that, where you have these types of states  
21                 that are, in the case of Iraq, a sort of semi-fascist  
22                 state, if you like, which really operated by fear  
23                 amongst -- on the population from a small number of  
24                 people, that assumption is going to be wrong. You are  
25                 going to be dealing with the situation where you

1 probably have to rebuild the civil infrastructure of the  
2 country from nothing, and that's what we found.

3 You will have heard from the evidence of the  
4 generals and others, when they went into Basra, contrary  
5 to what we thought, and the MoD planning assumptions, we  
6 found a completely broken system.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We will come to that, but I think  
8 you quoted Lord Turnbull. I mean, the decision, as  
9 I said, to contribute a substantial land force to the  
10 coalition, I mean, were you aware that we would occupy  
11 the south and east of Iraq and that we would assume  
12 responsibilities as an occupying power under the Geneva  
13 and Hague Conventions -- let me finish -- because what  
14 Lord Turnbull said -- I think it is very important -- he  
15 said:

16 "Had we stuck with option 2, we would have had  
17 warships and aircraft but we wouldn't have had the large  
18 numbers of people and special forces on the ground and  
19 we would not have been an occupying power with  
20 everything that flowed from it."

21 That's what I meant about the implications.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is correct that I think from about  
23 early January onwards, we knew that we would be in  
24 a position where we were going to have to handle the  
25 situation in the south. That was actually, I think,

1 preferable to us, frankly, from the situation originally  
2 contemplated, which is that you came in from the north.  
3 That was part of the commitment that we were able to  
4 make. We then knew they would be joined by the forces  
5 of other nations.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you aware of that when you took  
7 the decision to go --

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think from January onwards it was  
9 clear that we were going to be in a position, where we  
10 were going to be in charge of Basra, but the whole  
11 assumption -- and you see this very clearly from the  
12 documents -- is that you would come in, and for the  
13 first stage obviously the army would be the main people  
14 in charge. You would then bring your civilian people in  
15 behind that. You would then, as swiftly as possible,  
16 turn it over to the Iraqis themselves, and the idea was  
17 to get an Iraqi interim administration up and running  
18 very quickly.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that -- I mean that happened,  
20 I think, after we got the Security Council Resolution  
21 1483 and --

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that was also a very important part  
23 of what we wanted to do. We wanted to bring the  
24 United Nations back in.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why did we, unlike other coalition

1 members, accept the status of a joint occupying power?

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because we were the key partner of the  
3 US in this. We believed in it. We believed it was  
4 right to be there, for the reasons that I have given,  
5 and we were prepared to accept the responsibility of  
6 then putting the country right.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did we actually weigh up all the  
8 liability, the risks and the implications, the resources  
9 required?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and one of the things that  
11 we made very clear -- I think I made this clear on  
12 a number of occasions, was that we could not walk away  
13 from our commitment to people in Iraq afterwards, but  
14 I believe, for all the reasons I have given, that this  
15 was an important commitment for us to make. The whole  
16 reason why we then had quite a detailed and difficult  
17 discussion actually with the Americans about the  
18 United Nations then coming back in for the aftermath was  
19 precisely because we knew for ourselves -- and again  
20 I think Peter Goldsmith was advising this -- that we  
21 needed that cover, that military cover, and 1483  
22 effectively endorsed the coalition presence.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But why is it that so many witnesses  
24 have said to us that the aftermath planning was  
25 deficient?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, first of all, a lot of the  
2 criticisms have been directed at the American system.  
3 Now, all I would say about that is I think, like you, if  
4 you look at the Rand Report or the Inspector General's  
5 report, I think done in 2009, in America, I think it  
6 lays out very clearly the problems in pre-war planning  
7 and the problems in post-war execution.

8 I think for ourselves, if we knew then what we know  
9 now, we would, of course, do things very differently.  
10 On the other hand, for what we thought we were going to  
11 have, we had planned for it and we actually met those  
12 eventualities.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You say that criticisms were  
14 directed at the Americans, but what had you agreed with  
15 President Bush about the aftermath?

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we had agreed was that -- this was  
17 the whole dispute, really, about the United Nations. We  
18 were saying the United Nations had to come back into the  
19 situation.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But they were very reluctant to give  
21 the United Nations a role and that is something,  
22 I think, which we wanted and there was a resistance from  
23 the Americans?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that's absolutely right, Baroness,  
25 but in the end the Americans agreed that they should

1           have what we called a vital or central role.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Andrew Turnbull said we were  
3 being fobbed off by President Bush when he said that.

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think if you actually look at what  
5 then happened with the United Nations in Iraq, I think  
6 Resolution 1483 is really a very important resolution.

7           I don't know whether you want to look at it now, I'm  
8 perfectly content to do it, but --

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I have got it, but --

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Rather than refer to it, let me just  
11 make this very simple point: I saw Kofi Annan, I think  
12 on -- I think it was around 16 April. In other words,  
13 shortly after the military action had begun. I had  
14 a good and close relationship with Kofi Annan, someone  
15 I respect very much. He had been in a very difficult  
16 position throughout the last few months. He made it  
17 clear that the UN had to be independent of the  
18 coalition, but he also made it clear he wasn't arguing  
19 for the lead role. What he was arguing for --

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In the circumstances, not  
21 surprising.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The fact that it had been  
24 a coalition-led invasion and he did not want the  
25 responsibility of reconstruction, that's not surprising.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct, but that is why -- when people  
2 say that, as it were, the UN should have been given the  
3 lead role, I'm simply pointing out the fact that he  
4 didn't want that. What he did want was a vital role,  
5 which is what we got the Americans to agree to, and if  
6 you look at Resolution 1483, it sets out the areas in  
7 which his special representative, which he agreed to  
8 appoint, was going to have influence and say, and  
9 actually, that special representative,  
10 Sergio Vieira de Mello, was absolutely excellent, would  
11 have made an enormous difference to Iraq and its future,  
12 but the terrorists killed him, assassinated him  
13 in August 2003.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I understand, but I want to go back  
15 to the points, because my recollection is that, as early  
16 as September 2002, a number of very sensible questions  
17 were being asked in Parliament about the aftermath  
18 planning. We have also been told that you were given  
19 rather an optimistic view by the Americans who thought  
20 it would be all right on the day.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, the Americans were making efforts,  
22 actually, but I think, as I say, if you read the  
23 Inspector General's report, if you read the Rand Report,  
24 it is very clear things could have been done  
25 differently. I think the American administration, or

1 the American system, as it were, has accepted that.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But I understand you personally  
3 became involved in the aftermath arrangement  
4 about February 2003. Was that not too late?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I was personally involved in what  
6 was going to happen before then. As we came to the  
7 point of actually going in, it is true we had a meeting,  
8 I think in February 2003 and then subsequent meetings  
9 but the absolutely central point, since we are trying to  
10 see what are the lessons that we can learn, is that,  
11 unfortunately, what we thought was going to be the  
12 problem didn't turn out to be the problem.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but I think I go back  
14 to my earlier point. It is the adequacy of the planning  
15 on a whole range of things, economic, political, because  
16 in a way there was a danger, there was information that  
17 Iraq could have fractured, given the insecurity of the  
18 Kurds, what could have happened with the Shias and  
19 Sunnis. I mean, there is a whole range of eventualities  
20 which you planned for that wasn't done.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would say we most certainly did plan  
22 for the problems in relation to the potential for  
23 a Sunni/Shia/Kurd split, and what we tried to do was to  
24 make sure that, as soon as possible, we brought the  
25 Sunnis and the Kurds and the Shia together.

1           So what actually happened -- and this happened  
2           in May, only just a few weeks after the invasion -- they  
3           brought together -- I think it was called the Iraq  
4           Governing Council or the Interim Governing Council.  
5           That had a membership of 25. I think there were 13  
6           or -- I think it was 13 Shia and 11 Sunni, and one --

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But before that, I mean, the  
8           decision was taken, for example, the ORHA was actually  
9           replaced by CPA and, you know, changes were made without  
10          any consultation with us.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think -- look, what actually  
12          happened was it became very clear that ORHA was not  
13          capable of doing that.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I know that, but my point is, in  
15          terms of working together, if we were a joint occupying  
16          power, were we being consulted, were we exerting the  
17          kind of influence we needed to?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think we were being consulted on the  
19          questions everyone thought would arise, but it is  
20          true -- I mean, Tim Cross and others were coming back  
21          and saying, "This system is not working in the way it  
22          should", and we were then interacting very strongly with  
23          the Americans.

24          The only thing I say is: had we had even more focus  
25          on it, we would have still been focusing essentially on

1 the humanitarian side with an assumption that we would  
2 inherit a functioning Civil Service infrastructure, and  
3 it was that assumption that proved to be wrong.

4 I think that one the reasons why we set up -- and  
5 I know you have had evidence about this -- what is  
6 called the Stabilisation Unit, in 2004, was precisely  
7 because we recognised in the future -- and I think this  
8 is what the American system now knows, for sure, if you  
9 are going to go into a situation like this, you have to  
10 go in as nation builders and you have got to go in with  
11 a configuration of the political and the civilian and  
12 the military that is right for a failed state situation.  
13 That doesn't mean to say that you don't do it, but you  
14 need to be prepared for it.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the point really is our  
16 assumption was that we would get the United Nations to  
17 take the lead role. Eventually, that didn't happen, but  
18 did we have a plan B then? Because, in a sense, all I'm  
19 really wanting to get at is the ability to plan for  
20 eventualities.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did plan for those eventualities. We  
22 did an analysis of what they might be, and we worked  
23 them out. The trouble was we didn't plan for two  
24 things: one was, as I say, the absence of this properly  
25 functioning Civil Service infrastructure; and, of

1 course, the second thing, which is the single most  
2 important element of this whole business of what  
3 happened afterwards, people did not think that Al-Qaeda  
4 and Iran would play the role that they did, and we could  
5 have -- if what you had ended up having was essentially  
6 an indigenous violence or insurgency, or the criminality  
7 and the looting and so on, again there are issues to do  
8 with the numbers of troops, the types of troops and --

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We will actually come to that later.

10 I will pass on to Sir Martin Gilbert.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I just want to --

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, do finish.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I just wanted to finish by saying all of  
14 those are very important questions. We could have  
15 handled the situation if that had been the problem. It  
16 was the introduction of the external elements of AQ and  
17 Iran that really caused this mission very nearly to  
18 fail. Fortunately, in the end, it didn't, and the  
19 reason why that is important is that that itself, in my  
20 view, is a huge lesson, because those are the same  
21 forces that we are now facing, Afghanistan right round  
22 the region.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As I have said, that is an area we  
24 are going to cover later.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we will take a break in a moment.

1 I just wanted, in hearing this set of exchanges, and  
2 reading a great deal and hearing a good deal of  
3 evidence, that there was, in terms of the planning for  
4 the aftermath on the British side, leave aside the  
5 Americans -- and we have seen the Rand Report and the  
6 Hard Lessons report -- there was a single set of  
7 assumptions which regrettably turned out to be very  
8 over-optimistic about what we would find, but there  
9 appears to have been no real risk analysis looking at  
10 best case, middle case, worst case, and at the resource  
11 and planning horizon implications of that.

12 What we did know -- and I would not like to sound  
13 like Donald Rumsfeld -- we knew we knew very little  
14 about the condition of things inside Saddam's Iraq. We  
15 had no embassy, we had no direct means. John Scarlett  
16 told us it was not a natural intelligence target. In  
17 principle, we could have amassed a good deal of  
18 knowledge, but none of it sufficient.

19 The question, looking to the future, the lesson to  
20 be drawn, is it ever safe to look at a single set of  
21 assumptions unless they can be tested quite rigorously  
22 against a worst case background?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that's a very good question.

24 I think that actually we did, because the MoD did  
25 a massive amount of work -- there is a whole planning

1 assumptions paper, as you know, and we did focus on  
2 this, we really tried to drill down on it, and one of  
3 the reasons why, in early 2003, I was having quite  
4 difficult exchanges of correspondence with Clare Short  
5 particularly was because, rightly, she was getting  
6 worried that the humanitarian side was not going to be  
7 adequately advanced.

8 I think in the future you are best to make this  
9 assumption, actually, that these types of failed  
10 states -- I don't know whether you would describe Iraq  
11 as a failed state or a semi-fascist state, but whatever  
12 it was, it was a wholly dysfunctional system. If we are  
13 required to go into this type of situation again, you  
14 might as well assume the worst, actually, because it is  
15 going to be -- you are dealing with states that are  
16 deeply repressive, very secretive, power is controlled  
17 by a very small number of people, and it is always going  
18 to be tough.

19 Now, I think the real question in a way for us, as  
20 a country -- because I think whatever preparations you  
21 make this was always going to be tough, always going to  
22 be tough -- is: are we prepared to engage in this? Are  
23 we actually prepared to be in there for the long-term on  
24 nation building, in these difficult situations, fighting  
25 a completely different type of terrorist and insurgency

1 threat?

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. It may have turned out to be an  
3 expensive lesson, but one very necessary to learn.

4 Let's have a break for about a quarter of a hour.  
5 Can I just remind the audience that people will need to  
6 be back here -- I suggest within ten minutes to be  
7 certain of getting in and back through the security, if  
8 you go out, because we shall need to start dead on time  
9 and if you are not here, I am afraid that's it.

10 Thank you.

11 (3.22 pm)

12 (Short break)

13 (3.40 pm)

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Let's resume this final part of the afternoon  
15 and Sir Martin Gilbert is going to ask some questions.

16 Sir Martin?

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have heard from a number of our  
18 military witnesses that the requirements for troops to  
19 be deployed for such a sustained period in Iraq beyond  
20 the initial invasion stretched the military machine  
21 significantly beyond the limits of what the military  
22 regarded as its sustainability.

23 Were you advised about the British military's  
24 ability to sustain a significant force in Iraq?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was advised that we could sustain it,

1 but it was going to be difficult, for sure. We  
2 obviously had the ongoing campaign in Afghanistan. We  
3 were bringing troops from other countries. I think we  
4 had about 30 countries in the coalition. They brought  
5 in roughly, I don't know, 15,000 to 20,000 additional  
6 troops as well. I think we had the troops we needed in  
7 the south, but, yes, it was -- all the way through, it  
8 was going to be difficult.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you concerned at any point that we  
10 had actually overcommitted ourselves?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was very concerned to make sure we  
12 didn't, and obviously a constant interaction between  
13 myself and the military was to make sure that we didn't.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In his evidence to us, General Wall  
15 described the impact of the reduction of British forces  
16 in Iraq in the summer of 2003, and while he clearly  
17 accepted that this was necessary in order to provide for  
18 the long-term roulement of troops to sustain our troops  
19 in MND (South East), he did make clear that this  
20 constrains the ability to contain the emerging violence  
21 in Iraq.

22 What assumptions were made about the role of British  
23 troops with regard to Iraq, once Saddam had been  
24 removed? What did you see and plan for their tasks to  
25 be?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the idea obviously was that we  
2 would not require the same number of troops for the  
3 conflict as we would in the aftermath. There was,  
4 I think, a time in the middle of 2003, when we were  
5 asked for more troops and gave more troops.

6 Our issue really in the south was less to do with  
7 the number of troops, because, in fact, there was  
8 relatively low level violence in the south compared with  
9 the rest of the country. Our concern was how we managed  
10 to get the reconstruction going in the south in  
11 circumstances where, fairly early on, there were groups  
12 whose purpose was deliberately to stop that  
13 reconstruction.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Given the constraints, what did you see  
15 as the balance of the task for our troops, on the one  
16 hand, seeking out MND, which clearly, at one point, had  
17 to be a priority, and at the same time delivering  
18 a secure environment in which not only the Iraqis could  
19 sustain a normal life but also our British civilians who  
20 were there in reconstruction?

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: These were very much decisions for the  
22 commanders on the ground, but I think they were  
23 conscious at a very early stage of this that they were  
24 trying both to make sure that they dealt with any  
25 lingering resistance, but, also, that they provided

1 security for the local people.

2 I have gone back over this many times, because  
3 I think it is very important actually, this period  
4 straight after the invasion, because, in a sense, what  
5 happened was that we very quickly toppled the Saddam  
6 regime, but then what we found, as I say, was that the  
7 situation was different from the one we expected.

8 Between, I would say, March 2003 and early 2004,  
9 during the period of time that Sir Hilary Synnott was  
10 there, you know, we had the situation more or less under  
11 control. There was some reconstruction going. We had  
12 agreed, I think, a special claim on the reserve at the  
13 end of March 2003.

14 What really happened was that another assumption  
15 that had been made, which was that Iran would basically  
16 not be provocative, it might have its interests, but it  
17 wasn't going to be provocative, that assumption also  
18 started to change, and what happened was that, as  
19 Moqtadr Sadr became more powerful, and obviously to  
20 an extent backed by Iran, that entered a new dimension  
21 into that, and then, as 2004 went on and came into 2005,  
22 this Iranian issue became much larger.

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned that it was the military  
24 who were, of course, advising in terms of the  
25 priorities, but what was your input at this time? What

1           were you, as it were, suggesting and proposing to them?

2   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think we were getting feedback  
3           as quickly as we could on how we could change the  
4           situation round. We were trying to get the  
5           United Nations obviously back in with a vital or central  
6           role. I went out then to Iraq at the end of May 2003.  
7           I met Jerry Bremer there, and, after that, I had  
8           meetings both internally, commissioning work, and then  
9           had a very frank discussion with America as to what was  
10          happening up in Baghdad.

11           At that point, I think it is fair to say the issue  
12          really was -- I think John Sawers described this to you  
13          as the "Baghdad first" policy that, in the end, unless  
14          you could secure Baghdad, you were going -- you were  
15          always going to have difficulties.

16           But I would say -- it is interesting, this, when  
17          I was getting frequent reports back, and then, I think,  
18          as Sir Hilary Synnott told you, actually, I was always  
19          very clear with our people out there, "If you have got  
20          a real problem, pick up the phone, if necessary, and if  
21          you start to get messed around with bureaucracy, come to  
22          me directly".

23           I think, when I saw him at the end of February 2004,  
24          when he left, he thought it was challenging, but, you  
25          know, there was some progress being made and we had to

1           make sure the progress carried on.

2   SIR MARTIN GILBERT:  If I could go back to the military  
3           funding issue and perhaps look at its wider aspect, we  
4           have heard from several military witnesses how  
5           effectively the urgent operational requirements for the  
6           military were addressed, but we have also heard -- and  
7           Geoff Hoon touched on this last week -- how, because of  
8           the way the UOR procedure works, in years 2 and 3 of the  
9           funding cycle, the continued use of UORs over the  
10          sustained period led, in effect, to core MoD  
11          requirements being diverted to the UORs.  Was that  
12          something that you were aware of, something that you  
13          became involved in?

14  RT HON TONY BLAIR:  I don't think this was something I was  
15          personally involved in, no.  I was more involved at the  
16          level, if you like, of say, for example,  
17          in September 2003, they asked for additional forces and  
18          I was keen to get them going.  I don't think I really --  
19          I don't think the issues to do with urgent operational  
20          requirements really came to me.

21  SIR MARTIN GILBERT:  Or the fact that the urgent operational  
22          requirements were diverting funds away under the  
23          strategic defence review system.

24  RT HON TONY BLAIR:  I think if anybody had come to me and  
25          said, "Look, there is an issue and a problem here", and

1 we were having ongoing discussions about the defence  
2 budget and so on and so forth within government. If  
3 somebody had come to me and said, "I think there is  
4 a real problem. We have to deal with it", I would have  
5 been straight in there trying to sort it out, but  
6 I wasn't aware of that particular issue coming across my  
7 desk.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of other departments, we have  
9 also heard from Sir Suma Chakrabarti, among others, of  
10 problems that, essentially, they felt that funding was  
11 not being divided adequately, for example, that the  
12 rehabilitation in Iraq, the DFID requirements really  
13 required more significant resources. Is this something  
14 that came to you?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it did, and one of the reasons why  
16 we agreed a supplementary provision by the Treasury,  
17 I think of £127 million, if I remember rightly, or round  
18 about that, at the end of March, was precisely because  
19 we were aware we had to ramp up pretty quickly.

20 Now, there was there was an additional problem,  
21 which was getting the allocation -- the Americans had  
22 made a huge allocation for the CPA, the provisional  
23 authority up in Baghdad, and we were trying to get that  
24 money transferred back down, and I even got involved at  
25 one point -- I seem to remember that was a Siemens power

1 plant and I got involved in trying to sort out the money  
2 being delivered for, but my basic view -- I think we  
3 spent for DFID -- I think, 2003/2004, Iraq was the key  
4 country. We spent over £260 million. It was a big  
5 commitment that we were giving. Much of that was  
6 humanitarian, but there was also money there for  
7 reconstruction.

8 Had people come to me again and said, "Look, we need  
9 to make an even greater commitment", I would have done  
10 so, but I think, to be fair, during that period of time,  
11 as people were then assessing a quite different  
12 situation, what became clear in time was not a lack of  
13 resource, but a lack of security.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That brings me to my final question  
15 really, and you touched, I think, just before the break,  
16 in part on your answer, and that is the question of  
17 anticipating some of these problems in advance.

18 From what we have heard from the people on the  
19 ground, the military, and also, of course, the DFID and  
20 the whole question of the deteriorating security  
21 situation, are these not things which, August,  
22 September, October, 2002, should have been addressed?

23 After all, Iraq was not an unknown quantity.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely correct, and we focused very  
25 much on what we would find and how we would deal with

1 it. Also, there was, of course -- I mean, I raised this  
2 issue myself several times, you know, how would the  
3 Sunni/Shia relationship work out? That was going to be  
4 a major part of the problem. You had basically three  
5 groups. You had the Kurds up in the north, you had the  
6 Sunni, and then down in the south there was  
7 predominantly Shia.

8 For that very reason -- that was another reason why  
9 I wanted the UN closely involved, because I thought they  
10 had a better chance of bringing those groups together.  
11 It was also a reason why, very early on, we put a lot of  
12 effort into getting a sense amongst the different Iraqi  
13 groups that they could come together, because one of the  
14 things that had happened in Iraq, obviously, was that  
15 the Sunni, who were, what, 20 per cent of the population  
16 had effectively ruled the country, and so the majority  
17 Shia population had been excluded. So this was going to  
18 be a huge thing now. They were for the first time going  
19 to come positions of power.

20 But we put a lot of focus and work in that, and by  
21 and large -- you know, one of the extraordinary things  
22 about this, from 2003 onwards, is this political  
23 process, despite everything continued, and, actually, it  
24 was in 2006, as the result of what was an absolutely  
25 wicked and deliberate act of bombing the Samarra mosque,

1 that was what started to tip this into a Shia/Sunni  
2 issue.

3 Fortunately, in the end, we got back out of it  
4 again, but in 2004, down in the south, there were all  
5 sorts of issues but we were managing them.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was it then a weakness in the  
7 pre-March 2003 discussions that somehow voices weren't  
8 raised, and experts and knowledge weren't put on the  
9 table that there could be this massive deterioration?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was very much discussion of the  
11 Shia/Sunni issue, and we were very well aware of that.

12 What there wasn't -- and this, again, is of vital  
13 importance and this certainly is a lesson in any situation  
14 similar to this -- people did not believe that you would  
15 have Al-Qaeda coming in from outside and people did not  
16 believe that you would end up in a situation where Iran,  
17 once, as it were, the threat of Saddam was removed from  
18 them, would then try to deliberately destabilise the  
19 country, but that's what they did, and there are some  
20 very important lessons in that, because what is  
21 important also to understand throughout this process,  
22 the Iraqi people, as a people, were not in favour of the  
23 violence, they were not in favour of sectarianism. As  
24 a people, they supported and have supported throughout  
25 the political process. Indeed today in Iraq you have

1 now got, for the elections that are coming up, groups  
2 who are overtly non-sectarian standing for election,  
3 which is a huge thing for the whole of the Middle East  
4 and a great thing incidentally.

5 So I think what I think in future you have to be  
6 aware of is that if you are dealing with a country where  
7 you are likely to get this -- as I say, this perversion  
8 of the proper faith of Islam as a major element in the  
9 equation, you are going to have to prepare for that very  
10 carefully. Your troop configuration has got to be  
11 prepared for it and you are going to have to be prepared  
12 for quite a fight over it.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned I think twice in your  
14 speeches before the war, your meeting with Iraqis and  
15 how affected you were by that, but they weren't giving  
16 this sort of warning sign?

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they weren't. Look, it was  
18 a statement of the obvious. I mean, Britain in a sense,  
19 as Iraqis remember, back in the 1920s, were intimately  
20 involved with all this. So everybody understood the  
21 history of how Iraq had come about, and obviously you  
22 had the Kurds, you had the Sunni, and you had the Shia.  
23 But the consensus view was you had to watch for the  
24 Sunni/Shia violence. That was precisely why you had to  
25 construct an inclusive political process.

1           Right from the outset, we tried to deal with that,  
2           and I did something else, and I think Jack Straw  
3           mentioned this to you in his evidence. I also sent Jack  
4           to talk to the Iranians. A very big lesson from this  
5           for me was that we tried with the Iranians, tried very  
6           hard to reach out, to in a sense make an agreement with  
7           them, to give them a strong indication that it wasn't --  
8           the American forces were not there, having done Iraq, to  
9           move through to Iran or any of the rest of it and one of  
10          the most disappointing, but also, I think, most telling  
11          aspects of this is that the Iranians, whatever they  
12          said, from the beginning, were a major destabilising  
13          factor in this situation and quite deliberately.

14       SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

15       THE CHAIRMAN: I think, Roderic, you have got a question.

16       SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just briefly follow through on that  
17          point and then raise one other?

18               Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and with all the  
19          wisdom of hindsight, I suppose it seems pretty obvious  
20          now that Al-Qaeda would seek to exploit conflict in Iraq  
21          and, indeed, that the Iranians would as well. As you  
22          have just said, they had a destabilising effect and they  
23          must have enjoyed putting pressure on us and the  
24          Americans at a time when we were trying to put them  
25          under pressure to deal with their nuclear programme.

1           Now, that's all hindsight. But if there had been  
2           a really rigorous risk assessment made before we went  
3           in, would it really not have shown that these risks  
4           existed? You have repeatedly referred to how these  
5           external factors destabilised and how this wasn't  
6           something that would be predicted. Could it and should  
7           it have been predicted?

8   RT HON TONY BLAIR: That is a very, very good question. Let  
9           me try and answer it. We did ask for an assessment on  
10          Iran particularly. Indeed, you will see through the  
11          intelligence assessments in 2002, I'm constantly going  
12          back and forward -- you know, is Iran -- I think I asked  
13          this again in February 2003: what's the attitude of Iran  
14          going to be?

15          The conventional wisdom, if you like, at the time,  
16          was that you might get elements of the revolutionary  
17          guard playing about, but basically the evidence was that  
18          Iran would more or less have a watching brief to see how  
19          it would play out but it had no interest in  
20          destabilising.

21   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Despite the fact that Iraq had fought  
22          a long war with it, they weren't exactly best pals.

23   RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, exactly. That was the point.  
24          Because Saddam had been their enemy in the Iran/Iraq  
25          war, and, as I say, there were a million casualties in

1 that war, it was the most terrible situation. Precisely  
2 because they would be pleased to get rid of Saddam, we  
3 thought they would be more amenable.

4 I had actually spoken myself to the President of  
5 Iran prior to September 11 when we were trying to get  
6 the new resolution on sanctions. I had actually had  
7 a telephone conversation with President Khatami at the  
8 time. I had gone out of my way to say, "Let's have  
9 a new relationship", and so on. So in respect of Iran  
10 that was the advice, but we did go into this in some  
11 detail.

12 In respect of Al-Qaeda, I think, in retrospect, this  
13 was difficult. At the time -- and you know, we know so  
14 much more about these groups and how they operate now,  
15 but, at the time, the single thing people were most  
16 determined to prove was, in a sense, they were two  
17 separate problems, because the Americans had raised this  
18 question of a link between Saddam and Al-Qaeda, and,  
19 really, our system in Britain was determined to say,  
20 "No, come on, keep the two things separate. We are not  
21 saying Saddam had anything to do with September 11", and  
22 that was very much how Al-Qaeda were seen.

23 Now, I think -- and this is a very interesting point  
24 because it is absolutely goes to the 2010 point that  
25 I raised earlier. My view is, if we had left Saddam

1           there, and he had carried on, as we said, with the  
2           intent to develop these weapons and the know-how and the  
3           concealment programme, and the sanctions had gone,  
4           I have little doubt myself -- but it is a judgment and  
5           other people may take a different judgment -- that today  
6           we would be facing a situation where Iraq was competing  
7           with Iran, competing both on nuclear weapons capability  
8           and competing more importantly, perhaps, than anything  
9           else -- competing, as well as the nuclear issue, in  
10          respect of support of terrorist groups.

11       SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think it would be very useful, if we  
12          have time at the end, to come back to this 2010 point,  
13          because you have raised something that other witnesses  
14          have not so far raised with us, at least not in that  
15          way. But you have raised it as a sort of binary  
16          question, whereas there are alternative scenarios under  
17          which Saddam might very well still be in a box.

18                It wasn't a question of whether he got right out of  
19          it or not, but I think it is best if we don't go down  
20          that track at this moment.

21                I just wanted to put one other question about the  
22          post-conflict period to you, which is simply this: you  
23          said you went to Baghdad in May and you met Bremer. Of  
24          course, when Bremer arrived, he arrived setting up the  
25          CPA in place of ORHA which everybody had described as

1 a shambles, with two extremely important edicts which he  
2 promulgated in his first week, which had been  
3 pre-packaged in Washington, on de-Ba'athification and on  
4 the disbandment of the Iraqi armed forces.

5 It wasn't, as other witnesses have told us, that we  
6 disagreed with the principle of these edicts. It was  
7 really the extent. They were far too sweeping, and that  
8 damage had to be undone. So A lot of damage, it turned  
9 out, was done by these edicts, again based on what we  
10 have heard in evidence.

11 My question is this, simply: had we been consulted  
12 before this happened by Washington on these very  
13 important decisions? We were their co-occupying power,  
14 and if they hadn't consulted us, should they have done?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Certainly the moment -- I mean, I don't  
16 know whether there had been any official contact on this  
17 at all. I know I hadn't had the discussion with the  
18 White House on it. I would, however, say, the moment we  
19 were aware of this -- John Sawers was, of course, in  
20 Baghdad then, and he was on to the case.

21 I think one of the things, you know, that obviously  
22 you will do is to look at this de-Ba'athification and  
23 disbandment of the army and assess how big a factor it  
24 was.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have done to an extent already.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would say it is quite interesting,  
2 this. I'm not sure in my own mind about this even now.  
3 I think in respect of de-Ba'athification -- and I think  
4 John Sawers said this to you -- it was going to be  
5 really difficult to prevent a certain level of  
6 de-Ba'athification. The question is: should it have  
7 gone down to the level it did?

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, that's exactly the point.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: All I would say about that is the  
10 pressure -- because it is almost impossible for us,  
11 I think, to understand how oppressed and repressed the  
12 population of Iraq felt. Suddenly they had this  
13 freedom. They detested these Ba'athist people.  
14 I remember meeting groups of Iraqis before the invasion  
15 and they would tell you of the torture chambers and all  
16 the rest of it. I know we had the same problem with the  
17 Nazi party in Germany after the war. It is a very, very  
18 difficult situation, this, and even now -- because I got  
19 on to President Bush pretty much straight away on this.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was kind of too late by then. So  
21 effectively, we hadn't been consulted in advance. As  
22 soon as we heard about it, you and John Sawers got on to  
23 it.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think John was actually there at the  
25 time of the decision.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: My other question was: do you feel we  
2 should have been consulted about it before --

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I feel it is a decision of such moment  
4 that it would have been sensible if there had been  
5 a major discussion about it.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the answer is "yes"?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But I would say, to be fair to the  
8 Americans, the moment that it happened we raised these  
9 issues with them and actually they reacted to it.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But they didn't withdraw the decisions.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: They amended the decisions very  
12 substantially, and this is where I think again I would  
13 consult quite carefully with the people who took these  
14 decisions on the American side, because I have spoken to  
15 people subsequent to this. I think probably it is true  
16 it would have been better not to have done the  
17 de-Ba'athification and disbanding of the army in that  
18 way, but all I say to you is that's a very live debate  
19 amongst the people that were there at the time, and --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- just to say this: as a result of the  
22 conversation I had with George Bush, literally days  
23 after this, they were then scaling back. They scaled  
24 back further, and in respect of the army, they were  
25 always intending to re-recruit and then they corrected

1           this pension problem that they had with the army pretty  
2           quickly. So all I would say is I think it is something  
3           that you need to take a range of views on.

4   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

5   THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence?

6   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. We are now firmly into  
7           the post-war period. We discussed before lunch some  
8           hours ago, the ISG report and I really don't want to go  
9           back over that. I think we can agree it indicated that  
10          Saddam had never lost his interest in WMD programmes.

11           But the headline for most people was that the actual  
12          stocks of WMD, the reconstituted facilities, as  
13          discussed in the dossier, for example, had not been  
14          found. What was your -- when did you realise that that  
15          was likely to be the case?

16   RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, obviously, as time went on through  
17          the course of 2003, you know, at the very beginning --  
18          you know, others have taken some evidence of our genuine  
19          belief about this. At the very beginning, we were  
20          constantly, almost daily, getting reports that there was  
21          this site or that site and we were trying to direct the  
22          armed forces there, but it was a major part of our  
23          operation, actually, after 19 March. But obviously,  
24          during the course of 2004, it became very difficult to  
25          sustain this.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, General Fry has told us  
2 that, even as those troops were on that mission, as you  
3 describe, they became somewhat disillusioned, because  
4 the basis they were supposed to be there, it wasn't  
5 there. So even during the course of 2003.

6 Now, that's the fact that you now found, we have  
7 gone into this campaign on one assumption. Maybe, as  
8 things developed in the future, it still could have  
9 turned out as badly as you thought it already was, but  
10 it meant that, in effect, the quality of post-Saddam,  
11 Iraq was now going to be the major test of what we were  
12 doing.

13 I just want to briefly go back before the war. Were  
14 you aware of the pre-war assessment that the American  
15 army -- the chief of the American army,  
16 General Shinseki, made that 500,000 troops were going to  
17 be needed to secure Iraq. It wasn't just him that was  
18 saying this. He was slapped down by Paul Wolfowitz for  
19 the comment. Were you aware of that?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was aware there was a debate within  
21 the American system. Did you use the -- I think it was  
22 the doctrine of overwhelming force or did you have  
23 a smaller group of people a smaller force? I think the  
24 issue is really for the post-war period. I think you  
25 can argue for the actual conflict itself there were

1 sufficient troops. The question is: should you then  
2 have changed and had more or different troops later?  
3 I think, again, that is a difficult question to answer  
4 and there are people who take both sides of that.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, but part of the debate  
6 within the United States was the determination of  
7 Donald Rumsfeld to demonstrate that it was possible to  
8 wage a campaign of this sort with comparatively few  
9 forces meant that he underprovided for the security  
10 situation that was going to arise after the war, which  
11 was General Shinseki's point.

12 So in some senses the difficulties that were going  
13 to be faced were pre-determined. It was always going to  
14 be difficult after the war. There just weren't enough  
15 troops around.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the key thing is this -- and,  
17 again, this is a major, major part of how any such  
18 operation would be done in the future. The force to  
19 remove a regime and change the government, if that's  
20 what happens, that's the only way you can secure your  
21 objectives, and this is the decision we had come to, the  
22 only way we could prevent Saddam being a threat was  
23 actually to remove him from office -- the force that you  
24 require to do that is one function and there is one set  
25 of arguments that go along that, and you are probably

1 much more expert on this than me.

2           However, what we now know and in any of these  
3 situations should know from now on, is that you will be  
4 nation building after that and that may require a quite  
5 different type of force and it may require more, it may  
6 require simply different forces, but it is a different  
7 task.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, there are different  
9 requirements. We have had evidence about the skill of  
10 British forces in being able to move quite quickly from  
11 a war-fighting role to this nation-building role, but it  
12 is fair to say -- and I don't think Americans, certainly  
13 now, would disagree with this -- that was not the way  
14 that they looked at it. That, from Rumsfeld's point of  
15 view, it was the war-fighting role he was interested in,  
16 and they made very little provision, both in training,  
17 doctrine and numbers for the follow-on forces that would  
18 provide for the security.

19           So in the context also of the disbandment of the  
20 Iraqi army, the risk of a vacuum in the security  
21 situation is very high indeed.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think in respect of the  
23 disbanding of the army, I think again -- I think --  
24 I think it was Mr Slocombe who was dealing with this on  
25 behalf of the Americans, and I think his view was that,

1 in a sense, the army melted away and then they tried to  
2 re-recruit.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was the pensions point you  
4 mentioned earlier, that it was true that it didn't exist  
5 as an organised force, but there was a basis to get them  
6 back together quickly again which was lost.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think a huge question here -- because  
8 security is what went wrong. Sometimes people say, "If  
9 you had done the reconstruction quicker or got more  
10 underway or something, it would have been a different  
11 situation".

12 My view of this is that the very purpose of the  
13 people we ended up fighting was to stop the  
14 reconstruction. So every time we would repair  
15 electricity, they would bomb it, every time we got the  
16 oil production going, they would try and sabotage it.  
17 Every time we tried to provide better facilities, they  
18 would try and wreck it. So the issue is a security  
19 issue.

20 Now, I think we had moved beyond what was a debate  
21 at the time, which really went something like this --  
22 and you probably recall this from 2003 and the early  
23 part of 2004, and that was a debate which said, "Look,  
24 the Americans are good at war fighting, but they do not  
25 do peacekeeping. The British can do both". I think, if

1 we are looking at our own capabilities now, and what we  
2 will do in the future, I think it is not as simple as  
3 that, actually, and if you look at what General Petraeus  
4 did in the end with the surge, it is correct that he had  
5 his political dimension, reaching out to the Sunnis and  
6 so on, but as the surge began, the American forces  
7 suffered even heavier casualties.

8 I mean, they were doing fighting and one of the  
9 things that I think -- I am afraid we have to learn from  
10 this situation, because we face exactly the same  
11 situation in Afghanistan -- is that, in these  
12 circumstances, it is not going to be easy. You do not  
13 move to peacekeeping because actually you are facing  
14 a situation where your enemy is trying to kill you.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It partly depends upon your ability  
16 to assert order and authority early on, and I don't want  
17 to go into all the details, but that's clearly where  
18 things went badly wrong, and we can remember the looting  
19 and so on and comments that were made at the time.

20 Let me fast forward to what seems to me  
21 a particularly significant month, which is April 2004.

22 A lot of things happened in that month. I won't --  
23 one of them was Spain left the coalition, but we will  
24 leave that to one side. Fallujah. You have --  
25 relations with the Sunni community had deteriorated,

1           they felt they were potentially being disenfranchised.  
2           This was coming to a head in Fallujah, where US Marines  
3           were planning to enter the city with force to take out  
4           some 2000, I think, insurgents. How did you view that  
5           situation, because it was potentially extremely  
6           dangerous?

7   RT HON TONY BLAIR: It certainly was, yes, and I was  
8           involved in discussions with the Americans, with the  
9           President and also with Allawi as well, who was taking  
10          on the interim administration in Iraq.

11           I mean, I think at the time I was worried the  
12          Americans were going in too hard and too heavy, and they  
13          made certain changes as a result of the conversations  
14          that we were having. If I look back on it now, I'm not  
15          sure I was right about it, though. You see, I think the  
16          truth is we were reaching out to the Sunni. Indeed, one  
17          of the reasons why I could see us having a more  
18          challenging situation in the south through into 2005,  
19          and it was something we were discussing in the  
20          government, was that it would become at some point very  
21          clear that the purpose of what we were doing was not to  
22          replace a Sunni dictatorship, a minority dictatorship  
23          with a Shia majority dictatorship. We actually wanted  
24          a genuinely inclusive government. So I have always  
25          thought at some point we must be able to persuade the

1 Sunni that we were actually their best chance of  
2 participating in the political process.

3 The reality is there were people who were quite  
4 determined not to allow that reconciliation to happen.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, this illustrates the dilemma  
6 you now faced, the coalition faced, because, on the one  
7 hand, you had people who clearly had no interest in any  
8 accommodation with the coalition, starting to cause  
9 serious casualties, developing their numbers and their  
10 skills, and not just external forces, these were  
11 indigenous. But if you came down too hard on them, the  
12 risk was of alienating further. The scenes that would  
13 be out on Al Jazeera would be horrific. You were  
14 concerned, I suspect, about the impact of what  
15 Mr Brahimi could do, who was Sergio de Mello's -- not  
16 quite in the same role -- replacement.

17 I'm interested in the dilemmas we found ourselves in  
18 in Iraq. Either way, it was going to be very tough.

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was going to be very tough, and  
20 one of the central questions -- I mean, my view is that  
21 the way these terrorists are trying to stop us doing  
22 what is right and right by the people of Iraq shouldn't  
23 deter us. We should carry on, and, having beaten one  
24 tyranny -- as one Iraqi put it to me: having beaten the  
25 tyranny of Saddam, we should now beat the tyranny of the

1 terrorists.

2 I was certainly of the view that we had to carry on  
3 in that endeavour, but you are absolutely right, that  
4 was a huge problem, and the interesting thing to me, if  
5 you look round the world, it is a problem for all  
6 nations in this situation dealing with this new type of  
7 terrorism.

8 If you take -- because I spend a lot of time out  
9 there now, obviously, in the Middle East, with the  
10 Israel/Palestine question, it is a constant problem for  
11 Israel. They get attacked, they then use great force in  
12 retaliating. Before you have gone two weeks, they are  
13 the people who have started it all.

14 If you look at the difficulties that India has, or  
15 Russia and Chechnya, or --

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is undoubtedly true that the  
17 nature of the response to this sort of insurgency makes  
18 a difference to it, and we can talk about these other  
19 cases. The problem that you were in at the time is that  
20 the forces available to the coalition were insufficient  
21 to get a grip on it, and that the methods that they  
22 therefore would have to use in order to impose  
23 themselves militarily, would be much more likely to  
24 cause civilian casualties than they would have done if  
25 you had had far more forces properly trained to start

1 with.

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously this wasn't the issue down  
3 south, but --

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's the other issue  
5 for April 2004.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but -- I think you have got to look  
7 at this question very carefully, because I think I would  
8 put it in a different way, and I think, if you look at  
9 how the surge actually worked in the end, it worked  
10 because you had a -- in fact, it really worked for four  
11 reasons, the surge.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think -- the surge worked in very  
13 different political circumstances than those obtaining  
14 in 2003/2004.

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's my point, in a sense; that if you  
16 analyse why it worked then, 2007, and in 2004 it wasn't  
17 working, then that's the question: what is the --

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, but it worked because you had  
19 forces that were trained for the job, you had a doctrine  
20 that was appropriate, and the political conditions,  
21 including -- you have indicated this aspiration of the  
22 Iraqis with the violence helped, but in 2003/2004, it  
23 was different.

24 Let me just explain April 2004. You have also got  
25 the Sadrist uprising. You have got -- we had considered

1 the Shia areas more likely to be settled, and you have  
2 given some indication of this as well. So now we are  
3 starting to find, even there, violence is taking root.  
4 This, again, must have been a really serious concern to  
5 you, because this is where the British forces were.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and what was very clear is,  
7 as I say, this influence of Iran on the situation was  
8 growing. We debated a lot what to do with Moqtadr Sadr.  
9 Did we try and reach out to him? I think we tried to  
10 make certain approaches there. Did we try to arrest  
11 him? There was an issue there. Would that provoke more  
12 violence? This is why these things become really,  
13 really difficult.

14 Sorry, I didn't mean to take you out of your time  
15 zone when looking at the surge, but the reason I think  
16 it is so important, because there is a real lesson out  
17 of this, is that -- you see, you are bound to take  
18 a certain amount of time to win this battle, because,  
19 essentially, what happened in Iraq, and I have tried to  
20 explain this to people before, is you had one conflict,  
21 which was the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and  
22 that was over pretty quickly. You had the aftermath,  
23 which was very difficult. But then what started to  
24 happen in 2004/2005, and then with full on in 2006, the  
25 first half of 2007, is you had a metamorphosis into

1 a different type of conflict, where you were fighting,  
2 yes, a certain amount of indigenous insurgency, but with  
3 these external factors coming in.

4 In the end, what did we need? We needed four things  
5 to defeat this, and two of them take time. One is we  
6 needed the political buy-in. The second is we needed to  
7 build up Iraqi capability. The third is we needed, as  
8 you rightly say, Sir Lawrence, the right troop  
9 configuration, and the fourth thing is we needed to be  
10 prepared to stick at it and to indicate clearly that we  
11 were going to stick at it until it was done.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have taken us again three, four  
13 years further on and indicated what happened in those  
14 three years.

15 The final aspects of this month, April 2004, which  
16 was the revelation of what happened at Abu Ghraib. What  
17 was your reaction when you saw the photographs of the  
18 conditions inside the prison?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I was shocked and angry, as anyone  
20 would be. Shocked because it was wrong, and angry  
21 because of the damage I knew it would do.

22 You know, you mentioned earlier the media part of  
23 this and Al Jazeera. The truth is we were fighting  
24 a constant battle against people utterly misrepresenting  
25 us, our motives, what we were trying to do, and

1 obviously these pictures and the abuse of prisoners was  
2 going to be vital propaganda for our enemies.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Had you been given any advance  
4 warning by the Americans that these revelations were  
5 coming?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think everybody was taken by surprise,  
7 including in the White House.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there was knowledge from January  
9 that something awful had been going on there.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I had actually appointed Ann Clwyd as  
11 human rights adviser, and we made a real effort, in  
12 fact, to try and say, "Look, things are going to happen  
13 differently". So there are no excuses for it. It is  
14 completely wrong. The most important thing was that it  
15 did damage to our cause.

16 On the other hand, and it is right to say this, and  
17 I said this at the time, the activities of a few within  
18 the American forces, and, indeed, the British forces,  
19 should not take away from the fact that the majority of  
20 American and British forces were doing a magnificent job  
21 in incredibly difficult circumstances and were doing  
22 that job for the Iraqi people and protecting them and  
23 helping them.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Well, let's consider how much they  
25 were. We have covered some of this. So let me just

1 summarise where we seem to be. The year after the  
2 invasion, at the moment the coalition is unable to  
3 provide security for the Iraqi people and you have  
4 indicated, without security, life can't get better.  
5 Infrastructure is blown up, the life of people  
6 deteriorates, services aren't any good. You can't  
7 develop the economy and that feeds into an awful  
8 situation.

9 Now, for the Iraqi people at this time things are  
10 not getting better. Is that fair to say? If you look  
11 at the promises that had been made to them, they might  
12 have some grounds for disillusionment with the  
13 coalition.

14 I just want to give you some figures, because I find  
15 them tragic. We are in January 2010 now. These are  
16 just January monthly figures, the documented civilian  
17 deaths from violence in Iraq. 570 in January 2004,  
18 10,000 -- sorry, 1,042 in January 2005, 1,433  
19 in January 2006. 2,807 in January 2007. These are  
20 monthly figures. These are the documented deaths. They  
21 are not the -- goodness knows how many undocumented.  
22 They are not the deaths from the deterioration in  
23 services, poverty, poor health and so on.

24 The striking thing is they are getting worse each  
25 year. What did you feel at the time that you could do

1 about this? Did you -- what could you say to the Iraqi  
2 people that could explain what they must have felt,  
3 a sense of letdown at what the coalition had been able  
4 to do for them?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we did with the Iraqi people was to  
6 say, "First of all, we are going to carry on with the  
7 political process, because for the first time you have  
8 actually been able to elect your government and your  
9 officials. You are drawing up a constitution in  
10 a proper and decent way".

11 The second thing was to say, "We are going to be  
12 with you and we are going to help you defeat this", and  
13 the third thing to say -- and this is immensely  
14 important to this whole argument -- when people say,  
15 "There were people dying in Iraq", and, you know, the  
16 figures, I think the most reliable figures out of the  
17 Iraq body count or the Brookings Institute may be  
18 100,000 over this whole period -- the coalition forces  
19 weren't the ones doing the killing. The ones doing the  
20 killing were the terrorists, the sectarians, and they  
21 were doing it quite deliberately to stop us making the  
22 progress we wanted to make.

23 So my attitude -- and I took this line very, very  
24 strongly with people -- when we say, "Isn't it terrible  
25 that the death toll went to 2007, that high?" yes, it is

1           terrible, but the first question to ask is, "Who was  
2           killing them?" and this turned out to be precisely the  
3           same people that we were trying to fight everywhere and  
4           our responsibility was to stick in there and see it  
5           through, which eventually happened with the surge, with  
6           the Charge of the Knights down in Basra, and today, of  
7           course, the situation in Iraq is very, very different  
8           and the people are better off and have a decent chance  
9           of a proper future.

10       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let us hope so.

11       RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that's the evidence that was  
12           given --

13       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Certainly better off than they were  
14           in 2007.

15       RT HON TONY BLAIR: Or in 2003, or 2002, or 2001.

16       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Having just had some conversations  
17           with Iraqis, I think that's something that has to be  
18           shown. But I don't want to get into that. We can agree  
19           and hope that the position for ordinary Iraqis only  
20           improves.

21           Can I just go back to this question of  
22           responsibility? There is no doubt that this was not  
23           British troops killing Iraqi civilians. This was  
24           violence on a major scale, but isn't it, to some extent,  
25           to a considerable extent, our responsibility, if we have

1 gone into a country, initially as an occupying power,  
2 and then unable to provide the basics of security?

3 Let me just -- this is evidence that we got from  
4 General Shirreff describing the situation as he found it  
5 in May 2006:

6 "A single battalion commander responsible for a city  
7 of 1.3 million people told me that he can put no more  
8 than 13 half platoons or multiples on the ground, less  
9 than 200 soldiers on the ground. You compare that with  
10 what I recall as a young platoon commander in  
11 West Belfast in the late 1970s, when there was a brigade  
12 on the ground. The result of all of that was what  
13 I call a cycle of insecurity."

14 He goes on to make the points that we have made  
15 before. So that was May 2006, and the basic description  
16 was that the militias had filled the gap that we had  
17 left.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: By May 2009, that is a different  
19 situation, and why? Because we then built up the  
20 capacity of the Iraqi forces themselves. Actually, in  
21 the end, the British, I think, were particularly with  
22 the Iraqi 10 Division. In the end, we managed -- and if  
23 it hadn't been for the British forces down in Basra  
24 making sure that we were acting and helping keep this at  
25 bay the entire time, the Charge of the Knights would

1 never have worked, but it did in the end, and if you  
2 talk to people about Basra today, there are real  
3 improvements there now and it is a completely different  
4 situation in security. Likewise, in the rest of Iraq.

5 In the end, we did stick with them, and I agree with  
6 you it is our responsibility, but here is the point that  
7 I think we have got to get ourselves into in the western  
8 world, if I can put it like this, or when we are doing  
9 these types of operations: yes, it is our  
10 responsibility, but let's be quite clear why we face the  
11 difficulty. We face the difficulty because these people  
12 were prepared to go and kill any number of completely  
13 innocent people in suicide bombings, because, as you  
14 know, in the first half of 2004, I think we had 30, in  
15 the first half of 2005 that then went up to 200. We  
16 should be prepared to take these people on, and the fact  
17 that they are prepared to act like this should not be  
18 a reason for our not being there or fighting them.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to conclude because there are  
20 other questions that need to be posed to you. I suppose  
21 the final question is: this was a very heavy price to  
22 pay, was it not, for the lack of preparation? Perhaps  
23 a cavalier attitude to planning taken, perhaps more in  
24 the United States than the United Kingdom in 2003.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We certainly didn't take a cavalier

1 attitude to planning in the UK. What we planned for was  
2 what we thought was going to happen. But -- and you  
3 will consider this, but I just give you my view of this,  
4 because, otherwise, I think we will make a mistake in  
5 the future in such situations.

6 However much you plan, and whatever forces you have,  
7 if you have these elements, AQ on the one side, Iran on  
8 the other, who are prepared to destabilise, you are  
9 going to be in a tough, long-drawnout, difficult  
10 situation, but my point is very simple: the fact that  
11 these people, in breach of not just the rules of  
12 international law, but humanity, are prepared to do  
13 these terrible things in order to frustrate the will of  
14 the Iraqi people should not mean we back away from  
15 confronting them. We should be there with the Iraqi  
16 people, alongside them, as we did and were in the end,  
17 in order to make sure that, having been released from  
18 Saddam, they were then released from the reign of  
19 terror.

20 I do speak to Iraqis, and I spoke to one just a few  
21 days back who said to me, "We have changed the certainty  
22 of repression for the uncertainty of democratic  
23 politics". He said, "It is difficult and challenging,  
24 but the progress is extraordinary", and nobody would  
25 want to go back to the days when they had no freedom and

1 no opportunity and no hope.

2 So I understand what you are saying, but -- and we  
3 do have to take our responsibilities seriously in these  
4 situations, but we are in exactly the same situation now  
5 in Afghanistan, and heaven knows where we will be in the  
6 same situation again in the future, and the lesson out  
7 of it, in my view, is you have got to be prepared for  
8 the long haul and you have got to be prepared to stick  
9 it through to the end.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The long haul started in 2003?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It did start in 2003, but I posed the  
12 2010 question earlier and I will pose it again.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. At that point, I think I had  
14 better pass over to the Chairman.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we had better ask one or two  
16 questions about Afghanistan and its influence, as it  
17 were, from the side, on the Iraq situation, not to look  
18 at Afghanistan in its own right. Sir Roderic?

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just one really. You have just mentioned  
20 it.

21 In 2004, Geoff Hoon told us that he was against the  
22 idea of deploying into -- more troops into Afghanistan  
23 until we had reduced our commitments in Iraq. In the  
24 following year, we decided to take responsibility for  
25 Helmand province in Afghanistan and to deploy a much

1 larger troop contingent there, and the effect of that  
2 was that, by the end of 2006, at its peak, we had over  
3 7,000 troops still in Iraq and over 6,000 by then in  
4 Afghanistan.

5 Weren't you concerned that this was stretching the  
6 resources, both the human and the equipment resources,  
7 of the army absolutely to their limits?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I was certainly concerned that we  
9 were then fighting in two different theatres of  
10 operation, but, again, I think the decision actually to  
11 go down into Helmand was taken, or began to be taken in  
12 2005. We were told that we were able to do this, and it  
13 was right that we did it, and what was actually  
14 happening in Iraq was that, unlike the rest of -- it all  
15 happening in Basra, as I would say it, in the south as  
16 opposed to the rest the country, is that the problem in  
17 a way was that people were worried that most of the  
18 attacks were actually happening on us, on the coalition  
19 forces. So our concern was that, over time, we should  
20 be building up the Iraqi capability and then that would  
21 allow us to draw down.

22 But we were capable of doing the Helmand mission,  
23 and, indeed, we wouldn't have done it if weren't.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was a stretch, and you were warned  
25 that it would be stretch presumably?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Actually, the suggestion that we did it  
2 came from the MoD. Of course, they said it is going to  
3 be tough for us, but they said we can do it and we  
4 should do it. So in a sense, right at the moment it was  
5 difficult in Iraq, we were prepared to make the  
6 additional commitment to Afghanistan.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: We would like, Mr Blair, to ask a few  
9 questions about the strategic direction of government  
10 and how one does that in a Cabinet system in situations  
11 like Iraq. I think Baroness Prashar would like a start.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

13 Some questions, Mr Blair. Just taking your meeting  
14 on 3 July 2002, which you chaired and at which the Chief  
15 of Defence Staff put forward some military options, and  
16 according to Alastair Campbell you said that you did not  
17 want any discussions with other departments at this  
18 stage and did not want any of this swimming around the  
19 system.

20 Why was the participation restricted to two Cabinet  
21 ministers and not, for example, to the Secretary of  
22 State for International Development Secretary?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were discussing then what was likely  
24 to happen in relation to the politics and the diplomacy,  
25 particularly in relation to the military.

1           Now, at a later time, as you know, there were --  
2           officials from DFID were involved in the planning  
3           meetings. I think --

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My understanding is that came at  
5           a very late stage and after a lot of pressure from --

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the officials were together. It  
7           is true that it was at a later time that Clare Short  
8           herself joined the Committee.

9           However, having said that, we were in pretty regular  
10          correspondence and, as I say, in the end, DFID acquitted  
11          itself perfectly well. The problem we had was not  
12          a problem that was capable of being cured by DFID.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but, I mean, at an  
14          early stage, for effective planning to go ahead, you  
15          know, you need full departmental engagement, probably  
16          Cabinet involvement. Why wasn't the Treasury and DFID  
17          involved in the early stages?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were also discussing this at  
19          a Cabinet level too, and obviously we were in close  
20          touch with the Treasury and so on. Right at that  
21          moment, the single most important areas were diplomacy  
22          and were the issues to do with military planning.

23          Look, I know that much has been made of: well, these  
24          were ad hoc committee meetings with a small "a" and  
25          a small "h", rather than with a large "A" and a large

1 "H". The key thing was to get the key players together  
2 so you could have a proper, frank discussion and take  
3 the decisions necessary. That's really what we did,  
4 both before the invasion and afterwards.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but Lord Turnbull said:

6 "I think you should include people who have a locus,  
7 even if they are going to be difficult."

8 Because in a way, if you are going to look at the  
9 aftermath reconstruction, DFID and the Treasury had  
10 a locus.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sure, and I think I said in response to  
12 the Butler Inquiry that, you know, in future, there is  
13 a case for having a specially constituted committee.

14 All I would say to you is that we did have the key  
15 players and there was a constant interaction with  
16 government on the key issues. Insofar as we were  
17 predicting what we would find, we made provision for it  
18 and the relationship between myself and Jack Straw,  
19 Geoff Hoon, the politicians, but also the Chief of  
20 Defence Staff, were close. I mean, we were in close  
21 interaction the entire time, and the main bulk of this  
22 was going to be done in the first instance by the  
23 military.

24 Now, it is correct that, as we got into late 2002,  
25 early 2003, DFID became a bigger part of the picture.

1 Clare said she wanted to come to the meetings. That was  
2 fair enough. That then happened. The issue, however,  
3 that DFID was focused on was the humanitarian side, and,  
4 to be fair to them, they did a very good job of it.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As you have mentioned the  
6 Butler Report, I think the Chairman has a question on  
7 that.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: I sat on the Butler Committee and I don't  
9 want to go over old ground, but just to be clear, the  
10 Cabinet met frequently in the period 2002/2003, and it  
11 is not that they were not consulted, but, rather, that  
12 papers in general were not circulated.

13 The Butler Committee found none and we haven't found  
14 any, which has given rise to the question: was there  
15 sufficient information, analysis, both of the issues and  
16 about the background, to enable your Cabinet colleagues,  
17 who would take full collective responsibility for the  
18 big decisions, to understand, and, if necessary,  
19 challenge within Cabinet discussion?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had, I think -- I think it is 20 --  
21 I think there was --

22 THE CHAIRMAN: At least 25.

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- 25 pre-invasion Cabinet discussions  
24 of Iraq, and then there were ad hoc ministerial  
25 discussions, I think 28 of those meetings. There was

1 a constant interaction and people would describe -- it  
2 wasn't just a sort of formal Cabinet discussion,  
3 Jack Straw would take people through the information  
4 that we had. There was an immense amount going on  
5 inside the MoD, inside the Foreign Office, actually  
6 inside DFID as well, and I really don't think any of the  
7 members of the Cabinet at the time felt they weren't  
8 involved or felt they couldn't challenge.

9 Indeed, Robin Cook did, and Robin and I disagreed  
10 about it in the end. So obviously, there are these  
11 issues to do with the nature of the meetings that were  
12 held, but I was in an almost constant interaction for  
13 2002 and 2003 with members of the Cabinet.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: You do have, both from two very different  
15 witnesses that we have taken testimony from,  
16 Alastair Campbell and Lord Turnbull, the same thought,  
17 that you need to accommodate difference of view and  
18 respond to it within a collective, within, in this case,  
19 the Cabinet or some smaller grouping, the ad hoc  
20 committee, for example.

21 With hindsight, do you think that there was  
22 sufficient space and opportunity for those differences  
23 to be accommodated and fed into final judgments?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I really do, actually, yes. Nobody in  
25 the Cabinet was unaware of the -- what the whole issue

1 was about. It was the thing running throughout the  
2 whole of the political mainstream at the time. There  
3 were members of the Cabinet who would challenge and  
4 disagree, but most of them agreed. It was the same with  
5 Parliament. I was subject to constant numbers of people  
6 telling me, "You shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do  
7 that, you should do it differently", and so on, and in  
8 relation to the planning afterwards, I mean, whatever  
9 else -- whatever differences Clare Short and I may have  
10 had from time to time, the one thing I would never  
11 accuse her of being is backward in coming forward.

12 So there was a huge -- all the time, interaction, as  
13 I say, between people on the very issues.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we would like to explore  
15 just one other aspect of this, and that's the  
16 interaction between major strategic policy-making at  
17 Cabinet level, at Prime Ministerial level indeed, and  
18 the folding into that of key legal advice.

19 We are not going to go over the ground we have  
20 already covered earlier today, but there is a set of  
21 questions we would just like to pursue, starting with  
22 you, Usha.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

24 We discussed with Lord Goldsmith, you know, the  
25 process through which he was involved in this

1 decision-making process and what became very clear is  
2 that, during the time, particularly before July 2002,  
3 ministers were making public statements. I think he had  
4 to write to Mr Hoon and he saw a memo of the comments  
5 that Mr Straw had made to Colin Powell, and he was  
6 having to constantly write and tell them, you know, they  
7 should be seeking his legal advice.

8 The fact that he had to respond to people making  
9 statements without being clear about what the legal  
10 situation was, do you think that could have been avoided  
11 if the Attorney had been able to discuss issues in the  
12 Cabinet and that would have actually ensured that the  
13 formal advice of the Attorney would have been  
14 pre-empted?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the very first paper we got on  
16 this back in March, or the clutch of papers we got  
17 in March 2002, which were seen obviously by Jack --  
18 I mean, the legal paper was provided by Jack Straw's  
19 department and by Geoff Hoon as well, who is, I think,  
20 fully aware of all this. I mean, people had the basic  
21 legal framework.

22 Now, I think it is perfectly good for  
23 Peter Goldsmith, as the Attorney General, on his own  
24 volition, if he thought somebody was saying something  
25 that couldn't be justified or was unwise in legal terms,

1 if he got on the phone and said, "Don't do it", or wrote  
2 them a note saying, "Come back into line on this", which  
3 I think they did.

4 I don't think it would have made a great deal of  
5 difference to have had him there at Cabinet. What  
6 he needed to be able to do was be in a position feeling  
7 sufficiently confident, which he did, to be able to  
8 intervene and say, "I don't agree".

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the expression we got was he was  
10 constantly having to ask, and wanted to write his  
11 opinion, and provide his opinion, and he said it wasn't  
12 always welcome.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think he said that about the  
14 particular opinion he gave at the end of July, and it  
15 wasn't so much, as I said earlier, that it wasn't  
16 welcome, it was, you know, I was dealing with an already  
17 difficult situation. Now I had another issue to take  
18 account of. I had to take account of it, rightly, and,  
19 incidentally, he was completely right to do it, because  
20 it made a big difference to the way we approached 1441  
21 and the resolution there, but I don't think it would  
22 have made -- look, I'm very happy to talk about how, for  
23 example, you know, you might do some of these things  
24 differently now, but I honestly don't think having Peter  
25 at the Cabinet meeting would have made a difference.

1           What did make a difference was his having the  
2 confidence to be able to say, as he should, as an  
3 independent attorney for the government, to pick up the  
4 phone and -- even to the Prime Minister, which he did,  
5 saying, "This is what you can say and this is what you  
6 can't".

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that doesn't allow for  
8 a collective decision-making where there is a proper  
9 consideration of different options and so on.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think in respect of the legal  
11 opinion, Baroness, I think that the key thing really was  
12 this: the Cabinet weren't interested in becoming part of  
13 the legal debate, they just wanted to know, "Is the  
14 Attorney General saying it is lawful or it is not?"

15           I think in respect of these other issues, there were  
16 actual debates about this. There was a debate, for  
17 example, in January 2003, if I recollect it, that was  
18 not just about the diplomatic issues, but specifically  
19 on the humanitarian and aftermath questions in Cabinet.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But going back to the legal advice,  
21 I mean, when the Cabinet met on 17 March, I think  
22 Lord Goldsmith presented the draft Parliamentary  
23 question answer, but there was no discussion on this  
24 legal advice, and we have seen the report of  
25 a discussion that he had with Mr Straw on 13 March in

1       which he was persuaded not to present a finely balanced  
2       paper of the arguments, but actually to present this  
3       paper which was going to be his Parliamentary question,  
4       and I think Clare Short made it clear that she wanted to  
5       discuss it and know whether the Attorney General had  
6       changed his mind, but no such discussion took place.

7   RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think Andrew Turnbull explained this  
8       to you. The whole purpose of having the Attorney there  
9       at the Cabinet was so that he could answer anybody's  
10      questions about it.

11   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the Attorney General did say  
12      that, you know, the legal basis is essential but not  
13      sufficient. So in that sense the broader implications  
14      of invasion -- I mean, should that not have been  
15      discussed?

16   RT HON TONY BLAIR: The broader implications in terms of  
17      whether it was right or wrong to do it?

18   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

19   RT HON TONY BLAIR: That was, in a sense, the purpose of the  
20      Cabinet discussion, I think, and it is perfectly -- the  
21      legal issues were one aspect of this. But I think, once  
22      the members of the Cabinet -- I mean, the members of the  
23      Cabinet were really focused on the politics, and indeed  
24      even Robin Cook, his attitude was, if you get  
25      a second resolution, then I'm with you, but if you

1           can't, then, politically, I think this is too difficult.  
2           So, you know, we were very focused on those political as  
3           well as legal questions.

4   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   But would it not have allowed them  
5           to weigh up the risks for themselves, for the civil  
6           servants and so on, you know?

7   RT HON TONY BLAIR:   I think they were weighing the risks up  
8           for the country, but I don't think, in respect of the  
9           law, as it were -- I don't think members of the Cabinet  
10          wanted to have a debate with -- I mean, Peter was there  
11          and could have answered any questions they had, but  
12          their basic question to him was: is there a proper legal  
13          basis for this or not and his answer was, "Yes."

14                 Now, we had actually said -- and this was the reason  
15                 why we had Peter there and I think in any future  
16                 situation it is sensible to have the Attorney there.  
17                 But in a sense we offered him up; he was the lawyer  
18                 there to talk about it.

19   THE CHAIRMAN:   Mr Blair, do you think there is a contrast of  
20           approach between what frequently happens in government  
21           at all levels, including to the top, that, in forming  
22           policy, you engage with legal advice because it may need  
23           expression in statute, or comply with existing bodies of  
24           law, you fold in the legal advice through the  
25           policy-making process -- that's one approach.   The other

1 is to set very clearly what your policy objectives  
2 are -- and they may be, as in the Iraq case, iron  
3 strategic objectives -- and then, as it were, work  
4 around or through and with the constraints and  
5 opportunities that legal advice then gives? Do you see  
6 a difference of approach there?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that there could be but I would  
8 say in this situation, since in a way March 2002 was the  
9 time when you set the first framework for this, the  
10 legal advice was one of the key things we asked for, and  
11 we got it, and that legal advice -- and it is  
12 interesting to go back and look at it -- it was legal  
13 advice that was saying you needed a fresh resolution,  
14 and one of the reasons why we went down the path was to  
15 give a fresh resolution.

16 One of the things -- and this was part of the debate  
17 that happened later -- was that I felt we got the fresh  
18 resolution, so why is there still a legal problem, but  
19 then I was told what the problem was.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: It still seems, from all we have heard, both  
21 today and on from previous witnesses, that there was  
22 a very clear strategic policy objective set for Iraq,  
23 which was to bring about compliance with the  
24 United Nations Resolutions, disarmament, clearing of  
25 WMDs, and if that meant regime change by military means,

1 that was the last resort but not ruled out.

2 But there were moments very, very late  
3 in January, February and March 2003, when that policy  
4 objective could have been blocked by a failure because  
5 of a legal constraint. Is that unavoidable in  
6 situations like this?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think it is unavoidable in  
8 a situation where it is that controversial and divisive  
9 and it is that -- you know, that open to challenge. You  
10 see, there actually could have been a major debate about  
11 Kosovo and legality; there could have been. There  
12 wasn't because in the end most people went along with  
13 the action; they agreed with what we were doing.

14 The truth is that the law and the politics follow  
15 each other quite closely, and I think, necessarily in  
16 this situation, where we were setting our strategic  
17 objectives. You know, we had this strong belief and, as  
18 I say, this is my belief now too, that this threat had  
19 to be dealt with with a certain amount of urgency. We  
20 had our alliance with the United States of America and  
21 so on and all the issues to do with Saddam, and then  
22 obviously, at the same time, as you are proceeding and  
23 strategy is evolving, diplomacy is evolving, you are  
24 looking at the issues to do with legality.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we would just like to ask one or two

1 more questions before we come to the close. So, Usha?

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My final question, Mr Blair, is  
3 really about the effective government? Because there  
4 would be a long command chain. Because, if you are  
5 looking at the top decision-makers in London, working  
6 with soldiers and civilians who had to deliver locally  
7 in Iraq -- so it is quite a complex operation and many  
8 of these issues were cross-departmental, and therefore  
9 quite -- a new operation had kind of come together.

10 How did you hold your Secretary of State to account  
11 for delivery, because delivery was your mantra at that  
12 stage? How did you make sure that what was to be  
13 delivered was being delivered effectively on the ground?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: In the pre-war part we had the Ad Hoc  
15 Group on Iraq of officials, which met from September  
16 onwards, and that included all the relevant departments.  
17 I was chairing the ad hoc ministerial discussions, and  
18 as I say, I think we had 28 of those meetings. And then  
19 afterwards we had the War Cabinet and then the DOP  
20 meetings, and then Jack Straw became the effective  
21 Chairman of the ministers and the officials driving  
22 forward policy from that front.

23 There wasn't an issue really at any stage of this  
24 with people not feeling they were part of this, apart  
25 from the one issue to do with Clare and the ad hoc

1 committee, which, as I say, was resolved in, I think,  
2 early 2003.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Tim Cross said to us that there  
4 was no minister Cabinet rank reporting back and driving  
5 this day-to-day, because, you know, what we were hearing  
6 from the ground. This was Tim Cross's comment to us.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think one of the questions -- and  
8 I think this has been raised in some evidence to you --  
9 is, again, if we knew then what we know now, would you  
10 want perhaps to put a specific Cabinet minister in  
11 charge of this? All these things are worth looking at.  
12 The only thing I would say to you is that we were,  
13 partly through my own personal involvement but also  
14 because you had Mike Boyce and the Chiefs of Staff  
15 Committee, you had the officials meeting, you had  
16 David Manning very closely involved in this -- I can't  
17 really think -- and I think Andrew Turnbull said this to  
18 you in his evidence -- that there was a machinery of  
19 government problem, in the sense that if we had had  
20 a different machinery, we would have acted differently.  
21 I don't think, but that's a judgment.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: One thing I want to put to you --  
23 because Sir David Omand, whom we saw last week, he  
24 emphasised the importance of structuring decision-making  
25 so that you are simply not swept along with the pace of

1 events, particularly like military preparations. Do you  
2 think we had the ability and the will to pause and look  
3 at our strategy? For example, in early 2003, UNMOVIC  
4 inspectors had returned to Iraq and were expecting  
5 either Saddam would grossly obstruct them or he would  
6 quickly find evidence of WMD. In the event this didn't  
7 happen. Did we actually think -- did we stop and  
8 re-evaluate our strategy at that stage?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We would have entirely re-evaluated our  
10 strategy had, as I say -- and I'm just using this as  
11 a shorthand -- Saddam Hussein done a Gaddafi, had he  
12 said, "I'm finished with all this, I want to join the  
13 international community on proper terms." But he  
14 didn't, and what he did -- and this is where, as I say,  
15 the Iraq Survey Group -- unfortunately, people have only  
16 looked at one part of their findings and not the other  
17 part of their findings. He never had any intention of  
18 complying because he had the intention, once he got  
19 sanctions out of the way, of restarting it again.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Even later, it became clear that our  
21 post-war efforts were becoming a strategic failure. Did  
22 we think at that stage -- because the impression one  
23 gets is we are responding to events on the ground. Were  
24 we doing any re-thinking?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. The reason why we were in

1 a constant iteration very quickly after the conflict was  
2 because of what we were finding, and then, as I say,  
3 there was this metamorphosis of the whole struggle,  
4 really, and battle, when the AQ and Iran elements became  
5 uppermost, and then it really did change into  
6 a different type of fight, and one of the interesting  
7 things, for example -- I mean, Kimberly Kagan does this  
8 on her book on the surge and it is important because in  
9 the end that is what worked.

10 What nobody foresaw was that Iran would actually end  
11 up supporting AQ. The conventional wisdom was these two  
12 are completely different types of people because Iran is  
13 Shia, the Al-Qaeda people are Sunni and therefore, you  
14 know, the two would never mix. What happened in the end  
15 was that they did because they both had a common  
16 interest in destabilising the country, and for Iran  
17 I think the reason they were interested in destabilising  
18 Iraq was because they worried about having a functioning  
19 majority Shia country with a democracy on their  
20 doorstep, and for Al-Qaeda they knew perfectly well  
21 their whole mission was to try and say the West was  
22 oppressing Islam. It is hard to do that if you replace  
23 tyrannical governments with functioning democracies.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So from your point of view you think  
25 the machinery of government worked?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't doubt you could have had  
2 different machineries, but we did have a machinery of  
3 government that worked, and worked effectively, in order  
4 to analyse the problems we were likely to face and how  
5 we would deal with them. And as I say, I think no doubt  
6 there are other ways that it can be done but we had --

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But on reflection there is nothing  
8 you would do differently?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, when you look back now -- and  
10 I have just said to you earlier. For example, if you  
11 want to look at maybe putting a specific Cabinet  
12 minister in charge of this, there are all sorts  
13 of things that, if you knew then what you know now, you  
14 would do differently; I have been through the whole  
15 reconstruction piece. But, in terms of what we knew at  
16 that time, we had a machinery of government that was  
17 perfectly adequate. There were 25 separate Cabinet  
18 meetings, 28 ad hoc committee meetings, regular weekly  
19 meetings of the officials.

20 Now, you could put them with a capital "A" and  
21 a capital "H", rather than a small "a" and a small "h",  
22 but I don't think it would have made a difference to the  
23 essential decision-making.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: We are coming to to the end and I have got  
25 a couple of questions I would like to raise. I think

1 the first is to look at the perspective of the whole  
2 enterprise from the standpoint of the people of Iraq.  
3 The coalition went in as liberators. Rather soon they  
4 began to be resented by parts of the population and then  
5 attacked as occupiers by some. By the time, for  
6 example, British forces withdrew from Basra City to the  
7 airport, 90 per cent of the attacks there were against  
8 them, as against -- between mix of the Shia factions.

9 So do you think, looking back from 2010, that the  
10 people of Iraq thought that the enterprise was  
11 worthwhile. Just as one piece, not of evidence but as  
12 a bit of anecdote: a very senior constitutional, if  
13 I can put it that way, Iraqi, said, clearly it was good  
14 that Saddam has gone but the inept nature of the some of  
15 the things that the coalition did -- the coalition, not  
16 the British specifically -- has caused great suffering,  
17 so the price was high.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is too early to say right now whether  
19 the Iraqi democracy will take root and will function  
20 effectively, although, as I think John Jenkins and  
21 Frank Baker said to you, there are really hopeful signs.  
22 And just to say some of the things that I think are  
23 taking place in Iraq today, if you look, for example, at  
24 the electricity, you look at income per head, which is  
25 several times what it was under Saddam, you look at now

1 the money that is being spent on infrastructure,  
2 I think, yes, it was a very, very difficult fight  
3 indeed, it was always going to be difficult once these  
4 external factors came into play of AQ and Iran, but,  
5 sure, when you go into a nation-building situation in  
6 the future, I think we will be far better prepared and  
7 better educated than we were then.

8 I would just give one -- if we are talking about was  
9 it worth it in terms of the Iraqis themselves, if you  
10 look at the latest information from the Brookings  
11 Institute and the polls that they are doing about the  
12 right direction, wrong direction for their country, they  
13 are actually upbeat about the future. You know, if you  
14 look at whether they believe that security and services  
15 are getting better, a majority of them think they are,  
16 despite all the trouble, despite the fact these  
17 terrorists carry on.

18 Let me just give you one example of where I think  
19 you can see both the nature, since we are talking about  
20 how is it for Iraqis -- because the Iraqis were  
21 themselves less worried about the issues to do with  
22 United Nations and so on; they were worried about their  
23 country and the oppression. Just focus for a moment on  
24 what the Saddam Hussein regime was like.

25 In 2000 and 2001 and 2002 they had a child mortality

1 rate of 130 per 1,000 children under the age of five,  
2 worse than the Congo. That was despite the fact that  
3 Saddam had as much money as he wanted for immunisation  
4 programmes and medicines for those children. That  
5 equates to roughly about 90,000 deaths under the age of  
6 five a year. The figure today is not 130, it is 40.  
7 That equates to about 50,000 young people, children,  
8 who, as a result of a different regime that cares about  
9 its people -- that's the result that getting rid of  
10 Saddam makes. And you can talk to Iraqis, of course,  
11 who will say to you, some of them, particularly those  
12 from the Sunni side still worried about whether they  
13 will be able to come into the politics -- and some of  
14 them may say, "Well, I don't believe it was worth it."

15 But I think if you ask the majority of Iraqis today,  
16 "Would you really prefer, with all the challenges that  
17 lie ahead, to be back under Saddam?" I think you would  
18 get a pretty overwhelming answer to that question.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: The other perspective clearly -- and you will  
20 appreciate this better than anyone can, probably. Our  
21 participation in the Iraq conflict has been very  
22 divisive here and abroad, has caused deep anguish to  
23 those who lost people they loved, some of whom are in  
24 this room. There is gratitude, great gratitude, to our  
25 armed forces for the sacrifices they made and the

1       bravery they showed and great sorrow at their losses.  
2       But we, like you, have also experienced at first hand  
3       the anger which is still felt by many people in this  
4       country and we have been asking, therefore, the question  
5       why. And so, as we conclude today, can I ask what broad  
6       lessons you have drawn -- you have drawn some already in  
7       the course of your testimony -- and to say whether you  
8       have regrets about key aspects of the Iraq conflict?

9   RT HON TONY BLAIR: I mean, I have said some of the things  
10       that I think are lessons that can be learned about  
11       nation-building. I think you have got to look very  
12       carefully at what type of forces you require because  
13       there will be a security situation that you face,  
14       a challenging security situation. I also think you have  
15       really got to look at the issue to do with the nature of  
16       this threat from Al-Qaeda on the one hand, Iran on the  
17       other, and the impact that that will have, not just on  
18       Iraq but potentially in different arenas right round the  
19       Middle East region and beyond.

20       I feel -- of course, I had to take this decision as  
21       Prime Minister and it was a huge responsibility then,  
22       and there is not a single day that passes by that  
23       I don't reflect and think about that responsibility, and  
24       so I should. But I genuinely believe that if we had  
25       left Saddam in power, even with what we know now, we

1 would still have had to have dealt with him, possibly in  
2 circumstances where the threat was worse and possibly in  
3 circumstances where it was hard to mobilise any support  
4 for dealing with that threat.

5 I think we live in a completely new security  
6 environment today. I thought that then, I think that  
7 now. It is why -- I have said this to you a number of  
8 times today -- I take a very hard, tough line on Iran  
9 today, and many of the same arguments apply.

10 In the end it was divisive, and I'm sorry about that  
11 and I tried my level best to bring people back together  
12 again, but if I'm asked whether I believe we are safer,  
13 more secure, that Iraq is better, our own security is  
14 better with Saddam and his two sons out of power and out  
15 of office than in office, I indeed believe that we are,  
16 and I think in time to come, if Iraq becomes, as I hope  
17 and believe that it will, the country that its people  
18 want to see, then we can look back, and particularly our  
19 armed forces can look back, with an immense sense of  
20 pride and achievement in what they did.

21 THE CHAIRMAN: And no regrets?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Responsibility but not a regret for  
23 removing Saddam Hussein. I think that he was a monster,  
24 I believe he threatened, not just the region but the  
25 world, and in the circumstances that we faced then, but

1 I think even if you look back now, it was better to deal  
2 with this threat, to deal with it, to remove him from  
3 office, and I do genuinely believe that the world is  
4 safer as a result.

5 I know sometimes, because this happens out in the  
6 region, sometimes people will say to me, "Well, Saddam  
7 was a brake on Iran". Let's be clear, there is another  
8 view of foreign policy in this instance, which is the  
9 way, if we had left Saddam in place, he would have  
10 controlled Iran better. I really think it is time we  
11 learned, as a matter of sensible foreign policy, that  
12 the way to deal with one dictatorial threat is not to  
13 back another, that actually the best answer to what is  
14 happening in Iran is to allow the Iraqi people the  
15 freedom and democratic choice that we enjoy in countries  
16 like ours.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. This brings us, I think, to the  
18 end of today's hearings. Is there any final comment,  
19 beyond those you have already made, that you wish to add  
20 before we close?

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: In that case can I say two things? The first  
23 is that there clearly are considerable limits to what we  
24 can cover in one day. The Inquiry still has much work  
25 to do. Among other things, our witness today, Mr Blair,

1 has drawn attention to a number of dimensions arising  
2 out of Iran and its behaviour which I think we shall  
3 want to pursue.

4 Can I, with that, thank our witness for a long day  
5 of testimony, a long, hard day, I think, and thank very  
6 much those of you who have been here as witnesses to  
7 this session, as to those who were present in the  
8 morning session. Thank you all very much indeed.

9 Now, with that, we will resume hearings next week on  
10 Monday at 11 o'clock in the morning, and later on, in  
11 late February or early March, we will be taking  
12 testimony from the Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Brown, and  
13 other senior ministers perhaps.

14 So, with that, we close this session. Thank you all  
15 again.

16 (5.10 pm)

17 (The Inquiry adjourned until 11.00 am on Monday  
18 1 February 2010)

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21 RT HON TONY BLAIR .....1

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FINAL