Friday, 10th September 2010

MATTHEW RYCROFT

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Our welcome to Matthew Rycroft. Matthew, many thanks for coming to this private session. I understand you have read the passages regarding the protocols which govern the session.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So, with that out of the way, let's go straight into questions.

I would like to start really with the moment -- not the exact instant, but when you arrive in Downing Street in February '02 --

MR RYCROFT: That's right.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: -- from four years in Washington at our embassy there.

Can you just sketch as briefly as you'd like what your sense of the UK's official policy towards Iraq was in around February '02 as seen both in Washington and then on arrival in Downing Street?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. Thank you very much, Chairman, for the invitation. I am very glad to be here.

I should explain this. While I was in Washington, my job was dealing with American domestic policies, which was a fantastic job and great opportunity to understand how Congress worked, how the Presidential race worked. My job was to get close to both the Bush campaign and the Gore campaign across the whole range of issues --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We'll need to slow down. I am sorry.

MR RYCROFT: -- across the whole range of issues, largely the

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political ones rather than the foreign policy ones. So I had an idea of American and indeed British policy on the range of foreign and domestic policy issues, but I wasn't responsible for pushing those forward in any sense.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, understood.

MR RYCROFT: I thought that American policy was clear and there was a lot of overlap between Clinton's previous policy, what President Gore would have had as his Iraq policy and what President Bush then had as his policy. They all believed in regime change. They all would have pursued regime change, I think, albeit in different ways. The Bush version of regime change was to my mind much determined, more unilateralist, if necessary, than a Gore version or indeed a continued Clinton version would have been.

British policy I rapidly discovered when I arrived in Downing Street in late February '02 was to deal with weapons of mass destruction, including in Iraq, and it was clear when I arrived this was going to be one of -- one of the big issues at the time that I was here -- time I was there, but by no means the only one.

Would it be helpful to explain how my job fitted in with others in Number 10?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, it would indeed. Just before we do that -- I was going to ask you just now -- can you say something about where the balance along the range of policy options in February '02, where the emphasis was, or was it really neutral between anything from continued containment right through to military operations?

MR RYCROFT: For the UK?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

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MR RYCROFT: From my recollection by the time I joined Downing Street the British Government had essentially decided that continued containment was not going to work, and I would place the change of -- the realisation of that judgment as the weeks following 9/11 for obvious reasons.

By the time that I then arrived, February '02, we were on a track of, as I said, dealing with Iraq's WMD and what dealing meant was to be determined by the policy over the coming months.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Fine. You helpfully suggested that you might say something about the Number 10 set-up, if you like, and where key advice was coming from to the Prime Minister at that time in Number 10. Would you like to take us into that?

MR RYCROFT: Thank you. I mean, just starting with my own job, it was called the Private Secretary Foreign Affairs. In the time that I was there there were two Private Secretaries Foreign Affairs and we pretty much divided the world geographically, and so I did the US and Europe. Then Iraq was added to my portfolio as I arrived, and I did defence issues and Northern Ireland issues, and my colleague did the rest of the world.

I worked essentially to three senior officials in Number 10 on the three different parts of my work: David Manning, Nigel Sheinwald on foreign policy, Sir Stephen Wall / Kim Darroch on the EU, and Sir Jonathan Powell on Northern Ireland. Of course I was, as all Private Secretaries were, working also and indeed primarily directly for the Prime Minister.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. Can you just say something -- we've got a lot of evidence and I think we understand it -- about the separate positions of David Manning, on the one hand, and Nigel Sheinwald, on the other? David is centred in Number 10 entirely. What about -- are you talking about Nigel later?

MR RYCROFT: No, I'm talking about Nigel from when he took over

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from David, which was in '03. It was about August/September '03.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: But also with a leg in the Cabinet Office.

MR RYCROFT: So did David.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: As David did.

MR RYCROFT: Certainly in the time I was there their two roles were identical. So the way they did their roles was different, but on paper their roles were identical, and they both were double-hatted, Cabinet Office and Number 10. I was just Number 10. Nigel, when he arrived, made me his deputy in Number 10 for all of foreign policy, so overseeing the rest of the foreign policy bit of Number 10.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right.

MR RYCROFT: And -- but I was purely in Number 10. He had a much bigger team in Cabinet Office dealing with --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Defence and security.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Then there is the political side of Number 10. You have Jonathan Powell, former diplomat, Chief of Staff. How does he fit in?

MR RYCROFT: He was the Chief of Staff and for well-known reasons he had authority over civil servants in that set-up and he was -- he felt like the chief of the staff. He felt to me as someone coming in as though even on foreign and EU issues through David and through Stephen that he was sort of ultimately overseeing both the policy and the political, and he was, you know, a very important person in my life in terms of ensuring I was doing what he wanted me to be doing. He was in almost all the meetings and his role was very important.

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Are you able to say anything about --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I ask something on that? Was Jonathan the person who determined which papers went into the Prime Minister and indeed discussed outcomes with the Prime Minister?

MR RYCROFT: He had a role in that, but we all put in papers directly to the Prime Minister.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: They didn't go through him?

MR RYCROFT: They didn't -- no. There wasn't -- at that point there wasn't a system where everything was channelled. There was a weekly box, as I recall, which I think he did look through and he would have been able to take things out and add things in or scribble on things if he wanted to, but we all dealt directly with the Prime Minister on our issues.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: A weekly box?

MR RYCROFT: It was a weekly box on Friday for the weekend and then for things that were more urgent, as indeed very many things were, there were more -- well, there were arrangements that allowed us to get things to the Prime Minister each evening if it was a written document and of course during the day if it was more urgent than that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And did stuff go to the Prime Minister only in hard copy or did some of it go in e-mail? Did the Prime Minister use e-mail?

MR RYCROFT: Nothing ever went to the Prime Minister or came from the Prime Minister in e-mail.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just to stitch up this particular little bit, "box" is a collective noun for a plural, because I recall another Cabinet Minister having had 25 boxes on one weekend. It is not just a single box.

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MR RYCROFT: It is not a single box. Correct.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: It is a process. I would like to ask you in a moment about the Prime Minister's political colleagues and where they fit in, but before I do, we have one thing about the state of policy and the awareness of the possibilities.

You have got very early in your time President Bush telling the Prime Minister that Schröder had said if there were to be military action in Iraq, Bush should make it short, quick and victorious. President Bush looked toward to discussing this with the Prime Minister in April.

So the military option was on the table at this point if it was in Schröder's mind in that particular way?

MR RYCROFT: I think it was absolutely in Bush's mind from before that. I recall him on the campaign trail before he became President talking in these sorts of terms.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: And sharing it with political leaders in allied countries or friendly counties.

MR RYCROFT: Or them raising their concerns with him.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: So, yes, it was absolutely there as a -- as an option.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. One last thing on this. You have got United Kingdom government policy on one area and you have US policy, and quite a lot of -- a great deal of mutual awareness, but where was the balance in terms of the drive, the direction? Was it essentially a US policy being formed which we were adapting to, or was it a UK policy which took account of how US policy was developing? Can you comment on that?

MR RYCROFT: You will have received a lot of views on that

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question. I mean, my personal view, largely formed actually from my time in Washington, but going into my Number 10 time, is that on something as important as Iraq policy, very near the top of the US agenda, there is a juggernaut that goes through the interagency process, and the job of anyone outside that interagency process, including the closest ally, is one of influencing, pulling, pushing, but not except in exceptional circumstances completely stopping and turning around and pulling and pushing in another direction.

So even if the Prime Minister had wanted to push the juggernaut in a completely different direction, I suspect he would not have been able to and, as I am sure we will come to talk about, he didn't want to turn it around anyway.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: That leads me to my last point on this, which is how far the Prime Minister, talking, as he is, with his Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary and other colleagues, how far was he very much in the lead in framing and forming British policy and British response to UK foreign policy, or were there different views gradually coalescing and forming out -- I will not say chaos but the debate?

MR RYCROFT: I think my recollection of that is that the Prime Minister took the lead in setting the overall strategic framework for British policy on this and the range of issues that flowed out of 9/11, and because he tends to think and take decisions in a very top down way, as I say, that was very influential at that top strategic level.

Right from the -- certainly well before I started in Number 10 and all the way through my time the building blocks that fitted in to make up that big picture were created by, informed by and advised by the Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary and others.

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. Fine. What I'd like to do next, and not taking too much time about it, but talk about the preparations for Crawford and then any impressions you got from the Crawford event itself. You were there but I think --

MR RYCROFT: I actually wasn't there.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You weren't there at all?

MR RYCROFT: I wasn't there at all. I didn't go on that trip. I think I went on pretty much every other trip after that. It was so soon after I arrived.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We will not ask you about the mood music.

Preparations first. The meeting was to be in earlyish April. You were heavily involved in the preparation. At the beginning of March we have seen the paper Tom McKane produced, the options paper, dated 6th March. That was discussed in the Cabinet on the 7th. Was it circulated simply as a Cabinet paper in the usual way?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall, I'm afraid.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. There is at the same time I mean another paper in circulation which was distributed before Cabinet, and this was something that Jack Straw made available as Foreign Secretary as something which had been issued to the Parliamentary Labour Party.

It would be helpful to us to know both the state of the -- status of the paper and how did it dovetail with what Tom McKane had produced on the official side?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. So just to repeat, I don't recall having seen papers like this that would help me answer the first question.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: No.

MR RYCROFT: I did see this and that sparked my memory. I mean,

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yes, it was written to me, copied around to Private Secretaries of every member of the Cabinet. So it wasn't for me, so to speak. It was for the members of Cabinet. It was clearly flagged as a party political document. So I don't recall what I did with my copy of it, but I saw that as a party political addition to the paperwork that would have been provided by officials.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I don't want to pick over all the details of the PLP paper, but it does talk at one point about Iraq's massive programme of development of weapons of mass destruction, which sparks the question: was there any kind of official clearance of the PLP paper or did it spring out of a political adviser's head?

MR RYCROFT: I don't know.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right.

MR RYCROFT: It could be a question to those who were in the Foreign Office at the time. I'm sure it was not cleared by Number 10 in advance. It certainly wasn't cleared by me in advance. Put it that way.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We are going to come much later this morning I think into how the Prime Minister's mind might have been affected by a particular piece of advice or information, but would this particular paper at this particular moment have been seen as particularly influential in terms of its nuances or would it just be part of the general background?

MR RYCROFT: My guess, and it's a guess, is that this would have been part of the background. I don't think the Prime Minister was ever short of either written material or advice on issues as important as Iraq, and I'm sure he would have read this, if it had gone to him, but I don't think it would have of itself been a formative influence.

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. It is right just to put on the record I think that there is not a Cabinet formal minute of a discussion of either paper.

MR RYCROFT: Right.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So it was there in Cabinet Ministers' minds and boxes, but not as an issue for discussion formally.

Now, moving on, still the preparation for Crawford, Alastair Campbell's diaries tell us about a meeting on 2nd April at Chequers to talk about Iraq. Were you there?

MR RYCROFT: No.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You think not?

MR RYCROFT: No, I was definitely not there.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: But what about the organisation of it and who was there and why? Did you have the main task of doing that? Do you remember?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall that at all. Again, extrapolating backwards, I can imagine that David Manning would have been involved in wanting to ensure that some military judgments -- not necessarily advice -- advice from military people would reach the Prime Minister to help him form again part of the background noise, as you put it, before going to Crawford.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Now one thing that has come to our attention is who was there at this meeting at Chequers. The Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary weren't there, but they, of course, had been present at other meetings and had given their own advice. The CDS was there it is thought.

MR RYCROFT: Right.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Indeed he was. Any particular significance to that or not?

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MR RYCROFT: I think I'm the wrong person to ask about that particular meeting.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We have asked the CDS as well.

MR RYCROFT: I mean, from my -- from my knowledge of meetings between the Prime Minister and the military later on in my time there, because this was still while I was sort of establishing myself, so to speak, within Number 10, there were plenty of contacts between the Prime Minister and CDS and other military figures that didn't always include the Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary.

I think the Prime Minister saw those sorts of contacts as very, very important in terms of both helping him understand where the military were coming from and looking ahead to what future issues and problems might be.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Last thing on this from me anyway. The run-up to Crawford. Both the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary minuted the Prime Minister or wrote to him. Jack Straw said it has been opened, "The rewards from your visit to Crawford will be few". Is it right to interpret that as both a policy but also a domestic political comment? I am not entirely sure what was intended.

MR RYCROFT: Yes. Reading on the second sentence, he instantly goes into the party political. So, yes, I think I would read that as rewards in the sense of fairly short-term British public opinion and party political handing.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. So there's also then the correspondence -- well, the letter from the Defence Secretary, from Geoff Hoon --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: -- where he -- he says two things which really

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I want to have you comment on. The first is that:

"The key strategic problem is the spread of WMD, of which Saddam is only one in our present dimension. In objective terms Iran may be the greater problem and ironically we have Saddam bound into the control mechanism."

But the other thing that he does say later on, if I can find the reference, which is Geoff Hoon's minute to the Prime Minister of 22nd March, he says on the second page about possible factors to be kept in mind in the event of a military expedition:

"If a coalition takes control of Baghdad (especially without catching Saddam), it will probably have to stay there for many years."

I just wonder whether you can say whether that lodged in the Prime Minister's mind at all?

MR RYCROFT: I don't know whether that particular sentence from that particular letter lodged in the Prime Minister's mind.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: But the thought?

MR RYCROFT: But the thought undoubtedly. Undoubtedly the thought was in the Prime Minister's mind that if at the end of this we were going to go down the military intervention route, then Phase IV, as it was then called, the aftermath, would be many years.

I think that is -- for me personally and I'm sure for him and us collectively that was a key lesson from earlier interventions; for instance, in the Balkans.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. I think Rod has a question, but just to round off my bit, here are two absolutely central Cabinet Ministers both exerting a degree of cautious comment.

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I am sure re-reading this now the Prime Minister would have taken both of those as caution verging on

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sort of unnecessarily pessimistic.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just coming back on your earlier comment that by the time you came to Number 10 and indeed after 9/11 there was a general belief that the containment wasn't going to work, you have here Geoff Hoon saying in late March:

"We have Saddam bound into an established control mechanism", which of course means containment.

So it would seem he was certainly still of the view that containment was working. It wasn't a universal view that containment wasn't working.

MR RYCROFT: I mean, clearly there was a debate, but the perception of the debate in general terms, as I took up my functions, was that we had -- we were -- 9/11 marked the beginning of the end of the containment strategy in Iraq. Clearly that was not a view that was unanimously shared, but it was the gathering view. It was the dominant view.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Beginning of the end not because it wasn't working, but because American opinion had just gone in a totally different direction after 9/11?

MR RYCROFT: And the Prime Minister's opinion.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And the Prime Minister's opinion, but not the analysis and the expert assessment in Whitehall of whether or not containment was a viable option for continuing to contain Saddam Hussein's threat?

MR RYCROFT: The way that I -- the way that I saw it, coming in fresh to this issue, was that it was a debate which was still ongoing. So it hadn't definitively come down on one side or the other, but it was definitely moving in the direction of, "This is the end of containment" by the time that I started, and that, as

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with most issues, there are always -- you can always find someone on each side of that or indeed along all the different parts of the spectrum from one extreme to the other, but for me my perception at that time was that the spectrum was swinging toward, "This is the end of containment", but that doesn't mean everyone believed that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In that debate, if it was coming to be seen as the end of containment, how many options did that then leave? Was there just at this point essentially the military option?

MR RYCROFT: No, emphatically not. I think again the way the Prime Minister continually put it was that we had no option but to deal with Iraq's WMD, but there were plenty of options within what dealing meant.

So dealing with Saddam's -- with Iraq's WMD, which was our over-arching strategy, could have been done through a number of different options and indeed the options were to some extent sequential. No-one was arguing for jumping straight to a military intervention. Going down the UN route, as it is summarised, was essentially the option of ensuring through a very strict inspection mechanism, backed up by yet another UN Security Council Resolution -- would -- would force Saddam to comply with the obligations to disarm his WMD but without military intervention coming at the end of it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That would only work with the threat of military intervention if he didn't comply.

MR RYCROFT: Certainly in our collective minds the threat of military intervention if he didn't comply was a very important part of the -- of the pressures on him and that from a very early stage in my time at Number 10, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were there any other options being debated

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when you say there were lots of options?

MR RYCROFT: I think there was an option of pushing and getting inspectors back in but leaving it rather open-ended, essentially, you know, French policy. French policy was not to not deal with the WMD. It was to deal with the WMD through inspections, but without going along with the idea of a military intervention if material breaches were made of that and previous resolutions.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks. Well, we've come to Crawford and you weren't there.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We have had evidence from those who were, though, of course, the Prime Minister had entirely private meetings at some point.

Just getting the read-out when the party returned to London, just quoting from David Manning's note of 8th April about the meetings, one thing he said was:

"It also seemed clear..."

This is the Manning note of 8th April. Do you have that?

MS. ALDRED: It is the bottom of that page, Matthew.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: "It also seemed clear [redacted]

Can you just help us interpret the flavor of that? There's provisional, there's possible, not finally decided, but there's also a sense of impetus.

MR RYCROFT: Exactly. Which bit of that needs...?

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, I suppose I am really asking is that exactly the kind of inflection we should take from David's note?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: It's heading that way but nothing is settled?.

MR RYCROFT: Exactly. That's certainly the inflection that I took form that note and I am sure that's intentionally David's summary of the read-out the Prime Minister gave him of the private discussion with President Bush.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I think I'll turn to Lawrence Freedman now. Crawford over. What happens next? Lawrence.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the -- given this impetus, there was an additional part of it which was the conditionality that the UK appear to have put forward to the President, Middle East peace process, better presentation and going through the UN.

Was that again part of the mood music back in -- back in Downing Street? It was understood these were the -- these had to be pursued?

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely. It was understood these had to be pursued. I think there is a lot of -- I am sure plenty written and spoken about what "conditionality" means, what is the strength of those conditions, and my view for what it's worth is that the Prime Minister and we were absolutely clear that all those three things needed to be pursued, and we and he spent huge amounts of political capital in pursuing them with the United States and ensuring that the US pursued them with the -- with the rest of the world.

If your follow-up question is if one of those had not been pursued, would the UK have not joined the US in military action, had it come to that, my answer would be they weren't conditions in that sense. They were things that needed to be done. They

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were things that we were lobbying, influencing, cajoling, advising that should be done. Occasionally -- more than occasionally we did use the word "conditions". I remember David Manning talking about the conditions with Condi Rice, but I think -- I think it -- my recollection was that they were things that needed to be pursued, as you say, but if they hadn't been pursued, they would not have fundamentally altered the equation in our strategy.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, arguably in terms of priorities going through the UN was the one which, if it had not been pursued, would have caused the greatest problems with the Parliamentary Labour Party and colleagues.

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely and the legal basis.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the legal basis. So presumably that one did have a higher standing than the others?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I can see as a matter of fact if the US had not accepted our logic and gone down the UN route, then clearly -- and they had then gone on to take military action under some other legal base, then we would not have joined that action. Absolutely.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You did go to Washington in May '02 with David Manning.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In your record you wrote:

[redacted]

You also mentioned David Manning talking to Condi Rice.

[redacted]

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[redacted]

Does this reflect a sort of awareness or concern we were being taken for granted?

MR RYCROFT: That was absolutely our concern. I think again there would be a slight spectrum of views from within our system over exactly what this conditionality meant, which I tried to describe earlier, and the way that I recall it there was a -- because the Prime Minister in particular was so clear that if it came to it and if -- if we had gone down the UN route and it required military action, then the UK would be side by side with the United States. I think that did lead on some occasions some people in the US system to -- I wouldn't use the phrase take us for granted, but I would -- I would -- I would use the phrase that they did not feel compelled to follow our policy proposals in areas that they didn't want to be doing anyway, including the Middle East peace process.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, did you discuss this with the Prime Minister? Did you convey this impression that you received in Washington to him?

MR RYCROFT: Undoubtedly. I don't recall any particular occasions, but it would have been, you know, an ongoing discussion with the Prime Minister. He would have known all about our visit to Washington and we would have talked about that. I don't know if it was then or some other point, but he -- I recall briefing him for one of his very regular phone calls, video conferences with President Bush to ensure that the policy proposals that we were making on those related issues were absolutely front and centre.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There's also a record again from [redacted]:

"[redacted] American policymakers had come to hear of

'the alleged UK offer of an armoured division for military action against Iraq'. [redacted] a UK officer in Tampa had said that the UK would provide an armoured division."

So another area of potential concern is the military were getting a little ahead of their political masters?

MR RYCROFT: What I recall reading into that was not quite that the military -- the British military were getting ahead of their British military masters, but the American military were reading into the fact that I think we had at this point seconded one person to CentCom -- they were reading into that that therefore we would be part of military action, come what may, and that reading into was too strong, and that therefore we needed to ensure that we made clear all of our other concerns.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And how would -- how was that making clear all of the concerns? Was this just --

MR RYCROFT: At the top the Prime Minister to President Bush. Certainly -- and at the second level David Manning to Condi Rice, and also Jack Straw to Colin Powell.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But quoting again -- this is June 2002 when Rumsfeld met the Prime Minister -- the Prime Minister told him:

"[redacted]",

which could sound like a pretty firm commitment in the event the Americans took action.

I mean, was there a risk of at least mixed messages here, that the determination to demonstrate to the Americans that we would be with them as a sort of entree into American policy making made it very hard for us to say, "But only if the following conditions are met"?

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MR RYCROFT: "Yes" is the -- "yes" is the one word answer. I come back to the point that the Prime Minister's view was that in this scenario, if we had collectively gone down the UN route and it had led to material -- clear evidence of further material breach of Saddam's, therefore if we had our legal base, then in terms of policy, politics, the UK would be with the US in any military action.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could I just chip in? You were there when Prime Minister Blair met Donald Rumsfeld because you noted it.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: It is really whether Donald Rumsfeld was picking up the nuances or was he just hearing very plain unnuanced messages, because they are two very different people?

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely. Again I don't recall his reaction, but, you know, this was clearly an important meeting, but it wasn't the be all and end all. I think with all of these records they are all part of a picture of UK/US engagement, which, as I said earlier – the way I would describe it is there is a spectrum of ways we presented our views collectively to them and indeed a spectrum of views they presented back to us. I would suggest their spectrum was rather wider than our spectrum

Nevertheless different people within our system at different times would stress different parts of this equation, some stressing more the conditionality, the absolute requirement to do A, B, C; others, including the Prime Minister, stressing more the commitment to be side by side. So therefore mixed messages.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to conclude on this little bit, there's a very clear personal commitment from the Prime Minister, but he'd been talking to Bush and indeed to Rumsfeld, politician to politician.

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MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the reasons why -- that's what we discussed before -- the UN commitment had particular force in the UK was because it actually would make the Prime Minister's position incredibly difficult domestically. Was that a point that was conveyed as part of the discussion or was it this was just the right way to do it and a good thing to do?

MR RYCROFT: Again I think both elements of that argument were there in how it was put across to the United States. Again it would depend who was doing the putting across. I, for instance, as a civil servant, would tend to make the policy argument about legal base and about the sort of strategic involvement of the UN and so on rather than what I would judge a rather party political point about the survivability of the Prime Minister, but clearly others would be making that point, and I certainly recall the Prime Minister himself at different times making both of those arguments and indeed many others.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks. Let's move on and ask Rod Lyne to pick up the questions. We are into July I think.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I want to ask about 23rd July [redacted] --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- [redacted].

You minuted this meeting.[1] It's one of relatively few internal meetings in this period on Iraq that were minuted. Why didn't Number 10 officials minute more of the Prime Minister's

[1] A version of which has appeared in the public domain.

internal meetings and indeed phone calls with Cabinet colleagues on these subjects?

MR RYCROFT: I minuted every single meeting [redacted] that I was in, and that were on my subjects, and by that I mean that weren't therefore basically political or ephemeral or that didn't change anything, were just sort of an update, as it were, just sort of comparing notes or sharing information.

I saw it as my job going into Number 10 and throughout my time in Number 10 that my job was to minute in some way or other everything that was related to policy, British policy, on the issues that I was responsible for within Number 10.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And if the Prime Minister was talking to the Foreign or Defence Secretary on the phone about Iraq, would you have been on the line and would you have made some sort of note of that call?

MR RYCROFT: If I had been on -- if I had been available, I would have been on the line unless either one of them had strictly said they wanted it to be personal. Even if they had, I might have been on the line, and I would have made a note of any call that was more than just an ephemeral, passing one. Anything close to a decision I would have recorded.

I wouldn't have recorded everything in a letter or a minute like 23rd July. Sometimes it might have been simply an e-mail to others in Number 10. Particularly, for instance, if I knew that Jonathan Powell or David Manning or another senior member of Number 10 had not been on the call, I would have e-mailed them to tell them what happened.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When the Butler review were looking at this, they came across a minute, indeed preparing the Prime Minister for the Butler review, which referred to the fact he had had

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thirty phone calls -- over thirty phone calls with Jack Straw in the period in question, only one of which was minuted. Does that surprise you?

MR RYCROFT: I think -- I think perhaps there's an issue about what "minuted" means.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: In other words, there --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: "For which a record could be found" I think in this case would be a way of describing it.

So these records -- I mean, if I go back to a point that Mr Blair made in his evidence to us, he said he had lots and lots of discussions about Iraq with colleagues, ad hoc discussions, with a small A and small H I think was the way he put it.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But through the period in which policy was being formed, say between 9/11 and March of 2003, a year and a half or so, there are extremely few internal meetings on Iraq which are minuted. I mean, this is one of the few.

Now every meeting you attended you would have made some record if there was some substance?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So are we missing a lot of papers?

MR RYCROFT: I don't know. I hadn't seen the note about the thirty -- the thirty calls.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: I have no idea whether I listened into thirty or only ten during that period.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But somewhere there might be some e-mails --

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Can I just show you, so it's in your mind as well as ours, so you have a copy close up?

MR RYCROFT: Right. Well, I would suggest that there were some -- I don't know is the answer. My -- my guess is that some of those thirty I was not listening to, because one or other of them had said it was a personal call. A further set of those thirty would have been recorded only by e-mail rather than -- and I don't know whether -- the extent to which Number 10 system went through all the e-mails in giving you the paperwork, and others of those thirty where I would have been listening in I would have not recorded, because it was, you know, just touching base or sharing information rather than -- rather than decision-making.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. If we come back to meetings, in the course of 2002 --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Can we have it back, please?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- roughly how many meetings, internal discussions with the Prime Minister about Iraq do you think you would have been present at and made some form of record?

MR RYCROFT: Well, I think I've read through all the records I made that were formal records like this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. There aren't very many of those.

MR RYCROFT: Well, there were six files like that that I read in preparation for this, not all by me I should say. Some were things coming into me. I don't know. I am sure we could add them up and give you a numerical number of how many there were in that period.

What I'm saying now, though, is there were -- I didn't see in that file of things that would have gone to you any e-mails from me other than e-mails that had already been given to the Hutton Inquiry or the Butler Inquiry.

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SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you would have written quite a lot of e-mails?

MR RYCROFT: I would have written them. On a given day I suppose I probably on average would have written five to ten formal things like this that are on file on Iraq, or EU, or Northern Ireland, or defence, and -- I don't know -- 60 to 150 e-mails roughly -- maybe that's an exaggeration; maybe 50 to 100 e-mails -- many, many more times e-mails than records, most of which would have been internal within Number 10, some of which would have been a quick e-mail to the Foreign Office saying, "Please can you provide A, B and C for PM Qs tomorrow?" or those sorts of things.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You see, if you're trying to assemble the evidence of how the policy was formed and how the strategic options were reviewed in the critical period of 2002, the most critical period being between spring and autumn, because by autumn the strategy was pretty well fixed --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- you have the April meeting in Chequers and you jump forward to the 23rd July meeting. My colleagues will correct me if I'm wrong, but between that -- and those are meetings with ministers ad hoc -- they aren't private committees -- different cast lists. There isn't actually sort of records of these discussions, and yet the Prime Minister in this period is making his mind up and obviously having discussions, as he told us, about this. So there's a big void there. We're about gathering evidence.

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, I don't accept --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Between April and July there will have been meetings you will have been at and made some form of record of.

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MR RYCROFT: Absolutely.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.

MR RYCROFT: In addition -- and I hope you have got all of that -- there will have been these phone calls with Bush, phone calls with Schröder, which --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: The phone calls are well documented.

MR RYCROFT: -- clearly for you and at the time for Whitehall provide in terms of what the Prime Minister was saying the Prime Minister's view. Clearly one purpose of having such emphasis on rapid and accurate and by most standards widely circulated records of things like phone calls is to give everyone the Prime Minister's view.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. We will come back on to various phone calls. There's a good audit trail of phone calls, but not of these meetings. That's very helpful. Thank you very much. Sorry to take time on it, but it's actually very important.

In the 23rd July meeting -- I don't know how clear your recollection is of that -- you had reservations expressed particularly by Jack Straw, as he had done in his minute earlier in the year. He talked about the case being thin. He talked about differences of political strategy with the Americans. He had reservations on the legal side being expressed by the Attorney General.

You had, I would say, characterising it, a rather unenthusiastic attitude from the Defence Secretary and perhaps cautious attitude from the Chief of Defence Staff, but the first conclusion in your record you draw from this meeting is:

"We should work on the assumption that the UK will take part in any military action."

Was that reflecting the overall tenor of the meeting or was

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it really reflecting the Prime Minister's personal view of the top down approach that you referred to earlier?

MR RYCROFT: I do recall the meeting [redacted]. I'm pretty sure that those conclusions were the Prime Minister's conclusions in the meeting of the meeting.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: His summing up?

MR RYCROFT: His summing up, exactly, although looking at it now, I see I didn't record, "The Prime Minister concluded that ..." So I can't, hand on heart, say that, but I wouldn't have made up the assumption A unless it had been the Prime Minister's view.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He steered the meeting to that conclusion effectively.

MR RYCROFT: That was the conclusion of the meeting.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you recall whether the Attorney General's fairly stark view on the legal obstacles made an impact on the Prime Minister at that meeting?

MR RYCROFT: I'm pretty sure the Prime Minister knew that was what the Attorney General thought at that time. Indeed, of course, that was one of the impetuses for going down the UN route to get what turned out to be 1441, which I presume is why it says, "The situation might, of course, change."

It did change with 1441, but yes, I'm pretty sure that that -- that it did make an impact, but not because it was news to the Prime Minister, but because it was a very important part of the work.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

However, I wouldn't quite agree with the way that you put – that you described the conjunction. The conjunction of terrorism and WMD is a topic of many Prime Ministerial speeches and it is not about Saddam being responsible for 9/11 or links between al-Qa'ida and Iraq. It is about --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is that sort of broader link rather than the specific non-compliance with UN resolution over WMD concern.

MR RYCROFT: Yes, I see what you mean. I think it's probably both would be the answer.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sorry.

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

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[redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Right. Thank you. That's helpful.

Just a couple of points of follow-up to the meeting. You recorded some follow-up points, one of which referred to:

"The Prime Minister would revert on the questions of whether funds could be spent in preparations for this operation."

Now the Chancellor had not been invited to the meeting.

MR RYCROFT: He had not been at the meeting. Whether he was invited or not I don't know.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And the Deputy Prime Minister also wasn't at the meeting --

MR RYCROFT: Correct.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- which is standard form for a meeting of this kind, that you wouldn't normally have invited the Chancellor

or the Deputy Prime Minister or you might or might not have done?

MR RYCROFT: Well, it wasn't me doing the inviting.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Who did the inviting?

MR RYCROFT: Literally the ring around would have been the -- (overtalking) -- guest list.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Who determined who was to be invited? Who decided this for meetings?

MR RYCROFT: I think the decision would have been Jonathan Powell's.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Right.

MR RYCROFT: Whether David Manning or I would have drawn up a proposal I don't recall on this occasion, but --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: -- we might have done. We would -- I am sure if I had done it, I think I would have included on the list the Deputy Prime Minister and Chancellor, but I don't know on this particular occasion.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Uh-huh. Because it is a major decision with lots of implications including for government spending, how did the Prime Minister follow up on the question of funding?

MR RYCROFT: Through separate contacts with the Chancellor. I mean, I think it was clear that there weren't major decisions on funding or that had consequences for funding from this meeting, but clearly there were financial issues related to the discussion at the meeting, which is why that's one of the conclusions.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You are looking at the possibility of going to war, which is pretty expensive, and perhaps a long drawn-out

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operation, but the follow-up mechanism is not that you write a highly classified letter or a Private Secretary note to the Treasury with a record of the meeting. It is that the Prime Minister has a word with the Chancellor, which is perhaps not minuted.

MR RYCROFT: Indeed.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was the modus operandi.

MR RYCROFT: With the Chancellor.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, because of the nature of the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Does this imply that the Chancellor at this stage anyway was thought to be not aligned with the policy that the Prime Minister was on?

MR RYCROFT: No.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It doesn't imply that?

MR RYCROFT: It doesn't imply that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What was the Chancellor's attitude in the middle of 2002 to the prospect of -- do you recall?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall, but I think I would have recalled if it had been significantly different from the Prime Minister, but I'm sure you have asked him.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So there was not thought to be a difficulty with the Chancellor, but matters involving the Chancellor had to be handled personally by the Prime Minister?

MR RYCROFT: Exactly.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Quite a lot has been written about this recently in the public domain. Okay. Thank you.

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Then there was another follow-up point. The Foreign Secretary would send the Prime Minister advice on positions of countries in the region.

Were you at this stage getting streams of advice from the Foreign Office in London and from its posts about -- because the subject now was very much coming up in the public domain, particularly out of Washington, and even more so in the weeks that followed this meeting, about regional reactions, likely regional reactions should there be a military action.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What sort of picture were you getting?

MR RYCROFT: I would say we were getting -- we collectively were getting a very full picture from British ambassadors in the region, which sometimes was collated by the Foreign Office into more formal advice to the Prime Minister and at other times, you know, one of the functions -- one of my functions as Private Secretary was to print off telegrams, e-grams and put them in the box, and on average I probably would have put in five each week roughly.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Each week?

MR RYCROFT: Roughly in addition to the things that were coming in. Sometimes, you know, if there were -- clearly there would have been spikes and troughs, but as a general rule if it wasn't urgent but it was interesting background information, so weekend box as opposed to overnight, I would roughly put in that somewhere.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What was the sort of picture you were getting from the region?

MR RYCROFT: I think it was rather mixed. I think I should add that the picture was enhanced in terms of the Prime Minister's

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own contacts -- in terms of the Prime Minister's own view by his direct contacts with the Arab leaders, which on the whole I didn't sit in on, because they were dealt with by the other Private Secretary, but I am sure I would have followed them as they happened and would have been particularly interested in their discussions on Iraq.

I think that the general picture that I recall was one of rather mixed messages, that there was a lot of public criticism of the policy that ended up with military intervention, but quite a lot of private nuancing of that public message, indeed going so far as some who would have been encouraging the countries concerned and I am sure in parallel with President Bush to go down that route.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: At a later stage a large number of former ambassadors to the region went public with their opposition to the policy, but at this formative stage were the current ambassadors serving in the region expressing misgivings in the traffic you saw?

MR RYCROFT: I don't -- I don't recall that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No.

MR RYCROFT: I mean, clearly by then it was a very divisive issue in terms of British public opinion. So it was, you know, pretty obvious that amongst the official population opinions -- personal opinions would be divided as well, and it was equally pretty obvious that those serving in the Arab world would reflect in their advice about what's happening in each country the views of that country, but I don't recall a single occasion when an ambassador, for instance, came in to say what their personal view was on the policy that was markedly out of line with the route we were going down, which by this stage was pressing for what turned out to be 1441.

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SIR RODERIC LYNE: You are not an Arabist. I think your colleagues in Number 10 at this time were also not Arabists as such, regional experts, although David Manning had been ambassador to Israel.

Were you bothered -- did you feel you were getting sufficient input of expert advice on the Arab dimension, on the state of Iraq, on all these tribal issues, Sunni and Shia and all of that stuff? Was that coming through -- was that bit of the picture being filled in for you and the Prime Minister at this very important stage?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, I feel that it was. It is perhaps a moment to say -- as you said, I am not an Arabist. I am not an Iraq expert. I didn't get the job because of my knowledge of the Arab world. Private Secretary jobs are so broad-ranging that the crucial competence it seems to me is picking up new issues rather than being expert in all of them or indeed any of them, and I always describe myself as the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, not Policy Adviser to the Private Secretary -- to the Prime Minister. I saw myself as a filter of all of this advice coming in rather than a generator of that advice. So on all of those Arab-related issues that you have mentioned I didn't have my own views other than just sort of general public views.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you were able to channel enough expertise to the Prime Minister that he was not in ignorance of that side of the equation? That's my question.

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely, and the streams that go through that channel were, firstly, these e-grams I mentioned; secondly, the advice from the Foreign Office; thirdly -- we have not mentioned but it is in our paperwork -- the seminar with academic experts --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come on to that later.

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MR RYCROFT: -- which we arranged; and, fourthly, other significant documents that reached us in Number 10, whether they be public essays through to intelligence.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And sources of expertise including SIS, which had some strong Arabist expertise?

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely, absolutely.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. I would like to just move quickly to the Prime Minister's correspondence with President Bush. At the end of July the personal letter that David Manning actually carried across the Atlantic, did the Prime Minister draft this himself?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And who was then offered a chance to comment on the draft?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall on this particular one, but my guess would be Jonathan Powell, David Manning, myself, Sally Morgan and Alastair Campbell.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But nobody outside of Number 10?

MR RYCROFT: Then I think there would have been a separate arrangement to consult the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary and go back to our earlier discussion, probably the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor, but I would be surprised if that was on the basis of an actual text. I would say this is in the realm of speculation, because it wasn't my job within Number 10 to do any of those things.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you recall having any reservations about any bits of this?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I mean, I recall the discussion about the first sentence --

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SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: -- and -- I mean, not the ins and outs of it, but the fact of it --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted].

MR RYCROFT: I remember. That's to say, I don't remember the ins and outs of it, but what I do remember is that there was some challenge within Number 10 to the Prime Minister on that particular sentence for a mixture of, if you like, tactical and strategy reasons. I remember the visit. I think I was on that visit with David Manning. I remember vividly talking about it, not just the drafting of it but the general issue with him on the plane.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: On what basis would the Prime Minister have formed the views -- this is quite a long letter, quite a lot of detail about foreign policy and so on, and he drafts this himself from a blank sheet of paper. Where would those views have come from that he expressed in it?

MR RYCROFT: Same as writing a speech. There will be all sorts of things that would go in, and just the way he works was to absorb all of those and then start, as you say, with a blank sheet of paper and write it out in long head.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would he have asked you for chunks of material in advance and so forth?

MR RYCROFT: For a speech he would have done and did, but for something like this more often than not I recall they sort of popped out on a Monday morning without us knowing on a Friday night or over the weekend that's what he was going to be thinking about.

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I don't know on this occasion whether he said on the Friday, "I am going to spend some of the weekend writing a note to George. Please can you give me some ideas?" He might have done. I suspect he just did it because he knew, you know, it was an important moment.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He addresses the question of what happens after Saddam in this letter and whether it could lead in time or should lead in time to a democratic Iraq governed by the people.

"[redacted]

[redacted]

How much of a debate was there about the feasibility and viability about doing something that would end up with a democratic Iraq, what the outcomes were?

MR RYCROFT: Within the British system or the Americans?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Within Number 10, around the Prime Minister, how much were you debating these issues?

MR RYCROFT: I think that was a very live debate with a lot of advice from the Foreign Office in particular, but it was one of those things that was -- it was a constant.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Written advice from the Foreign Office. Would he call experts over and actually talk to them about it?

MR RYCROFT: I'm sure there is on the files written advice from the Foreign Office about this, but what I meant really was more -- was discussions. I mean, this was an ongoing issue, clearly with some important points of decision, but a lot of this was an iterative process, if you like, with the Prime Minister getting his own thoughts in order to best present them to President Bush.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you recall who the voices were in that discussion?

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MR RYCROFT: Certainly the people I mentioned within Number 10 and within the Foreign Office. Certainly people like John Sawers were very -- I can't remember at that time which job he was doing, but he would certainly have been an influential voice.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Isn't he in Cairo by this stage? I think he's in Cairo at this point.

MR RYCROFT: Jeremy Greenstock in New York I would say was an influential voice not just on the UN issues -- I think he was at the UN at that point -- but on broader issues.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Any Arabists in London?

MR RYCROFT: I recall that Edward Chaplin, who I think is an Arabist and was the Middle East Director, came to some meetings, and, as you said earlier, SIS has a lot of expertise in Arabist issues, and some of them would have had direct access to the Prime Minister normally without me being there but probably with David Manning being there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Final question from me on this point. Just going forward a month from the delivery of the letter, and we have obviously discussed a lot of that with David Manning and others, the Prime Minister spoke to President Bush on 31st July and then again when he returned from holiday on 29th August and you recorded those conversations, and you circulated two records of the conversations.

You circulated one internally, a full record, and then an expurgated version for Whitehall, which differed in particular by not referring to the Prime Minister's note to President Bush.

Was it normal practice to send out an expurgated version for the version outside Number 10 and why were you not informing those who got this, still a limited circulation, highly classified, that the Prime Minister had written to President

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Bush?

MR RYCROFT: It was not normal practice, but I do recall doing it on a number of occasions. You haven't the whole record, but I would have thought possibly about five occasions and each time for a particular reason. As you say, there were things referred to in the phone call which I judged -- and I am sure David Manning would have given me very clear directions on these sort of issues -- that must not be referred to in correspondence in Whitehall.

So I recall the choice that I had was either only doing an expurgated version or doing two versions, and so on these occasions I decided that it was better to do two versions; in other words, better to have a whole version that would be only on the file for two or three people than not to record that at all.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is the correct implication from that that very few people were to know that the Prime Minister was writing to President Bush on this subject in this way?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, and I think that was a conscious decision.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: There might have been even an undertaking between the Prime Minister and the President this was a private dialogue in writing.

MR RYCROFT: Certainly in the Prime Minister's mind it was a private dialogue. Whether he made that explicit to President Bush I don't know. Of course, in terms of his impact what the Prime Minister was aiming for clearly was Bush personally, but I think that I and I imagine David Manning and others would have thought it was going to be important to have impact for it to go round a slightly wider group at the Washington end, which, of course -- you know, you get into complications.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did this bother you this wasn't a dialogue?

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There was never a letter back from President Bush throughout this correspondence?

MR RYCROFT: No. It wasn't intended to be a correspondence. It was intended to be I think yet another strand in our engagement with the US administration that would fit in policy terms with all the other strands, but which would be the icing on the cake, so to speak, would be particularly targeted at the President himself.

Their purpose is -- their purpose was to influence President Bush, and evidence of how successful they were came not from a reply, which as you say never came, but from the fact that President Bush accepted the advice -- parts of the advice on some occasions.

I do recall on the phone calls and the video conferences that as a general rule President Bush would begin the first contact after one of these had landed saying, you know, "Thank you for your note. I found it really helpful. I agreed with all of it" or, "I think we should come back to talk about your idea of X".

You know, they made an impact in terms of being read and getting on the agenda and I think that was half the battle. I am sure others have told you about the difficulties of getting advice to the President in unvarnished terms from our perspective and the difficulties that Colin Powell in particular had of doing that. So these were an important channel.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks. We'd like to ask just a few questions about Camp David itself and then we will have a break, but not a long one. Usha.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Thanks very much indeed. Now we move to September 2002. You accompanied the Prime Minister to Camp David?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

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BARONESS PRASHAR: My understanding is that you were not in the room for the discussion of the UN route, but you minuted the subsequent discussion on presentation, on public presentation?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, Baroness. What happened was there was a meeting between the President and the Prime Minister, which David Manning and Condi Rice were at. I think -- was that the one that Vice President Cheney was at as well?

BARONESS PRASHAR: Indeed.

MR RYCROFT: The rest of us were sitting in another room at Camp David, but rather than twiddling our thumbs we thought we would discuss things of mutual interest. Because Alastair Campbell was there -- I think -- was that the one where his American opposite number was there, Karen Hughes? The discussion was largely about public presentation of Iraq policy, as you say, which I reported.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Was there confidence before you arrived at Camp David that President Bush would agree to the UN route?

MR RYCROFT: I think we were very nearly there, yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: So this was --

MR RYCROFT: I think this was -- this was the sort of -- the final confirmation and indeed the public expression of a policy decision by President Bush, which he had been working towards over that summer.

I remember it very well, because over that summer there were many, many different voices coming out of the American system for and against the UN route. It was a very febrile debate, which was an absolutely crucial one from our point of view, and we needed to make sure that President Bush was going to come down on the right side. That would have been absolutely crucial to our strategy. I think we knew just before Camp David that he would. I think there might have been a contact between Condi Rice and

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David Manning and a phone call between the President and the Prime Minister before the actual summit at Camp David itself.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Was any thought given to the fact that -- in case he hadn't agreed, what were the alternatives or was he just putting all his energy into laying the foundations for him to agree with?

MR RYCROFT: Well, I think certainly our primary job over that period leading up to Camp David was to get the right answer. If we hadn't got the right answer from our point of view, then clearly we would have been in a completely different scenario without --

BARONESS PRASHAR: Was any preparatory work being done on what the alternatives might be, had he not agreed?

MR RYCROFT: I'm sure there will have been. I don't recall now myself knowing what that was, but there was -- I haven't talked about it at all today, but there was a Cabinet Office-led process to bring in advice across government on all of these Iraq-related issues which went on under David Manning's guidance, but with his other hat on, his Cabinet Office hat on, but I, being on the Number 10 side, was not so involved on that.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Can I just turn to the whole question of the actual presentation of the policy case, because on 2nd September you drew up a note entitled "Iraq: Difficult Questions" for the Prime Minister in advance of the press conference.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Did you feel that the line taken was an accurate summary of the UK's policy towards Iraq in that paper and did it reflect the Prime Minister's position?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, yes and yes.

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BARONESS PRASHAR: As agreed as Her Majesty's Government's position or the Prime Minister's position?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Because you gave us a scenario. You are sitting in the anteroom with Alastair Campbell and Karen Hughes discussing presentation. You know, what was it based on? Was it your understanding it was an accurate summary of the UK's policy, the Prime Minister's view?

MR RYCROFT: My recollection is that it was -- the discussion in Camp David was a -- was a discussion between, if you like, the two heads of the communications efforts of our two governments, who would have reflected the Prime Minister's and President's views, but also the views of the British and American governments. So that was the one in Camp David.

Then on the press conference there's a lot in here -- I think this is me pulling together material from a lot of different points of view. In re-reading this in preparation, I saw that there was some basically party political paragraphs in here, which I certainly wouldn't have written myself, but I cut and paste to have it all in one place for the Prime Minister.

BARONESS PRASHAR: The picture I'm getting is a lot of preparatory work had been done before Camp David?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: There was a view he would agree to that?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Based on all the preparatory work and the views they actually formed the basis of the presentation policy, the paper that you drew up. Would that be accurate?

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely.

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BARONESS PRASHAR: Now when it came to discussing public presentation with the Americans at Camp David, did the conversation reveal any different nuances in the UK and US positions?

MR RYCROFT: A lot.

BARONESS PRASHAR: What were they?

MR RYCROFT: I think the British side led by Alastair Campbell on this issue at that meeting was trying to get the American side to see just how great that anti-American feeling was particularly in the Middle East.

BARONESS PRASHAR: [redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. This was not a one-off. I mean, this was a theme, a sub-theme of the Prime Minister's contacts with the President, and I'm sure Alastair Campbell's with his opposite numbers, most of which I wouldn't have been involved in, because they would have been on the phone day-to-day, but this one, because we were all there, I report.

So we were coming at it from very different perspectives. Dare I say it, I think we thought we had some advice that the US communicators could helpfully take on board, but it wasn't their natural communication style. They tended to be very direct and to – certainly those at the Cheney end – Vice President Cheney end of the spectrum, they would tend to be very forward, very direct about what the American interest is and anyone who disagrees doesn't matter.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Would you say that the focus on presentation on the question of, you know, democracy and Americanisation, and the question of international support, multilateralism was a presentation or do you think this message was taken up at the deeper policy level?

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MR RYCROFT: It was absolutely at a deeper policy level. This was the public communications aspect of that deeper level. So it's absolutely the case that the Prime Minister believed in going down the UN route, in doing things multilaterally as a coalition..

BARONESS PRASHAR: That was the Prime Minister, but was that the message being received, understood and taken on board by the Americans?

MR RYCROFT: There are Americans and there are Americans.

BARONESS PRASHAR: I'm talking about at this meeting.

MR RYCROFT: At this meeting, absolutely.

BARONESS PRASHAR: President Bush and even Dick Cheney?

MR RYCROFT: Dick Cheney wasn't at this bit of the meeting, as he was in with the President and Prime Minister when this meeting was going on, but we sort of reported back to each other I remember afterwards. So we heard from them what they had discussed. I think I would have recorded that and --*.

BARONESS PRASHAR: [redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: Oh, sorry. That is the report. That is the reporting back.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Exactly. So he was in the room?

MR RYCROFT: He was in the room. So your question is: did he agree at that bit of the meeting? I doubt it. I don't remember his body language, but, you know, I don't think that someone like him would have been convinced frankly by anything that was said.

BARONESS PRASHAR: We have touched earlier on the containment policy, because you record the Prime Minister saying containment

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policy had never fully worked. I mean, on what basis did you say that and what evidence did you have to support that view?

MR RYCROFT: I think he took it -- I think he said that on the basis that containment had not worked in terms of disarming Saddam. So Saddam still had his weapons of mass destruction, and he was still in breach of that whole series of UN Security Council Resolutions.

BARONESS PRASHAR: That was the Prime Minister's genuine view?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: It was basically that containment hadn't worked in disarming --

MR RYCROFT: Containment had not led to the disarmament of Saddam, which is what was required of him by a whole series of UN resolutions, and after 9/11 the risk of a Saddam armed with WMD was too great a risk to carry.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Do you think by this stage it had become a kind of perceived wisdom that this has become -- kind of everybody was assuming it wasn't working, or was it based on any kind of analysis?

MR RYCROFT: I think it was absolutely based on analysis and judgments and JIC judgments of what WMD Saddam continued to have. So, yes, it was based on judgments and those judgments were shared by the rest of the world.

There is a clause in UN Resolution 1441 just after the moment we are talking about which meant every single -- either 14 out of 15 or all 15 members of the Security Council voted for that. It says something like, "Considering that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction are a threat to international peace and stability".

That to me was a recognition that every country on the Security Council, including Syria and France and Russia, all

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thought that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and therefore the policy of containment had not led to their disarmament.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we deserve a break for five minutes or so.

(Short break)

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Lawrence is going to start us off again. Lawrence, over to you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we left before the break with the focus on presentation and Iraqi WMD, which takes us neatly on to what happened almost immediately after Camp David, which is the preparation of the dossier, but just before that can you just give us a picture of again something you mentioned before the break, which were the JIC assessments?

How carefully were these read by the Prime Minister? Would this have been a priority read for him when it appeared in the box or might he just have glanced through it?

MR RYCROFT: It would have been a priority read for him. I would suggest that any -- there are not that many JIC assessments. So I think he would have read all of the ones that went into his box and certainly anything on as live and interesting an issue as Iraq he would have read very carefully would be my guess, and he might well have talked them through probably with some combination of Jonathan Powell, David Manning or me.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you would have had discussions about what these assessments meant?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I don't recall the particular discussions, but I know there would have been, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the issues which -- almost every

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time we have raised these assessments we have drawn attention to the various caveats --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- "sporadic" and "patchy" and words like that. Was that part of the conversation? Do you think there was an awareness of just how -- again due to something that has been said to us -- thin some of the intelligence was?

MR RYCROFT: I don't really think I have anything to add to what other witnesses have said about this, because they have been much more centrally involved in it than I was.

My own personal view from that time for what it is worth is that there is a bit of glamour associated with intelligence for many politicians and not just politicians, and perhaps, you know, the agencies play up to that. Sorry. That's a misleading phrase. They use the fact that politicians are interested in their product. There's a sort of -- there's an urgency. It's in a red folder. It looks different from normal things in a box or that are being discussed. The fact it is intelligence I think makes people interested in it.

I think that from my -- my recollection and my experience the caveats and so on were well understood by the Prime Minister I think and those of us around him. I think we knew what intelligence was. We knew what assessment was. We knew this was a question of balancing and judgment and so on.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you have sort of follow up from these assessments? Can you recall wishing to go back to JIC or go back to SIS simply as a result of these assessments?

MR RYCROFT: I do recall that on some occasions, yes, and going back in writing or -- yes, in writing. I actually don't recall one on Iraq at the moment, but I can recall on other issues.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Not obviously on Iraq but as a --

MR RYCROFT: As a general rule.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You weren't concerned about doing that.

What about getting other documents on Iraqi WMD? Apart from JIC I think there was a PLP briefing paper of March 2002 as well and there was obviously the September dossier. Are you aware of any other briefing documents on Iraq that were sort of coming into the Prime Minister and then also going out to the rest of the Cabinet?

MR RYCROFT: Well, I certainly recall things going into the Prime Minister that were sometimes JIC assessments and sometimes raw intelligence. I don't recall whether they went to the rest of the Cabinet. I know the JIC assessments did, but I don't recall whether the extra bits, if you like, that were coming in sometimes directly and personally by C and other times as part of John Scarlett's weekly and then daily intelligence updates.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So, I mean, did you feel -- accepting what we now know about the variation of the assessments from what seemed to be there, but do you feel there was a pretty balanced representative selection of views going to the Prime Minister on this particular question?

MR RYCROFT: No, I don't think it was balanced. I think it was -- I think it was -- well, I think it was the view of the intelligence. As it turned out, it was wrong. So in that sense it wasn't balanced. It depends what you mean by "balanced".

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: My qualification was in terms of what was generally felt to be at the time.

MR RYCROFT: Oh, I see. Yes, I see.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you aware of any challenges --

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another way to put it: were there any challenges coming through to what the intelligence was saying? Was there anything that was -- that might have questioned the consensus that you recall?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. For instance, Putin and Chirac on separate occasions both essentially said, "Your intelligence is wrong. There isn't any WMD". So that, if you like, was a challenge. I don't recall anyone in our system saying that, but --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And Putin was later in the -- and Chirac. I think there was a press conference.

MR RYCROFT: The one I'm thinking of is the Putin press conference and then a Chirac phone call.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That was after the dossier.

MR RYCROFT: Oh, okay. Before the dossier? Well, as I said in answer to the Baroness' question about 1441, every country on the Security Council thought that Saddam had WMD and they were a threat to international peace and stability.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the consensus was --

MR RYCROFT: The consensus -- but my point is not just within the British intelligence community but within the world -- was that Saddam had WMD and of course he had used them and would make great efforts to prevent access later on to the inspectors.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How well briefed was the Prime Minister on the distinction between different kinds of WMDs? You talk about it as a single ball of wax. JIC said his nuclear programme was effectively frozen. So you are only talking about a serious threat from chemical and biological, which had their own limitations in terms of delivery, range, effect?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you think the Prime Minister was really

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conscious of that or did he think of WMD in the round as a massive threat to humanity?

MR RYCROFT: I definitely wouldn't want to contradict anything he himself has said about what he thought. My own view of what he thought was much more the second than the first, that WMD per se was the threat, that Saddam had the intent and the weapons and the past record of use, and that was the big picture, and, of course, he understood the differences between nuclear, chemical and biological and within those I think at that time had some understanding, having read the draft dossier as much as anything else, as to what we actually meant by capability under each of those headings, but I think from his -- what he tended to talk about with other foreign leaders in particular was WMD, full stop.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I ask you about a particular document, which is a one-page note -- it starts with a one-page note that the Prime Minister sent to David Manning on 1st September requesting a briefing on five questions about Iraq.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Two to three pages of what we know about the existing WMD programme, and then the next day, the Monday, Mark Sedwill sent you advice on four of these questions, which you then passed on to the Prime Minister.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Under the heading "Does Iraq possess WMD?" this briefing note states in a very unqualified way:

"Yes, Iraq is still hiding weapons of mass destruction in a range of locations."

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you know who wrote this briefing note?

MR RYCROFT: No, but obviously -- clearly it has come from the Foreign Office. I don't know beyond that, but I think if I had read that at the time -- when I read that at the time, I can't imagine that I would have been surprised by those two sentences, because that was the consensus that there were at that time, not just in the UK.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, when the Prime Minister asked for a briefing, though, does the provenance normally matter to him? Wouldn't he have liked to have known who had written it?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: And who had seen it clearly.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would have just been --

MR RYCROFT: I am saying now I don't know who wrote it. I am not saying I didn't know then who wrote it or who had cleared it or what the provenance of it was and so on. Of course, this was concurrent I think with the preparation of the dossier, of which there is a huge amount of evidence for you about who saw what when and who did what when.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. This is actually quite an interesting document slightly separate from that.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It has -- I mean, the assertion is unqualified, which is a contrast, as we have just discussed, to some of the JIC assessments. Was this drawn to the Prime Minister's attention?

MR RYCROFT: The contrast you mean?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: I don't know that it was.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So just to finish on this particular thing, I mean, in terms of the timing, which I think is just before Camp David, this will be what the Prime Minister had with him, a very unqualified assertion about --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- what we knew and how we knew it. It wasn't -- it went a bit further than JIC in that respect?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I mean, again, you know, looking back now and trying to put myself in my shoes then, firstly, as I said, I wouldn't have been surprised by the tone of that. Secondly, I think I would have thought that that was a -- it comes from the Foreign Office and it was a -- it would have been certainly cleared by whoever needed to clear it. So if it was based on JIC assessments or even more so raw intelligence, it would have been cleared by people who needed to clear it, but it would have been based on all the sources as well.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks. Just another event, that was at the same time as the dossier but slightly separate from it, was 12th September when the Prime Minister and David Manning were briefed on some new highly sensitive intelligence by C, a senior SIS officer. Were you aware of that meeting out of the intelligence?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall that actual meeting, but I am as sure as I can be without absolutely knowing that David at least would have told me about it after -- straight after it had happened.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you get any sense from him of the impact of it? Did David say, "This is startling stuff. We are in a new game now" or was it just a bit more of the picture?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall. I mean, what I do recall is there were a number of events like that where there was new

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intelligence coming in, perhaps particularly a bit later on in the run-up after 1441, while we were -- while the inspectors were looking for WMD, and there were some quite breathless moments when intelligence was rushed in saying, "We found it. It was underneath a potato field" or "It is underneath a hospital car park", and the inspectors rushed off to go and find it and found crowds waiting there for them to shoo them away. So I remember in general intelligence came in and did have an impact, but this particular one I'm afraid I couldn't answer.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to those later events. Just again at this particular period, I mean, how often were there sort of extra meetings or special meetings with C or with a senior SIS person coming over specially to brief the Prime Minister on intelligence? Was this quite normal?

MR RYCROFT: I would say that -- I don't know what the numbers were, but certainly whenever C felt that he had something that he wanted to brief the Prime Minister personally on, then, you know, time was always found for that sort of meeting, but I don't know.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is slightly beside the point, but an interesting contrast with the evidence we got from Eliza Manningham-Buller, who doesn't seem to have had a lot of direct access or contact. Would time have been found for her if she asked to see the Prime Minister at this time on a matter of concern?

MR RYCROFT: This is outside my area that I was dealing with largely. I don't recall a time when she asked. Of course, she was there in many of the meetings that were set up subsequently.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It's the nature of the relationship.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: They would have seen one if they thought

there was something important to say. By and large would it be C who would come along?

MR RYCROFT: From what I recall my big picture is SIS I would say had a privileged relationship with the Prime Minister. Absolutely. Secondly, that typically it would be C plus one and the one would be the person, you know, who had responsibility for the area, but I don't recall it happening a lot, but that could just be because it wasn't me in the meetings. It was David Manning in the meetings.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When you refer to this privileged relationship, do you think this was something where in some respects SIS was filling a vacuum, that it was in a sense demand-led or was it supply-led? Was it that they were seeking to muscle in, if you like, or push themselves forward?

MR RYCROFT: I didn't see it like that, I must say. I saw it that they had a product that was very interesting to the Prime Minister. Again a little bit later on, but I think it helps answer the question, he was desperate to see whatever product there was that would have proved that Saddam had WMD, was hiding, was continuing to produce it, whatever, and so their product was absolutely in demand, and it would have been game changing in terms of the second resolution in that period between 1441 and the military action.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it was demand-led, but SIS would do their best to respond to the demand?

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely and not just SIS, because, of course, John Scarlett and the JIC as well.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: So -- yes.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to complete this little bit, there was something that David Omand said which has been much quoted since, where he said that because of the past successes of SIS -- but in this case he thought that SIS over-promised and under-delivered. Do you have a view on that.?

MR RYCROFT: He's dead right, absolutely right. We didn't know that then. We were getting -- we were getting the promise and the promise of future delivery, but it was only when in particular the -- well, I guess after the military invasion that we realised just how much of their product was false.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. Is there anything else you would want to add to that particular -- this particular question of this relationship between C and the Prime Minister on the detail of the hard intelligence?

MR RYCROFT: The main thing: just that anything I say should not trump anything he or the Prime Minister or David Manning says, because they were much more involved in it than I was.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can we now turn to the dossier itself? You are copied in on the e-mails chains on the various drafts.

Can you just say what your role actually was in the process and how you became involved and what that involvement entailed?

MR RYCROFT: At the time I didn't -- I didn't feel centrally involved. I knew there was a process set up, as you know, in the Cabinet Office and so on, and then within Number 10 there was a particular communications angle, but I was the Prime Minister's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, including Iraq. So I felt that I had a locus to at the very least follow the ins and outs of the debate and to keep an eye on it from the Prime Minister's perspective, and I recall being in some of them but by no means all of the meetings about this, and talking a lot to the Prime

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Minister about it, passing on his views on some occasions to John Scarlett, and in particular preparing for the debate in the House of Commons on the -- that coincided with its publication. So sort of in and around it, but not central in terms of the publication of it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, I recall there is quite a lot about the views of Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell being passed back to John Scarlett. I am not that aware of much of a record of the Prime Minister's views on the draft dossier itself. What sort of things was he commenting on?

MR RYCROFT: There's only one incident that I actually recall, and it was I think literally the day that John Scarlett was taking it to the printers, and the Prime Minister had a suggestion that something should be taken out of the dossier, which was the bit about -- it was human rights abuses. It was to do with the punishment meted out I think to the losing football team. It was something like that, and again I don't have the paperwork with me, but I -- what I recall is that the Prime Minister rang -- it was Sunday morning, I think, certainly over a weekend -- saying that he thought this in a way sort of detracted, if you like, from the WMD aspects of the document.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's quite an interesting point. I was thinking about this the other day. Given that the focus was on the WMD, there is this bit in the dossier which nobody actually talks about very much, which is the human rights thing.

MR RYCROFT: Right.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the Prime Minister saw rather later in the day that, having focused on WMD, having a chunk at the end on human rights in a sense diluted the message. Is that ...?

MR RYCROFT: I hesitated because I don't recall exactly what his

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reasoning was. I'm not sure that he was saying, "Take out all the human rights stuff", but I think he was saying this particular issue. This really is sort of putting words into his mouth, but what it might be was that if it had stayed in, it would have sort of attracted quite a lot of attention in a way that actually it wasn't -- it wasn't the key part of the construct, and the whole point of the dossier obviously was to get out as much as possible of what the government thought it knew about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you recall any other Prime Ministerial concerns about the dossier in draft form?

MR RYCROFT: Not that -- the only reason I mention that is precisely because it was a weekend, it wasn't part of the normal flow. So the others would have been picked up I think in the paperwork.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then we have this expression "beyond doubt" that appeared right from the start in the first draft of the foreword, and this was circulated on a number of occasions to addressees, including yourself, members of JIC and press teams and so on.

Do you know where this phrase came from, "beyond doubt"? You didn't draft it yourself, did you?

MR RYCROFT: No.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you have any role in the drafting?

MR RYCROFT: I thought -- didn't Alastair Campbell draft it?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: I think he drafted it and sort of cleared it round with people. The bit that I really remember about that and indeed the drafting of the Parliamentary statement was the Prime

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Minister's absolute insistence that the JIC needed to be comfortable with it, and so, no, I don't know any more about it.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Would you have been surprised by what John Scarlett told us, that he didn't think it was part of his role or part of his position to comment on the Prime Minister's personal foreword as opposed to the text of the document and so on?

MR RYCROFT: I think it was very important for the Prime Minister that he felt that he wasn't -- clearly he wasn't saying anything in the foreword that wasn't backed up by the dossier, and that his crucial yardstick for measuring that he got that right was the fact that John Scarlett and others clearly were comfortable with it.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So there was a gap in understanding on that point on the evidence that we have heard. The Prime Minister thought it would have been cleared by JIC, by John. John said, "No, that was not part of my job. This was part of the Prime Minister's political stand".

MR RYCROFT: Right. Okay.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You weren't aware of that?

MR RYCROFT: I wasn't aware of the gap, but as you described it, yes, I agree there was a gap. I am sure the Prime Minister would only have done it if he had reassurance that the JIC were comfortable with it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to conclude then, no other advisers challenged that "beyond doubt" phrase in your recollection?

MR RYCROFT: None in my recollection, but, I mean, there would have been a lot of discussion about it and -- not about it, but about the foreword in general and the Parliamentary statement that followed.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks. Let's turn to 1441. Usha.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Spend a few moments on 1441. I mean, we witnessed intense diplomatic negotiations on this. How would you characterise the US and UK objectives in the process when the negotiations were going on?

MR RYCROFT: It was very intensive. I think our objective was to -- well, our top objective was to get the Iraq issue back into the UN. By that we meant a UN Security Council Resolution ideally by unanimity that set out a final opportunity, an ultimatum to comply with all of the previous resolutions, and a two-stage process so that if there were further evidence of non-compliance or non-cooperation, then a decision but not a further resolution by the Security Council -- sorry -- a discussion but not a further resolution by the Security Council about the consequences.

So one objective was to keep the international community together and the other objective was to ensure that if there were a material breach either through non-cooperation or through a find of WMD, then we didn't have to go through this whole rigmarole again and have another resolution that then gave a final, final opportunity to comply.

BARONESS PRASHAR: How did you understand to be the US objectives? How would you characterise their objectives?

MR RYCROFT: Again there are Americans and there are Americans, but the -- they have an absolute red line that there should be no second decision required by the UN Security Council, but I think by that point they had, most of them, accepted the logic, the Prime Minister's logic, the UK logic, that it was better to have this first resolution than nothing at all in order to keep the --

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to broaden out the coalition, and to give, you know, countries like the UK but also Australia and others the basis, both legal and political, to join any military action if that were to happen.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Uh-huh. Just looking at the sort of question of non-military route, you know, which was obviously ...

On 14th October you recorded that Bush said that in – his public line was that war was the last choice..

"It was conceivable that we could do this peacefully."

Your comment was that:

"This was intriguing, but we should not read too much into it."

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Then I think on 23rd October you recorded:

"[redacted]"

MR RYCROFT: [redacted].

BARONESS PRASHAR: "[redacted]."

Now did the Prime Minister actually at that stage believe that the US might pursue a non-military route?

MR RYCROFT: He absolutely believed that the -- that it was possible for Iraq to avoid military action. So he absolutely believed that the UK position was as he set out. I think he was quite sceptical about --

BARONESS PRASHAR: Bush's statement.

MR RYCROFT: -- Bush's statement, which would probably explain why I have said it was intriguing. Exactly. I don't know

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whether I said that in that comment because that was the Prime Minister's comment after the phone call or it was just my own. I don't recall that, but it is interesting reading the two together how even though over nine days things have moved on a bit and -- from a very welcome point of view for the UK, which is that the possibility of full compliance with the UN resolutions without military action is -- is possible, because clearly that was our top -- that was our preferred route.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Can you throw any light why Bush might have said that? I mean, do you think something different was happening?

MR RYCROFT: I would like to think it was the drip, drip, drip of the Prime Minister saying that was the logic of the approach. I think the whole purpose of giving Saddam a final opportunity to comply was that he had a final opportunity to comply. In other words, if he did take it, he would have been complying and there would not have been any reason to take military action. That was the British approach.

BARONESS PRASHAR: I am now on 21st November 2002. You recorded:

"[redacted]"

Now what does that reveal about US's position and what was Prime Minister's own view at that stage? This is November 2002.

MR RYCROFT: So this was after the passage of 1441?

BARONESS PRASHAR: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: It, firstly, reveals my drafting of records tried to capture the flavour of what was actually said, because I can imagine Bush saying exactly that, whereas others might have toned down some of the language, but more seriously I think what it

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reveals is that the logic of 1441 that I have just described is right there, but that Bush still has a policy of regime change, which as his policy from when he was governor of Texas.

So what this I think means in Bush's mind is that it's only a matter of time before Saddam slips up either by failing to conceal the WMD or by demonstrably refusing access of the inspectors to an extent that the whole world – the whole of the Security Council would have rallied around the famous second resolution and would have said that there were therefore grounds for all necessary – for military action.

BARONESS PRASHAR: A couple more questions on this. I mean, I following the negotiation of 1441, the timescales for inspection had become compressed.

MR RYCROFT: Yes, because there was the final opportunity to comply.

BARONESS PRASHAR: That's right. Were the implications of that identified and considered or was it something that happened as a matter of course?

MR RYCROFT: I think there was a lot of consideration given to the time lines for military reasons in terms of military preparation, for political reasons in terms of planning for the post conflict, for -- I mean, by other people for the sort of more domestic political -- all sorts of -- all sorts of reasons. So I think, yes, a lot of consideration was given to time lines.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Because to some extent I mean Saddam's response and his actions were quite vital for our strategy.

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely.

BARONESS PRASHAR: But how much intelligence did you receive at this time about Saddam's intentions and what were the calculations made based on the sort of historical risk that he

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posed? You know, how were these factored into our strategy?

MR RYCROFT: I think our strategy was built on the fact that Saddam had used WMD in the past, that intelligence showed us that he continued to have an intent to use it in the future, and that he -- and that intelligence showed us he had the capability to use it in the future. So I think our strategy was built on those foundations, some of which have turned out to be false.

BARONESS PRASHAR: But did you continue to actually receive intelligence sort of post-1441 about his intentions? I mean, was there --

MR RYCROFT: What I -- I don't have a complete recollection of this, but what I do recall is that there was, as I have mentioned earlier, intelligence in this period about what looked like -- what was interpreted as attempts to hide WMD or, you know, equipment related to WMD from the inspectors, and there was -- there were a lot of calls by Blix to the UK for SIS to have an even closer relationship with them about all this so that their inspections could be intelligence-led, and there was also I recall some intelligence about his use of WMD in the case of an attack, of a military intervention, which I recall rightly we took incredibly seriously.

I don't know if we will come on to it, but quite a lot of discussions between the Prime Minister and the military are about him really getting reassurance that they are prepared for that action by Saddam and our military would be prepared in terms of defensive CBW suits and so on.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The thing that was really being squeezed by the time line at this point is the period available for military planning and preparation, isn't it?

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MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Was that right at the forefront or was it a diplomatic (inaudible)?

MR RYCROFT: It was absolutely at the forefront, but I don't think it squeezed out the diplomatic. I am sure different people put different emphasis on these different strands. The way I saw it was that clearly the US timing was driven by military and our efforts in this period were driven by an increasingly desperate attempt to get the Security Council together again.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, fine, which leads me to ask Sir Roderic to pick up the questions. Rod.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We attempt to get a second resolution. While the first resolution was being negotiated the Prime Minister told President Bush on 23rd October that [redacted]

He was still taking this line, as you recorded, in a conversation with Bush on 24th January. Indeed, he noted then, "[redacted]" and "[redacted]".

So he is still saying, "We go ahead anyway".

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But by March, as you record in a briefing note you did to the Prime Minister of a conversation with the President on 5th March -- and we get this in many other documents -- a second resolution is described as being vital to us.

Why did it become vital at some point between January and March to get a second resolution?

MR RYCROFT: Politically rather than legally is the short answer I think. Legally all along we knew where we stood, which was the 1441 revived -- revived previous authority, but because of our wish to create as wide a coalition as possible and as formal a coalition as possible, we decided that it would be desirable to go for a second resolution, and we knew that we would never get one if we were too explicit about saying we don't need one.

So I think -- I do recall straight after 1441 quite a lot of debate about how to square that circle, and I think that is why the tone comes out slightly differently at different times, but I think the bottom line was absolutely clear throughout. We never needed a second resolution legally, but the political requirement for it went up and down or rather basically went up as time went on in order to keep the international community together. So if I used the word vital, it was -- it meant politically vital.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you say we never needed it legally, the Attorney General was telling the Prime Minister at the end of January that there was a need for a second resolution, authorisation by the Security Council, and that had been his consistent advice up to that point and until the middle of February. So your senior legal adviser in the government was saying you did need one right up to that point.

MR RYCROFT: I mean, again I wouldn't want anything that I say to trump what others involved might have said, but my understanding

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all the way through was that certainly that the US were basing their legal advice on --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were indeed, yes.

MR RYCROFT: -- all the way through, and I think for reasons Jack Straw explained at length the UK red line negotiating 1441 was met at this point, that we did not require --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But are you reflecting the Prime Minister's view that all along we didn't legally need a second resolution?

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So until mid-February the Prime Minister was confident we didn't need one, although his Attorney General was telling him that we did?

MR RYCROFT: I think -- I think the Prime Minister's view all along was that there was a case at least, a legal case to be made for the revival argument on the basis of 1441, and that we preserved our red line in the negotiation of 1441, which is why we signed up to it and so did the Americans. They didn't make a mistake and allow something to be smuggled in that breached that red line of no further decision required. It was very carefully drafted to allow both sides, if you like, to claim victory, but that certainly included victory for our side, rather a US/UK interpretation that no further decision was required. I think the Prime Minister's view was clear in that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So he and his team in Number 10 were not bothered by the fact that the Attorney General was telling you in November, December and January that a second resolution would be required for military action. When it got to the late stages of the resolution, 4th March, you told the Prime Minister that, "Our best guess is that, as things stand, we have a reasonable chance of securing ten positive votes", and you then list them in order

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of likelihood, and you say, "We are also faced with an increasingly likely French veto."

Why did you think at that stage that we had a reasonable chance of ten positive votes when certainly Sir Jeremy Greenstock has told us he was never confident we had more than four in the bag?

MR RYCROFT: Clearly there are lots of different moments in this history where we weren't reasonably confident of securing ten positive votes, but this was -- I remember this moment, because it was as we were going into what turned out to be the end game in terms of a strategy to secure the Mexican and Chilean votes, which would have been nine and ten.

So I based that advice on not just the telegram from Jeremy Greenstock, which I refer to, but also all of the diplomacy going on to secure the three African votes.

At other times I remember advice going in saying what you quoted Jeremy as saying, that we only had four in the bag. I think that's consistent with that. We did have four in the bag, but we had at that point a reasonable chance of securing a further six if we did all of this, Blix, clusters stuff with Mexico and Chile.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: On the following day you advised the Prime Minister:

"We must get at least nine positive votes and no Russian veto."

This is a briefing note for a conversation with President Bush, the one where you start off by having the Prime Minister told, for instance, that it is vital --

"The second resolution is absolutely vital. We must get at least nine positive votes and no Russian veto."

You then say:

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"If the French veto alone, we just about manage it."

Now that doesn't square with saying the resolution is vital, because if they veto, you don't have a second resolution.

What was your reason for thinking it would be manageable if the French had vetoed the resolution?

MR RYCROFT: This a speaking note I have in front of me.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: This is a speaking note for the Prime Minister to use with Bush.

MR RYCROFT: This is not an explanation to the Prime Minister. This is on the basis he has had that explanation and we have had full discussions about this whole issue of the unreasonable French veto, which, looking back, I have some doubts about, but this is not a note about that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No.

MR RYCROFT: This is what to say to Bush.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you have doubts actually as to whether it would have been manageable?

MR RYCROFT: I have personally doubts about the whole concept of an unreasonable veto myself.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you aware that the Attorney had also already in his definitive advice given clear doubts about this notion of a unreasonable veto?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall now being aware of that then.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In the 7th March advice. This is 5th. So this is just before.

MR RYCROFT: Just before that. I mean, what I do remember is there was a lively debate about this whole notion of an unreasonable French -- unreasonable veto. I could well

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imagine that the Attorney and many others would have had doubts about that. As I say, I still share them.

This is not a -- just to be clear, to go back to Sir Roderic's question, this is not an explanation. It is not advice to the Prime Minister about why a French veto might be unreasonable. This is a speaking note for the Prime Minister to use with the President.

I can see, I mean, I'm eliding various different things here, but I am absolutely sure I would have understood the differences between getting a resolution and having a French veto and so on then as well as now.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Then President Chirac makes his statement and then on 12th March the Prime Minister discusses with President Bush the end game. We have been through this with a lot of other witnesses. I don't need to go through all the detail with you, [redacted]

Now three and a half hours -- and indeed on Chirac's statement and on a particular interpretation of Chirac's statement. Three and a half hours before that conversation between the Prime Minister and the President the French Ambassador calls you up -- and we have the e-mail recording this that you sent out -- to say that Chirac's comment needed to be read in the context of what he said immediately before, ie to put the alternative interpretation of Chirac's comments.

There were also telegrams from John Holmes and other representations to the Foreign Office all in the same direction.

Was there a conscious decision for reasons of domestic political presentation to pin the blame on the French when, in fact, the situation was that we had failed to get the Chileans and the Mexicans across and had no prospect at this stage

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actually of getting our resolution?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Thank you.

MR RYCROFT: I think that's exactly right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Final small point. There is a document, which I don't have in front of me at the moment, slightly earlier in the second resolution process where there's a lobbying exercise being put together. I think it is a document you wrote, which refers to using Stephen Wall to lobby certain people in context around Europe. Stephen, vastly experienced diplomat. His remit, of course, was European Union at that time.

To what extent was he using his seniority or being used informally as part of the Iraq group at this point?

MR RYCROFT: Well, he was certainly passing on to David Manning and me the benefit of his European experience. I recall that vividly, because our offices were right next door to each other. As you say, there were occasions when the European dossier and the Iraq -- sort of the European issue and Iraq issue came together and so he was involved then.

I don't know the extent to which the Prime Minister sought his views on the European handling of Iraq more generally, but it did come up. There were European councils at this period, including one in the days we are just coming to. So he was definitely -- of course, he was, as I say, a very experienced, central member of the Number 10 team, who had his doubts about the Iraq policy, including but not only for the European reasons.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Let's turn, if we may, to Baroness Prashar. We are into military action. Usha.

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BARONESS PRASHAR: Can we just talk a little bit about the timing of the military action, because there are some key exchanges between Blair and Bush on the timing which you recorded, the one on 24th January, when you wrote that:

"[redacted]"

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: And:

"[redacted]".

On 31st January David Manning recorded:

"The start date for the military campaign was now penciled in for 10th March."

So this is going in the background. So how does this sort of shape the diplomatic structure? What was the interplay between the two?

MR RYCROFT: The one was definitely shaping the other. I think that the military -- the US military timetable was a bit like the juggernaut that I used earlier. You know, it was a very, very strong factor in American thinking, and it was linked to their own domestic political factors as well. So it wasn't just the military, but there was a clear American pressure to get on with this, and we had a clear requirement to have some more time, not a huge amount more time, and I don't think the Prime Minister ever thought that sixty days more was needed. I think it was – was it Fox and Lagos were talking about those sorts of lengths of time and we were very skeptical about that, but we did think some more time would help to keep -- get the coalition together in the Security Council for a second resolution, and would increase the probability of a WMD find or a non-cooperation incident with the inspectors that would have allowed more countries to view Iraq's

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behaviour as a material breach of 1441.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Then on 3rd March you wrote:

"We face an uphill struggle securing US agreement to any further time."

On 5th March you recorded that:

"[redacted]

Now why was there no consideration about delaying until autumn? I mean, what had happened to the autumn start, or was the timetable being driven by the military requirement and Bush's impatience or his administration's impatience?

MR RYCROFT: My own view was by this point Bush was very impatient. The whole centre of gravity within the US system was clearly on the side of action imminently. The Prime Minister, as you see, made the argument for a bit more time, essentially for tactical reasons, as I mentioned earlier. I don't think he was ever persuaded of the argument to wait another six months or something, because the countries that opposed the second resolution did so essentially because they opposed the whole strategy we were on, which was military action if Saddam is not complying, and we thought it was absolutely clear that Saddam was not complying, because he wasn't offering fuller access to the inspectors, and so a further six months or a further -- a further resolution giving Saddam another six months would have just taken the debate no further than 1441. So it would have been a step back to whenever 1441 was passed.

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BARONESS PRASHAR: When the timetable was being discussed and there was impatience because of the readiness of the US army, was any consideration given to the UK troops not being -- not involved? Was that something that was discussed?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: You know, we were not ready. We did not want to be involved.

MR RYCROFT: There were discussions about the UK not being involved, but they were not on the basis of readiness. They were on the basis of a political judgment about the costs -- the political costs of involvement in these circumstances.

There was a lot of discussion and advice to the Prime Minister about the level of military readiness, and it is something that he was very interested in, but it was never an argument for delay. I don't recall him ever receiving advice at this sort of time saying, "We are not ready".

BARONESS PRASHAR: Did he ever consider not giving permission on (inaudible) grounds?

MR RYCROFT: He considered it and was asked to consider it and he considered it and rejected it. I mean, I think he -- it clearly came up publicly when Donald Rumsfeld mentioned it and there were occasions when he -- when people put it to him and he considered it and rejected it, and he was very, very clear in his rejection of it for all sorts of reasons.

BARONESS PRASHAR: When did he conclude that there would be no second resolution? It was stated on 17th March.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: But when did he come to that conclusion himself?

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MR RYCROFT: I came he came to that -- I think he came to that conclusion before the Chirac statement, which is why I answered the way I did to Sir Roderic's question. I think the Chirac statement fell into our laps as a --

BARONESS PRASHAR: So he already comes back?

MR RYCROFT: I think he comes back shortly before then, around about 12th March, but I also recall him saying that even after that military action was avoidable if Saddam had had a final chance to comply, and I also recall him saying sort of something leaning the other way, which is that actually, looking back with hindsight, military action was probably inevitable from the moment of Saddam's declaration on I think 10th December.[2]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just one more question on this. David Manning and Jeremy Greenstock have both indicated to us that they personally would have thought it would have been better if there had been more time for inspections. Was that view dismissed as clearly -- what was your view out of interest?

MR RYCROFT: I remember that that was David Manning's view and he absolutely expressed it. The Prime Minister's view was very clear: "More time for what? If it's just another resolution that goes back to 1441, it's a step backwards", and I think he had realised that the countries that were opposed to military action in these circumstances would remain opposed to it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Let me just talk about the -- go back to the military package that we put into this.

You will recall in September, going back to September, there were three packages being discussed --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- and package 3 is the big one, the major army commitment. What's striking about the documents is the Prime Minister seems continually wary about package 3 --

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- first because of FRESCO, the fireman's strike, secondly, because of the cost and he was reluctant to commit. Is that your recollection of his position, that despite being very keen on the overall policy, he was not so keen necessarily on the army being directly involved?

MR RYCROFT: I can't now recall what the differences were between 2 and 3. I think 2 was quite a substantial package nevertheless.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: 2 was a substantial package but it wouldn't have had the army in there in strength.

MR RYCROFT: In strength.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: (Inaudible).

MR RYCROFT: Right. The bits that I am clear about are that, firstly, that if it came to military action and if, you know, the legal conditions and so on were met, then it was clear the Prime Minister's personal judgment was that the UK should be part of the coalition, and that the contribution should be substantial enough to -- to be proportionate with our standing in the world.

There is a strategic point here as well as a tactical UK/US issue. So I think all along I would have expected the UK in this scenario to be, you know, at the substantial end of the spectrum, but clearly there were a lot of steps that the Prime Minister needed to go through to get to that point, and we have touched on many of them already: the legal issue, the Chancellor and the costs and some of the other political issues, which I was

[2] Witness's note: Because that declaration was false and incomplete, and therefore evidence that Saddam was not trying to comply with 1441.

obviously aware of but not dealing with.

Re-reading these now, it feels to me as though those were the reasons why he was wary about option 3 rather than a sort of armchair general military judgment about option 3.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: No. Understood. One of the consequences of the reluctance to commit was that the timetable was getting squeezed at the other end.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you recall discussions on that? Both Geoff Hoon and Mike Boyce have given some indication to us about their concern that the longer this took, the harder it would be to get our forces into position.

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I do remember that and I remember the tension between that, on the one hand, and, as this implies, the sort of the risk of leaks if planning accelerates, and there weren't particularly leaks, but we constantly had quite a difficult presentational issue, which is how do you describe that sensible contingency planning is taking place without it looking like a decision had been taken, because it hadn't, and versions of that tension I think appear throughout this part of it really from -- actually really from summer '02 -- certainly from summer '02 to March '03, and at different points in that the tension came out in slightly different ways. I think the closer you got to March '03 there was an argument in favour of it being very clear that very serious military planning was underway in terms of influencing Saddam.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That would have been consistent with the argument you were putting pressure on Saddam.

MR RYCROFT: Exactly. The paradox: the clearer we were with him that military action would follow if he did not comply, the more

likely it would be that he would comply and therefore that military action would not be necessary. That was a theme. That was a theme running through this time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But he was aware of the sustainability issues?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, he was. I think -- I mean, there are records of these. We went to go and see the chiefs on two or three occasions and -- in addition to the CDS's contacts, which are more personal contacts with the Prime Minister.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That was their message?

MR RYCROFT: I think they -- I saw those as an opportunity of the Prime Minister to get a personal understanding of the sorts of challenges they would face and to reassure himself that they were reassured that there was a plan, a military plan by the Americans, and that the sorts of concerns that he had about, "What do we do if Saddam uses WMD?" and different sort of concern about proportionality and targeting, I think that comes through quite clearly. So I think those were important meetings.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were there anything from the chiefs that gave them any sense of misgivings on their part about what they were about to embark on?

MR RYCROFT: No, no. In terms of a decision yes or no, no. The misgivings were about how exactly it should be done, and, you know, whether there genuinely were these back-up plans in place, whether the US had a winning concept, as it was called, which was earlier on, and what the sort of consequences would be. Those were the sorts of concerns. I don't think the Prime Minister ever picked up anything other than determination to do this if that is what we came to.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just one other question, which is how we

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managed to acquire MND South East as our sector. It does seem to be a decision taken rather late in the day and there's two parts of it. There's the question of the military being responsible for security, and then the question of a civilian lead responsible for reconstruction. There's a Foreign Office note of 7th March, which seems to raise this, which is very late in the day. Do you have any recollection of how this decision was discussed and how we came out at the other end with this?

MR RYCROFT: I mean, the bit that I recall is -- was the military strand of that, which was that the original plan was with Turkish permission to go through the north, and when that was not forthcoming, then plan B, if you like, was to go through the south. So that's the military bit of it. I don't now recall how and when the political was met with the military, but, I mean, I think I would have been surprised if it hadn't been. I would have been surprised if the plan was for UK political lead responsibility for a sector that didn't fit in with the British military presence, but this was all going on in parallel with discussions about our responsibilities alongside the US as an occupying power, which was an important part of the post conflict plan.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Basically there were two options. There was one that we could play a part in Iraq as a whole as a joint occupying power.

MR RYCROFT: Yes, exactly.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Or we would do a bit of that and mainly concentrate on the South East. It is just not clear when that decision was taken. Do you recall it as a separate decision?

MR RYCROFT: I don't recall it now as a separate decision. It is such a huge one it must have been.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One would like to think so. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. I would like to break into the session to ask you about time management.

First of all, Mel, are you okay if we go on a little bit after another short break?

TRANSCRIBER: Yes, that's fine.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Are you okay, Matthew, if we go on to, say, 1.15 or thereabouts?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Sure? In that case let's take a five-minute break now and then we will go on for another half hour.

(Short break)

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Onward and upward for the last half hour.

MR RYCROFT: I apologise if my answers have been too long.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: No. Let's turn straight to Baroness Prashar. I am sorry. I am ahead of myself. It is Roderic.

BARONESS PRASHAR: It is Roderic first.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I just want to come back on the legal stuff. We have covered quite a lot of this. Sally Morgan was in quite a lot of the meetings on this. Why was she there? What was her role?

MR RYCROFT: And I wasn't in the meetings she was in. The sort of -- the party political -- yes, the political aspects on handling of the Attorney General as a Cabinet colleague aspect, you know, that was her job. Wasn't her title Director of Government Relations or something like that? So, you know, I saw this as essentially quite a personal management of an issue that was a sub-set of political handling between Jonathan Powell and

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David Manning I think.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When the Attorney General wrote to the Prime Minister on 30th January 2003 just before the Prime Minister was meeting President Bush, you minuted in manuscript on the note addressing David Manning:

"I specifically said we did not need advice this week."

We have seen earlier minuting when he had offered to give advice from others, I think David Manning and Sally Morgan, saying no, it wasn't needed at this time.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And he still volunteered his advice, rather inconvenient advice. Why was Number 10 trying to dissuade the Attorney from giving his advice?

MR RYCROFT: As I say, this was an issue which Sally Morgan and Jonathan Powell and David Manning were handling and I knew that and I was comfortable with that and I wasn't in the meetings that they had with the Attorney. I have no recollection of this until it was declassified, but I think probably I was sort of minding the shop for David, so to speak, on a day when he was out of the office, or on a visit, or in a meeting, and so I was passing on to him when he got back the fact that I had done what he either asked me or would have wanted me to do, which was to say that there was no need for this advice at this stage.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, there had been earlier occasions when he had also been dissuaded from coming forward with formal advice. Are you essentially saying you were not part of that process? That was really handled by others?

MR RYCROFT: Essentially. I clearly had a role, if only sort of backstop for David.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we come back to what you were saying

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earlier about the assumption on which you -- and perhaps also reflecting Prime Minister's view -- were working on, that the revival argument in the end would be held to apply to this case and would be usable, and clearly the Prime Minister must have had something on those lines in mind when he spoke, as I referred earlier, to President Bush as far back as October, that he didn't need a second resolution to do it, and on this minute he's minuted in manuscript where the Attorney says that resolution 1441 in his view does not authorise the use of military force without a further determination by the Security Council -- the Prime Minister has minuted "I just don't understand this", which again reflects the same difference of view between the Prime Minister and the Attorney.

Now the Prime Minister was not an international lawyer. So where was he getting his advice from contrary to the Attorney's advice?

MR RYCROFT: Well, I think he was very clear what the American legal position was from his contacts with President Bush and others and I think, although he was not an international lawyer, he is married to one and he was a lawyer.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, his wife is not an international lawyer either. She specialises in human rights.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Human rights lawyer.

MR RYCROFT: Okay. Sorry. I mean, I suppose what I'm trying to say is the Prime Minister is relatively for politicians well versed in legal issues, say, and I think has a particular view of the legal profession which is that there is an uncanny similarity between the their legal views and their underlying political views.

So, to be blunt, on an issue as divisive as Iraq there are sections of the population that are on both sides of that debate

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and there are sections of the legal profession on both sides of that debate, and it is possible to construct a legal argument in favour of the revival argument and another legal argument against the revival argument, and I think that was really perhaps -- well, that was my explanation of some of the -- what I take to be quite irritated comments in some of these pieces of paper.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, the Attorney General was coming forward with views which were extremely inconvenient in relation to the policy. That's just a statement of fact.

Was the Foreign Secretary encouraging the Prime Minister to believe that the revival argument would eventually be available?

MR RYCROFT: I don't remember. I know there's a lot said and written by the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Office lawyers about this, but I don't remember whether -- on top of all that whether there were additional contacts.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you recall whether Charlie Falconer was providing advice? He is very close to the Prime Minister personally.

MR RYCROFT: I am sure he would have been privately, but I don't --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You don't recall that or anybody else.

MR RYCROFT: No.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks. Getting back on my own time line, it is over to you, Usha, please.

BARONESS PRASHAR: I'd like to discuss with you the aftermath planning. I would just like to ask you one question about your knowledge of Iraq, because Sir David Omand told us that JIC produced a paper in February 2003 which concluded that the threat

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from AQ would increase at the onset of any attack and that we should all be prepared for a high threat level and for more terrorist activity in the event of war, and he described this assessment in the context of the UK as strong.

Now can you confirm that the Prime Minister saw this assessment and others on the same subject, because, as you were his Private -- serving him?

MR RYCROFT: I can't confirm that now. If it's genuinely an open question, I am sure it could be confirmed, but just not by me right now. I would be very surprised if he didn't see it. I think he would have seen -- he would have seen -- if it had been up to me, I would have shown him a JIC assessment along those lines at that time undoubtedly.

BARONESS PRASHAR: You worked closely with him. Did he pay much attention? Did he read them carefully, these JIC assessments? Did he pay much attention to them? Is this something he did carefully?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, I think he did. It is a very important assessment.

BARONESS PRASHAR: If you were putting briefings to him, you would draw these to his attention?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. Someone would draw them to his attention. Quite often if they were JIC assessments, they would be done by David Manning rather than me. It was just one of the divisions of labour on the whole we had. It doesn't mean -- I don't know who that went to, but I'm really sure that someone would have done.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Okay. Can we then move on to the question of aftermath planning, because you were at this stage playing quite a key role, sort of an active role in developing thinking on

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aftermath planning and negotiating Phase IV of the USA.

Why were you asked to take this role?

MR RYCROFT: I think my role was, as you say, in terms of negotiation with the US rather than thinking up the policy for the UK, and I think that's quite an important distinction. I think the policy ownership of this rightly was with the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence and Cabinet Office.

I think you are right that I took on a particular role in connection with negotiating with the Americans, and I think the honest answer is because my American opposite numbers were leading on this in the US system. The National Security Council is hugely bigger than Number 10 or even Number 10 plus the Cabinet Office. So each of us at Number 10 had quite a large number of opposite numbers, but one of mine was John Bellinger, who I think was the opposite number for these negotiations, which I think we did by video conference at least two or three times and also face-to-face when he was in London in advance of the Hillsborough summit.

BARONESS PRASHAR: So, to be clear, your role was that of negotiating or developing the thinking?

MR RYCROFT: Negotiating. I think that's a very important distinction and I wouldn't dream of suggesting that I was responsible for the thinking, the content. I think that is -- you know, the Private Secretary role in our system is different from an adviser role in a Cabinet or National Security Council where they have real advisers. I wasn't and didn't ever pretend to be that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You are suggesting the lead was being taken by DFID and FCO?

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MR RYCROFT: I think largely by the FCO on this from what I recall, but with DFID involved by this point and the Ministry of Defence and Cabinet Office.

BARONESS PRASHAR: The records from this office -- the records from this time set out a three-step process, although the elements and the timing and pre-conditions of each changed frequently.

Now what was driving these changes and was this coming from us or from the US?

MR RYCROFT: I remember the three phases and I think it was something that we agreed with the Americans on actually from a relatively early stage, that there would be an immediate post-invasion scenario and there would be an end point with the Iraqis in full control. Then you need a middle, second stage to bridge the gap between those. So I think we reached agreement with them fairly early on that and the complications about the planning for this phase were all about the detail underneath that three-stage process.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Uh-huh. On 27th March 2003 you recorded, and I quote:

"[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

And yet within a month CPA was being created and we had taken on responsibility for the joint occupation.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, how much consultation was there about this change in this approach with us, if any?

MR RYCROFT: Well, very, very little. Again, as I say, the bit

I was involved in was really before and during the military invasion preparing for this -- negotiating with the Americans about the -- some quite specific things like the drafting of the UN Security Council Resolution, and I do remember these principles. I think the Foreign Office worked up some detail about these principles and, as I recall, largely they were very welcome principles. As you imply, the problem was not the principles. It was the fact that the principles were then ignored by the US very soon after the start of the occupation.

BARONESS PRASHAR: So, I mean, your assessment is there was not much consultation with us?

MR RYCROFT: I thought there was a lot of consultation at this stage in the drafting of the theory.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Yes, of course.

MR RYCROFT: And as soon as it became practice it was --

BARONESS PRASHAR: It was done without any consultation?

MR RYCROFT: Exactly, yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: The other thing I want to draw to your attention is on 4th April Nick Cannon recorded and I quote again:

"But the NCS (sic) are in charge of US policy ..." --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: NSC.

BARONESS PRASHAR: "... and gave the impression of flexibility in order to secure a resolution."

Do you believe this to be the case?

MR RYCROFT: On that issue at that time, yes, I do and I think that again that was the reason why it was actually helpful from the British system to have us in Number 10 as the sort of lead, if you like, in the negotiation to keep the NSC as the leads in the American side.

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If we had said, "Sorry. That is not our job. We are too busy doing other things", you know, I think we would have very quickly found the US system got increasingly in a Department of Defence direction and that would have been less -- even less good outcome from the UK perspective.

So we wanted to keep the NSC at the heart of this, because on this issue at this time they were much more closely aligned with our own thinking, Condi Rice principles being a good example, than other parts of the US system.

BARONESS PRASHAR: What was the influence of the Pentagon?

MR RYCROFT: I think it was a constant all along. Of course it was dominant at later stages, but just at this stage we had a moment where there was a fair amount that we could agree with the US led by the NSC and it felt at the time -- I recall it very strongly -- a very positive engagement where we came up with this UN resolution. We came up with the architecture, the sort of theory for the Phase IV, and I don't actually think there is anything wrong with that. What was wrong was the way that it actually happened in practice.

BARONESS PRASHAR: On 6th May 2003 you recorded that:

"The Prime Minister remains concerned that OHRA continues to suffer from lack of proper management",

and Tim Cross in public evidence told us that he told the Prime Minister:

"'I do not believe that we are ready for post-war Iraq'. The Prime Minister nodded and I'm sure he understood what I was saying."

Were you aware of the concerns of the Prime Minister at this point?

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

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BARONESS PRASHAR: What was he doing -- asking to you to do as a consequence of what he was hearing?

MR RYCROFT: Well, I think that this document and many others like it show an increasing concern from the Prime Minister as to what is actually happening on the ground, and I think Tim Cross was very influential in expressing those concerns, as were many others.

BARONESS PRASHAR: What happened in practice then? Concerns are there.

MR RYCROFT: You see a series of increasingly exasperated records or notes or instructions from the centre, Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, to the different departments involved to try to increase UK influence over what was a rapidly deteriorating picture, and I -- I think it was an interesting example of the lack of levers that are available to a Prime Minister.

BARONESS PRASHAR: We have been told that people were really relying on the interaction between Bush and Blair to make a difference.

MR RYCROFT: Right.

BARONESS PRASHAR: You are saying -- you are pushing it down to departments.

MR RYCROFT: Yes. I think both are true. Both are true at once. I think that one aspect of the Prime Minister's relationship with Bush is important, which I haven't mentioned so far, which is this: using his regular contact with him in this post-conflict period to drive policy on each of these issues, and those are the fifteen points we had at one point, a weekly update system that we set up, and his constant message and his constant -- his constant message was that this advice from Whitehall needed to be concrete and specific enough for him to raise with Bush and to

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get it unblocked, and he was forever complaining that, despite pulling all the levers he had, he never got something concrete enough to pass on to Bush to make a difference. I think this feels like the beginning of that phase, 6th May, and I would characterise that as going on quite a long time.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Can I just move on briefly to the role of the United Nations, because on 16th April you recorded the Prime Minister's meeting with Kofi Annan, and you wrote that:

"[redacted]"

What did this tell us about the UN's attitude towards Iraq?

MR RYCROFT: Something which the Prime Minister knew already, which was they didn't want to have the lead role, but they had to be there in as large a form as the US would allow short of leadership to – for many reasons, but including to bring together a wider piece of international community.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Usha, can we move straight on to --

BARONESS PRASHAR: Number 10, yes. Then we want to move on to this question of the reality of the aftermath. We are speeding through rather I'm afraid at this stage. On 3rd June 2003 Nick Cannon recorded:

"The Prime Minister believed that Whitehall should go back to a war footing for the next two to three months to avoid losing peace in Iraq."

I mean, what happened as a consequence of that statement of going back on a war footing?

MR RYCROFT: Well, I think it is probably better answered by each of the departments concerned, but certainly from the centre what

we were looking for was for very regular ministerial meetings, which I think at that point were largely chaired by the Foreign Secretary, but with the Prime Minister intervening on many occasions, including 3rd June, an officials level structure, which David Manning and then Nigel Sheinwald led, which I imagine was set up by the Cabinet Secretary, and within each department due priority, ie absolute top priority, being given to the Iraq issues, and because I'm from the Foreign Office and have most contact with them, I remember many occasions on which we had to encourage the Foreign Office to put more resource or better resource on to these questions, and I'm pretty sure similar discussions were happening in other departments as well.

BARONESS PRASHAR: But was the speed of the military timetable of military reductions over the summer a surprise against the background of that kind of comment, being on the war footing?

MR RYCROFT: I don't think it was a function of the -- it wasn't because of the timetable of the military intervention in March, because I think -- it was obvious that that was at least a possible timetable for a long time, indeed, towards the back end of the possible timetable. If you think about the timetable earlier, we were talking about November to February, but in terms of after the military intervention the speed with which it went downhill, I think that was absolutely a factor in this sort of concern by the Prime Minister, yes.

BARONESS PRASHAR: I mean, the picture I am trying to get, you know: how much consultation was there with Number 10 and the Prime Minister on issues like foreshortening the kind of handover and the responsibilities to Iraq in June 2004?

MR RYCROFT: I remember on that there was a lot of consultation about that both from, you know, US and UK officials inside Iraq, but also the Bush-Blair, Manning-Rice and other UK-US

relationships. So I think there was -- there were channels open to talk about these things, but by then I think -- you know, many of the problems had already happened by then.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Just finally on 18th May 2004 the Prime Minister wrote to President Bush saying:

"[redacted]"

Now what advice lay behind this thinking? Do you recall?

MR RYCROFT: I can't recall. I imagine that this again would have been a note that the Prime Minister wrote himself, and without seeing all of the things going into him at that time I don't know whether this reflects advice from the Foreign Office or from Baghdad or not. It feels like - I mean, it seems like -

BARONESS PRASHAR: If he wrote it himself, do you think that was his own judgment?

MR RYCROFT: I think it was his own judgment that that was what the key dilemma was, but I don't think he would have been breaking with British policy in terms of saying that the end -- that the decision that needs to be taken is about restoring full sovereignty as quickly as possible. I think that was a judgment that came out, you know, from all different chapters. The military I think were coming to that judgment, the Foreign Office, DFID. I would imagine everyone involved in the British system was coming to that judgment, but I don't recall seeing that recently.

BARONESS PRASHAR: Okay. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we are close to the end. We would

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like to ask a few questions about Fallujah or should I say Fallujah 1. Lawrence.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. It is just the position in April 2004. Well, let's just go straight into Fallujah itself. 23rd April you write an urgent note to the Prime Minister saying:

[redacted]

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

MR RYCROFT: Well, he did, because, as I recall, in the days after 23rd April there wasn't an immediate US engagement there and it was – wasn't there a visit to Camp – to the White House very soon after that where we discussed this? Was that in the same period? I think it was. It was ongoing then and the main purpose – one of the purposes of that discussion was to get even more time to ensure that the US military dealt with Fallujah in a way that would have been more positive [redacted].

[redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The concern was he didn't order Abizaid, but nonetheless the Americans were going ahead.

MR RYCROFT: Right.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, this is one of the worst months in some ways in quality terms, because you have the Sunnis and Najaf and so on at the same time. In the previous month you had been discussing the Iraq Survey Group and what they were coming up with.

MR RYCROFT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have Abu Ghraib and so on at this time. Was this a moment when you sensed maybe you were losing control of the situation?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. Just the fact the document we were just talking about, the Prime Minister's note to President Bush -- I think I saw just then -- didn't it begin by saying, "[redacted]"? I mean, that would be a good summary of the overall mood I think at this time.

Sorry. One other thing from this which does come through clearly is when the Prime Minister did go into President Bush with something very specific, concrete, there was a consequence. The US did not go ahead [redacted]. Maybe they weren't ever going to anyway, because of some other reason, but I do remember we were very worried about it in April and I think May '04, and in the end I think it was dealt with in a way that would have been closer to how the UK military would have done it if it had been our responsibility.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But if it was illegal, concerns about how this was being done if it was a real sledgehammer in terms of proportionality and so on.

MR RYCROFT: Absolutely.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think there was any point where if the Prime Minister had not been able to exercise influence, he would have felt obliged to distance himself rather publicly from American policy?

MR RYCROFT: I don't think that was his general way of operating with the US. It certainly would never have been to threaten to do that. I think that's absolutely not -- that would be to misunderstand his approach to the US. I think no is the answer.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Then just finally just before Fallujah he had written -- you wrote -- sorry -- 16th April:

"The Prime Minister said that we also needed a clear strategy for addressing the grievances of both the Sunnis and the MAS supporters."

Did anything come of that at that time?

MR RYCROFT: Yes. There was a whole Sunni outreach strategy that the CPA or whoever were leading on, yes. I think that was a big workstream. I don't recall what the content of it was, but

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there was a lot going on on that front.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, just to conclude, is there anything else on sort of the politics of this period you might just like to say, perhaps also just reflecting on the WMD side of it as well? This was probably one of the more difficult moments for the Prime Minister while you were still at Downing Street.

MR RYCROFT: Yes. There were several, but this was an ongoing very difficult moment, yes. I think it was the combination of the lack of WMD, the ongoing Inquiries -- I can't remember the timetable now, but there was the Hutton Inquiry and Butler Inquiry, and I was there at the time, as well as the ISC and other Inquiries, and the picture on the ground in Iraq being a very difficult picture, and I think, as I said before, increasingly exasperation from the Prime Minister that even though he felt he understood what needed to be done, it wasn't being done.

So, yes, I think it was an incredibly difficult time. We have not talked about all the other issues that were going bad at the same time as well. I remember in Northern Ireland -- I don't know if it was at this time or other high points in Iraq did also coincide with high or low points on Northern Ireland too and the whole European debate. So, yes, it was a very difficult time. I don't think I have any insight into it, but agreed.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think historians -- and I am not one, though Lawrence is -- have a concept of a long 18th century. You had a long two years in Number 10. I am not quite sure when it finished. Was it June?

MR RYCROFT: It was July '04 after the Butler Inquiry finished.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I was going to ask whether you have any

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further comments, given we are a listen and learn inquiry, not least about government processes in a complex situation. Anything you would like to offer us?

MR RYCROFT: I think we have largely covered what I would say. I think particularly re-reading all the papers, I mean, one thing that came through to me is actually the record and the paperwork. Albeit there is some notable exceptions, I think the record of the bits I was responsible for is complete, is joined up and demonstrates that because we have a system of a very, very small centre by comparison, that the centre has to rely on departments. So I think, you know, of the criticisms that are out there, the one that to me feels particularly untrue is the sort of -- is Number 10 taking all the decisions. It absolutely didn't feel like that at the time.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, just as a postscript to that can this very small Number 10, which characterises the post Second World War peace time administrations in Britain, peer into the giant departments of state, not least the Ministry of Defence, but also including the Foreign Office and Home Office in a different context -- can Number 10, can the Prime Minister reach in?

MR RYCROFT: My short answer to that is Number 10 can't, but the Cabinet Office can and the Cabinet Office is there to do that. Personally I thought the double-hatted nature of the Manning, Sheinwald (inaudible) jobs worked very well, but obviously I was on one leg only. We don't have that. We didn't have it before and we don't have it now, and perhaps we will never go back to it, but it did have certain advantages in terms of bringing the Cabinet Office closer into Number 10 and therefore expanding capacity at the centre without expanding Number 10. So you keep the responsibility and the empowerment with the departments, but you have a bit more at centre.

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I can't resist a temptation. One very last question on the point you have just raised. The Cabinet Office itself is a small outfit, not entirely small, because there are secondees into it from other departments. There is the Cabinet Secretary at the top and centre of the whole show looking at how it is working, how the different gears are meshing together.

During your time in Number 10 with reference to the Iraq conflict was there ever a sense that there was insufficient meshing of gears or insufficient drive down the drive line from top policy-making to implementation?

MR RYCROFT: Yes, I think there was. I mean, you could think about the flows in both directions.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

MR RYCROFT: My personal view is that the flow into the Prime Minister through those was good. In other words, I don't think there was any piece of advice at any point that was missing because there wasn't the flow inwards, although clearly the Department for International Development were not as into that as they could have been.

The flow in the other direction: I think, you know, from my perspective, you know, there are limits, as I said earlier, to what even the Prime Minister can make happen in Whitehall, and despite having, you know, very good machinery at the centre.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: This has been a long but very helpful session. Thank you very much indeed, Matthew.

MR RYCROFT: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I close it down.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

(Hearing concluded)

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