

1 Friday, 21st January 2011

2 (9.30 am)

3 Evidence of THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, good morning, everyone. Today the  
5 Iraq Inquiry will be hearing from The Right Honourable  
6 Tony Blair, Prime Minister from 1997 until June 2007 and  
7 I would like to welcome those of you in the hearing room  
8 and also those who are watching the hearing elsewhere in  
9 the QE2 Centre. Your places were allocated through  
10 a public ballot, which was independently overseen. We  
11 have much to cover with Mr Blair and I hope we shall be  
12 able, as we were last year, to go about our business in  
13 an orderly way and in fairness to all not to be  
14 distracted nor disrupted.

15 I should like to start by welcoming our witness and  
16 those who have joined us at the QE2 Conference Centre  
17 today as well as those who may be watching the hearing  
18 either on television or through the Internet. We heard  
19 some six hours of evidence from Mr Blair a year ago. We  
20 have also heard from many other witnesses and have  
21 amassed a very considerable body of documentary  
22 evidence.

23 As I made clear in launching this round of hearings,  
24 there are a number of areas where we need to clarify  
25 what happened. We need to find the lessons to be

1       learned and to do that we need to construct as reliable  
2       and accurate account as possible and reach our own  
3       conclusions.

4               So this morning we want to concentrate on a number  
5       of issues and decisions, some strategic, some more  
6       detailed, where Mr Blair's own recollections are  
7       important.

8               Those issues include the way in which the decision  
9       to take military action was considered and debated  
10      within the government, our understanding of what  
11      happened in Iraq after Saddam Hussein was removed from  
12      power and the UK's preparations for our role in Iraq.

13              We shall also look at what happened after 2003 and  
14      in particular the increase in violence which has  
15      resulted in the loss of so many lives.

16              We asked Mr Blair to provide a statement addressing  
17      a number of issues in advance of the hearing. Our  
18      request and Mr Blair's statement are being published  
19      now.

20              We are also publishing a number of documents or  
21      extracts from documents which are relevant to this  
22      morning's hearing. Mr Blair's statement covers a great  
23      deal of ground and refers to many documents. We shall  
24      not be going through it line by line this morning, but  
25      we shall, of course, be able to follow up further points

1       if we wish.

2               There are other matters which are important to the  
3       Inquiry's Terms of Reference, but which we do not need  
4       to address in the hearing this morning. We shall not,  
5       for example, plan to go over again the intelligence  
6       about Saddam Hussein's armament programmes and the  
7       government's knowledge and understanding of those, nor  
8       how that information was put into the public domain.

9               As Mr Blair's statement makes clear, he wishes to  
10       add a short summary of the lessons he thinks it would be  
11       valuable for a future Prime Minister to know, and we  
12       shall ensure that there is time at the end of the  
13       hearing for him to do so.

14              I have said on every single occasion when we have  
15       held a hearing that we recognise witnesses give evidence  
16       based on their recollection of events, and we, of  
17       course, check what we hear against the papers to which  
18       we have access, some of which are still coming in.

19              I remind each witness on each occasion he will later  
20       be asked to sign a transcript of evidence to the effect  
21       that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

22              With whose preliminaries I will ask Sir Martin  
23       Gilbert to ask the questions.   Martin.

24       SIR MARTIN GILBERT:   Mr Blair, the very powerful speech you  
25       made to the House of Commons on 18th March 2003 was of

1 critical importance. Without Parliament's approval our  
2 troops would not have been able to participate in the  
3 invasion. In your speech you drew an analogy with the  
4 1930s, the moment you said when Czechoslovakia was  
5 swallowed up by the Nazis. That's when we should have  
6 acted.

7 This was not the first time that analogy had been  
8 made. Jack Straw, for example, recalled the descent  
9 into war in the 1930s when he spoke on 11th February.

10 Comparing Iraq with Nazi Germany has enormous  
11 emotive force with the British public. It also  
12 heightens perceptions of the level and imminence of the  
13 threat.

14 In your book "A Journey" you say that you regretted  
15 and almost took out that reference and the almost  
16 universal refusal, as you put it, for a long time for  
17 people to believe Hitler was a threat. Can you tell us  
18 why you regretted saying that?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think I actually said in the  
20 speech in the House of Commons on 18th March -- I don't  
21 have it in front of me -- we have to be aware of glib  
22 comparisons, but there was one sense in which I think  
23 there was still a valid point to be made about how we  
24 perceive threat and that is in this sense, my view after  
25 September 11th was that our whole analysis of the

1 terrorist threat and the extremism had to change, and at  
2 that point I was most focused on this, that the single  
3 most important thing to me about September 11th, as I  
4 have often said; is that 3,000 people died, but if they  
5 could have killed 300,000, they would have.

6 The single most difficult thing we have to face  
7 today and I think we face it still -- I think this is  
8 why I personally take a very hard line view on Iran --  
9 is the risk of this new type of terrorism and extremism  
10 based on an ideological perversion frankly, of the faith of  
11 Islam, combining with technology that allows them to  
12 kill people on a large scale.

13 Now where I think the analogy is valid is in saying  
14 even though we may look at the world today and say does  
15 it really matter? Is Iran that much of a threat?  
16 Supposing we just let Saddam carry on, would it really  
17 have been such a problem? My anxiety is that yes, we  
18 cannot take that risk, that after September 11th, the  
19 calculus of risk had to change and change fundamentally.

20 So in that sense in a way I would say there is  
21 an analogy, but you have to be careful of bringing it  
22 out too broadly, otherwise you make a point that  
23 suggests the circumstances of Nazi Germany were the same  
24 as Saddam Hussein and I didn't really mean to suggest  
25 that.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So that's what you regretted?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I don't -- let me just  
3 make one thing very clear, I don't regret the basic  
4 point I am making, which is that this is a time in which  
5 even though many people would say this extremism can be  
6 managed, I personally don't think that's true. I think  
7 it has to be confronted and changed. That is the  
8 foreign policy difference you will see throughout this.  
9 I just read last night Sir Stephen Wall's evidence to  
10 you. Stephen is someone I like and admire and have very  
11 great respect for. I fundamentally disagree with him  
12 about this point. There are two views in this world.  
13 One view over Iraq in a sense was represented by Jacques  
14 Chirac. The other by me. One view is this extremism it  
15 is an encrustment on an otherwise manageable situation.  
16 Don't over-worry about it. Don't provoke it. Don't  
17 stimulate it. Just manage the situation.

18 The other view, which is my view, is that this thing  
19 is deep. Its potential to wreak enormous and  
20 devastating damage is huge and we have to confront it.

21 Now if that is an echo of how people were dealing  
22 with fascism in the 1930s that is the echo, but it  
23 doesn't go broader than that.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You have explained for you the decision  
25 to oust Saddam Hussein's regime by force was not

1 pre-determined and if Saddam had backed down, though you  
2 did not expect him to do so, then invasion would not  
3 have been necessary.

4 A critical decision was therefore your decision that  
5 we should be prepared to join the Americans in using  
6 force and that we should prepare to use force ourselves.

7 Can you tell us at what point you took that  
8 decision?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think after September 11th.  
10 I think I said in my statement of 14th September 2001  
11 that I think this issue of WMD is going to take on  
12 a different meaning now. Of course the Americans had  
13 already a policy of regime change. That was a policy,  
14 in fact, articulated by President Clinton, passed in  
15 1998 following the military action we took against Iraq,  
16 US and UK in 1998. So it was obviously going to be on  
17 the agenda. I was always going to make it clear and did  
18 make it clear we would be shoulder to shoulder with  
19 America in dealing with these threats after  
20 September 11th. So how we were to deal with it, that  
21 would be an open question. That we were going to deal  
22 with it I think was pretty clear from that moment on.

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The Cabinet paper for conditions on  
24 military action which was issued on 19th July 2002,  
25 a version of which has appeared in the press, recorded

1       that you had told the President at Crawford in  
2       April 2002:

3               "United Kingdom will support military action to  
4       bring about regime change provided certain conditions  
5       were met."

6               Was that a turning point?

7       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It wasn't a turning point. It was  
8       really that all the way through we were saying this  
9       issue now has to be dealt with. So Saddam either comes  
10      back into compliance with UN resolutions or action will  
11      follow.

12              If you like, it might just help, because going back  
13      through the papers again for this, I think I can give  
14      more of a shape as to how this then evolved.

15              So pre-September 11th we have a policy of  
16      containment, but sanctions are eroding. Containment  
17      they say partially successful, but it doesn't mean that  
18      he's not still developing his programmes with his  
19      intent.

20              Post-September 11th the calculus of risk changes.  
21      America has a policy of regime change, so they could  
22      have and some of the American system I think wanted to  
23      say right at that moment we are going after Saddam.  
24      I think there were a group of senators that wrote to  
25      President Bush at the end of 2001 saying that's what



1       should happen.

2               The first thing was in April to say to the  
3       Americans, "Look, we are going to be with you in  
4       tackling this. However, we should do this by way of  
5       an ultimatum; in other words, we should give him  
6       a chance to come back into compliance."

7               Then in July we say to the Americans, "Look, he  
8       should come back into compliance but we should do it  
9       through the United Nations. So we should build  
10      an international coalition."

11              So now we have instead of action immediately  
12      ultimatum first, then ultimatum with the UN sanction.  
13      That's really then when we came together for Resolution  
14      1441 and then even later, by the way, we tried to get  
15      another resolution with another ultimatum, but that's  
16      for another time.

17      SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I'd like to turn now to the involvement  
18      of your Cabinet in these decisions. You told us last  
19      year that the options paper produced by the Cabinet  
20      Office in March 2002, a version of which again has  
21      appeared in the press, was seen by you and the Foreign  
22      and Defence Secretaries and was discussed by Ministers.

23              We have been unable to identify such a meeting, such  
24      a discussion, and it is not listed in the material that  
25      you prepared for the Butler Inquiry in 2004.

1           Can you identify when this March 2002 option paper  
2           was discussed?

3   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I know that there was a version of  
4           it that certainly went to the Chancellor, for example,  
5           but we actually had Cabinet discussions. I don't know  
6           specifically on that paper, but on what to do about  
7           Iraq, and so, for example, there's Cabinet meetings  
8           I think in March before Crawford. For example, on  
9           7th March we set out our position on Iraq in the  
10          Cabinet minutes there. We say:

11                "It was important the United States did not appear  
12                to be acting unilaterally. It was critically important  
13                to re invigorate the peace process. Any military  
14                action taken against Saddam Hussein's regime had to be  
15                effective. On the other hand the Iraqi regime was in  
16                clear breach of its obligations under several United  
17                Nations Security Council Resolutions. WMD programmes  
18                posed a threat to peace."

19                So that's what we said there and then we went on to  
20                say how we should deal with this in a proper way.

21   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My question is not that the Cabinet  
22                discussed it --

23   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Right, but did they see the paper?

24                I don't know whether they saw the paper at the time.

25   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: At that particular Cabinet all we can

1 find that the Cabinet were presented with was the  
2 Parliamentary Labour Party paper that had been produced  
3 shortly before.

4 How did you expect your Cabinet to take an informed  
5 view or have substantive discussions of the sort you  
6 have told us did take place, without having papers and  
7 background information of the sort that were available  
8 to you?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the Cabinet, as I say, the  
10 leading members of the Cabinet certainly did, but the  
11 rest of the Cabinet, when we were having these  
12 discussions about Iraq, and I think all in all there  
13 were over 20 different Cabinet discussions about it, I  
14 have heard it said occasionally these discussions were  
15 undetailed. They were immensely detailed. You can see  
16 all the points that were being made, including all the  
17 points by the way in these papers.

18 The notion people weren't debating and discussing  
19 it, I can tell you it was dominant as the issue of  
20 discussion in the Cabinet, but more than that outside of  
21 the formal Cabinet meetings people were talking about  
22 this the whole time. So I can't say -- and I will go  
23 back and have a look again at whether apart from the key  
24 Cabinet Ministers others had sight of these option  
25 papers -- but this was a perpetual conversation going on

1       in depth and in the Cabinet discussions in March, in  
2       April, then again in May, June, July, all of this was  
3       being canvassed pretty broadly and pretty deeply.

4   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But without access to some of these  
5       crucial documents -- I mean, the options paper is very  
6       important. This was not something which they were able,  
7       as it were, to add to their contribution to the debate.

8   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the options paper really  
9       said two things. It said you can either go for  
10      containment. We can't guarantee that that's successful.  
11      He will probably continue to develop his programmes and  
12      be a threat, but nonetheless that is one option. The  
13      other option is regime change.

14         Now there's nothing in those papers, as it were,  
15      that wasn't surfaced as part of the discussion. So the  
16      discussion all the way through was: what is the  
17      judgment? Because it is pretty -- look, the facts on  
18      this are fairly clear in these options papers. If you  
19      go back to the one in March 2002, it lays it out pretty  
20      clearly. Right. That was certainly part of the  
21      discussion that was going on in Cabinet.

22         Now you can say, and I would be perfectly happy if  
23      you did say, look it is better to disclose all those or  
24      give everybody a copy of those papers. I certainly  
25      didn't say they shouldn't be, but the content of those

1 papers, that is something that was very, very adequately  
2 discussed and the issue was clear in the end. There was  
3 not a great dispute about what we thought about the  
4 facts. The facts were he is continuing to develop WMD.  
5 He has the intention of doing that. It is crucial to  
6 his regime. On the other hand, so far we have contained  
7 him.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

9 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will ask Sir Roderic to pick up the  
10 questions now. Rod.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just following through on that last  
12 point, Mr Blair. You say the content of things like the  
13 options paper is what was discussed. Now the options  
14 paper looked at three possible ways of effecting regime  
15 change. Does this mean that the Cabinet at this stage  
16 in March of 2002 was discussing regime change and ways  
17 in which it might have been effected?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What we were discussing was this,  
19 and you can see this set out in some of the other  
20 Cabinet minutes -- I have them here -- from 11th April  
21 straight after Crawford. The Cabinet was discussing  
22 this. We are going to have to deal with this issue now.  
23 Everybody knew that the Americans were taking  
24 a different and stronger line. The issue was very  
25 simple. He either had a change of heart, or regime

1 change was on the agenda. That was clear from  
2 the minutes, from the discussion at Cabinet and indeed  
3 from the whole of the public discourse around this.

4 Now you could have regime change happening in  
5 a number of different ways. There didn't need to be  
6 military action but the likelihood was that's what would  
7 happen.

8 For example, in the --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think you had been advised it wasn't  
10 going to happen without military action. It was  
11 a question of whether the military action was in support  
12 of a rebellion or was more direct?

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, yes.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But regime change without military  
15 action, I mean, you are going back to what happened in  
16 1991 when an internal rebellion had failed. That was  
17 looked at and dismissed in the options paper, wasn't it?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. Exactly. So --

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This really brings me to my next  
20 question. You referred earlier to the evidence given to  
21 us earlier this week by Sir Stephen Wall, who was your  
22 advisor, of course, not on Iraq but the European Union,  
23 but a very, very experienced official who attended  
24 Cabinet meetings, and in his evidence session he was  
25 asked at what point he thought from sitting in Cabinet

1       it would have become clear to Cabinet members as a whole  
2       with the possible exceptions of Robin Cook and Clare  
3       Short and obviously with the exceptions of the Foreign  
4       and Defence Secretaries, but to the rest of the Cabinet  
5       at what point would they have appreciated that they had  
6       endorsed a policy that was very likely to lead us to  
7       war. His answer to that question was "Probably not  
8       before January 2003". So that's about nine months later  
9       than the meeting you were just talking about.

10           Do you think that a fair assessment by Sir Stephen?

11   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't frankly. I mean, the  
12       whole debate that was going on in and around, for  
13       example, the visit to Crawford was whether we would be  
14       with America on military action. You can go back and  
15       look in my press statements. This is not a private  
16       thing. This is a public thing. You could look at the  
17       press statements, the speech in Texas. I actually have  
18       here, and I will just look out I think in a moment,  
19       an interview I did -- not the interview you referred to  
20       but an earlier interview with Jeremy Paxman in which  
21       I make it absolutely clear that, you know, regime change  
22       is possible. This is in April 2002. Okay. This is on  
23       BBC television. So it is not exactly a secret.

24   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, you made a similar point in  
25       your speech at Crawford also in April 2002.

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Just to give you a flavour of it:  
2 "Paxman: Do you agree with Bush on Iraq there has to  
3 be a toppling of Saddam Hussein?  
4 Blair: I certainly believe getting rid of Saddam  
5 Hussein would be highly desirable. I certainly endorse  
6 the policy of doing everything we can to get rid of  
7 Saddam Hussein if at all possible, everything we can  
8 including military means. That depends, as I have said  
9 many times."  
10 Then we go back into the inspectors and I say:  
11 "If he lets the weapons inspectors back in  
12 unconditionally, anywhere, any time, any place, of  
13 course that makes a difference but there's absolutely no  
14 sign that he's prepared to."  
15 Then on 11th April -- this is at the Cabinet  
16 meeting, straight after Crawford -- I say that  
17 I consulted my hosts in advance on the speech  
18 I delivered in Texas. In it I have made it clear that  
19 the Iraqi regime should permit the United Nations weapon  
20 inspectors to reenter Iraq unconditionally."  
21 Then summing-up I say:  
22 "If President Saddam Hussein were to reject a clear  
23 ultimatum on the return of weapons inspectors there  
24 would be widespread understanding of the need to take  
25 appropriate action."



1           By the way, daily there were stories that we were  
2           lining up and about to launch a military action with the  
3           United States. So the one thing nobody could have been  
4           in any doubt about was either where I stood on the issue  
5           or what the policy of the government was. The policy  
6           was to say to Saddam, "You have to let back in the  
7           inspectors unconditionally, allow them to do their job  
8           and the ultimatum is if you don't do that action will  
9           follow."

10       SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another senior official who attended  
11           Cabinet, Mr Tom McKane, told us in evidence this week  
12           that the official policy of the Government continued to  
13           be containment at least until September 2003 -- 2002.  
14           At the period that you are talking about the government  
15           under your leadership is still leading a drive to get  
16           a smart sanctions resolution of the United Nations that  
17           was then passed in May.

18           So would an ordinary Cabinet member, not one  
19           directly handling this issue, really have been aware in  
20           March/April of 2002 that he or she was taking collective  
21           responsibility for a policy that was, if Saddam didn't  
22           back down, likely to lead us into joining in military  
23           action against Iraq? Sir Stephen Wall thought not. You  
24           say he is wrong. You were the Prime Minister. I mean,  
25           he was sitting there in the meetings listening to them.

1 I suppose in a sense he was more in the position of the  
2 Cabinet Minister not involved in the issue. But you  
3 think it was absolutely clear when we were talking about  
4 going to the United Nations the implication was this  
5 could lead us into military action against Iraq.

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't think there was any doubt  
7 about that at all. If you went back, unless people were  
8 not listening to the news or reading the newspapers,  
9 which is not my experience of the Cabinet Ministers, it  
10 was literally the issue the entire time. What I was having to  
do  
11 was constantly say to people: "We have not taken the  
12 decision on military action. We are not at this stage  
13 of having put the ultimatum down."

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Perhaps we can move on to this question  
15 of the point of when the Cabinet was asked to take  
16 a decision. Firstly, between April 11th, 2002 and  
17 23rd September 2002 my understanding is that the Cabinet  
18 had no discussions about Iraq, but that was a fairly  
19 important period in which the policy was evolving.  
20 Within that period we had got very fully engaged in  
21 military planning both internally and with the United  
22 States. Also in that period you had reached your  
23 agreement with President Bush to go to the United  
24 Nations with the intention of warning -- delivering  
25 a warning to Saddam that if he didn't comply he would

1 face serious consequences. He would effectively face  
2 the use of force.

3 Now in this time in which the policy was developing  
4 between 11th April and 23rd September did you feel that  
5 you had Cabinet endorsement for that policy that was  
6 taking us closer towards the point at which military  
7 action might be necessary? Had they taken that sort of  
8 a decision?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. Their desire was that  
10 we went down the United Nations route.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, but did they understand that given  
12 that Saddam in your estimation was unlikely to back  
13 down, that beyond the United Nations route lay the  
14 probability of military action?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, absolutely. I was saying  
16 this publicly. I wasn't saying it privately.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No. So you had a clear Cabinet mandate  
18 in effect to carry those negotiations through in this  
19 period and everybody around that table taking collective  
20 responsibility understood what was happening?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I honestly don't think you could  
22 have a Cabinet Minister around that table who would say  
23 "Oh, my goodness, I didn't know we were saying Saddam  
24 had to comply with the UN inspectors or we are going to  
25 take military action". I mean, I was saying it. At

1 every Prime Minister's questions I was being asked it.

2 Look, I will go back over the Cabinet minutes, by  
3 the way, between April and September to see that we  
4 didn't discuss Iraq at all. I'm surprised by that.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If I am wrong on that, please tell me?

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have not checked them myself, so  
7 I will do.<sup>1</sup> However, let me just say literally  
8 throughout that period there was a perpetual focus on  
9 the question of were we going to get the Americans to go  
10 down the UN route. The Cabinet, of course, was fully  
11 behind that. That's what they wanted, because the  
12 Cabinet I think were pretty much in two different -- of  
13 two different minds, if you like. One group would  
14 have been absolutely with me all the way. The other  
15 group were saying: "Well, look, we understand it's a big  
16 problem, but let us try to avoid military action if we  
17 possibly can and the United Nations route is a good way  
18 of doing that."

19 All of us knew that at some point there was going to  
20 come a moment of truth or likely to where you had to  
21 decide are you seeing it through or are you not seeing  
22 it through, and in the end Robin Cook, for example,  
23 wasn't with us on that, but there was not a single  
24 Cabinet member around that -- I cannot believe anyone  
25 would come here and say "I really didn't realise that

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<sup>1</sup> At Mr Blair's request the Cabinet Office subsequently advised the Inquiry that, at the Cabinet meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June there was a brief discussion on Iraq in the context of a discussion about Afghanistan. The minutes from this Cabinet meeting had not previously been shared with the Inquiry (the Iraq reference had not been spotted until this week, because the subject heading was "Afghanistan"); they have now.

FINAL

1        was the policy of the government", because it was being  
2        articulated weekly, occasionally daily, by me, because  
3        every interview I did at the time, every Prime  
4        Minister's question time I did, people were saying to  
5        me, "So what's going on here?"

6        SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, what is not clear is at  
7        what point you were actually asking the Cabinet to take  
8        decisions. You have just said you were saying "We don't  
9        have to take a decision on military action now".  
10       Sir Stephen Wall, again not only in his evidence with us  
11       or earlier occasions, has spoken with admiration of the  
12       skill with which you decided the policy and steered it  
13       along a course that you had determined. He said in  
14       evidence that your style was very much to keep your  
15       options as open as you could. Paul Boateng, in giving  
16       evidence to us, talking of the September Cabinet  
17       meeting, said that it was a full discussion, but it  
18       wasn't one in which the Cabinet was discussing options.

19       As we have heard already, the Cabinet had not had  
20       any papers on Iraq other than the briefing paper for the  
21       Parliamentary Labour Party and in September they all had  
22       copies of the dossier. They had not had the options  
23       paper. It only went to the Foreign and Defence  
24       Secretaries on the face of it. You say the Chancellor  
25       also got a copy. It is not clear that even the Deputy

1 Prime Minister got a copy.

2 If you are an ordinary Cabinet Minister not dealing  
3 day-to-day with the issue, yes, you read the newspapers,  
4 but if you are not seeing the policy papers are you in  
5 a position to make a decision, one question? Is the  
6 Prime Minister making it clear to you, that "We have got past  
7 the point of briefing and discussion. We are actually at  
8 this point" -- you are looking to the Cabinet for  
9 a decision for endorsement of a very serious decision at  
10 a point before we get to the final stage when  
11 effectively there aren't any options left before March  
12 2003.

13 So can you identify a point before March 2003 at  
14 which you specifically sought a decision from the  
15 Cabinet rather than kept your options open?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I wasn't keeping my options open.

17 I was stating a policy that was very, very clear and  
18 what I will do after this, by the way, is go back,  
19 because I appreciate what you are asking me about those  
20 Cabinet meetings, but I will go back and give you all  
21 the summaries of the discussions at the Cabinet and the  
22 summing-up, but the policy was totally clear. The  
23 policy was we are going to deal with this issue. Our  
24 preference is to deal with it through the United Nations  
25 but not dealing with it is not an option.

1           Now that is there in the Cabinet minutes in March  
2           and April, never mind September. What the Cabinet did  
3           have, of course, was access to the intelligence. By the  
4           way, if any Cabinet member came to me and said, "Look, I  
5           have got issues about intelligence" and I think there  
6           were some who had come and asked to be able to see it,  
7           I would send them off to see the intelligence people,  
8           but also the issue was being canvassed in the Cabinet in  
9           the sense that the facts weren't really in dispute. You  
10          couldn't --

11   SIR RODERIC LYNE: But our military preparations were being  
12          made in great secrecy?

13   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: That's necessary frankly.

14   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Of course it is necessary. They remained  
15          pretty secret until pretty near the end of the year.

16          Now the Cabinet handles secret material, Cabinet  
17          Committees, senior ministers handle secret material.

18          Do you think it was clear, do you think it was  
19          understood within the Cabinet that we actually had  
20          military preparations underway?

21   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, of course.

22   SIR RODERIC LYNE: And they were taking collective  
23          responsibility for this policy?

24   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course they were taking  
25          collective responsibility for the policy because it was



1           being outlined the entire time. They knew you can't  
2           simply decide one day that you are going to --  
3   SIR RODERIC LYNE: They didn't know the military  
4           preparations were underway?  
5   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I would have been astonished if  
6           they didn't, because there was discussion of that. I am  
7           sure again -- I will have to go back over the notes --  
8   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although within the MoD people were told  
9           to keep it very tight. The logistics boys were not  
10          allowed --  
11   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course. Look, if you are  
12          preparing military action, you have to keep it very  
13          tight. There was no way, for example -- I am sorry but  
14          I would not agree to giving a military planning paper to  
15          the general Cabinet.  
16   SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am not asking about a military planning  
17          paper going to the Cabinet. It is a question of whether  
18          they were aware this was a course they were on?  
19   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't think anybody was in any  
20          doubt about the course they were on.  
21   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.  
22   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: If -- you know, that does not mean  
23          to say that there were not some who were saying "I wish  
24          we weren't on this course", but it really does defy  
25          common sense and logic, let alone the discussion, to

1 think that there were people in the Cabinet who didn't  
2 know what was -- that we were on a course where the  
3 principals of it were absolutely clear. Go down the UN  
4 route, get an ultimatum. If he fails to meet the  
5 ultimatum we are going to be with America on military  
6 action. This is not -- as I say, if you go -- and  
7 I will send the committee afterwards several of my  
8 public comments at the time. I sent it out with crystal  
9 clarity. That was our position. It was a position when  
10 I was being under a certain amount of criticism for  
11 having, but the Cabinet were completely aware of the  
12 fact that's what we were on.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Can I move on to one other aspect  
14 of the way the Cabinet processes happened, which is  
15 comparing your practice with that of previous Prime  
16 Ministers where on major issues of security, defence,  
17 possible conflict, the habit had been to have Cabinet  
18 committees which would include not only the relevant  
19 departmental Ministers, Foreign Affairs and Defence, but  
20 other very senior Ministers, people like the Chancellor  
21 of the Exchequer, the Deputy Prime Minister, if there  
22 was one, who didn't have the burden of the departmental  
23 portfolio, could look at that it a bit from the outside,  
24 but who in these meetings, being very experienced and  
25 very senior, were able to look for weaknesses in the

1 policy, the strategy, stress test it, challenge it, if  
2 necessary, even challenge the Prime Minister, which  
3 a more junior minister might feel inhibited about doing.

4 Now so far as I can see that didn't happen in the  
5 way that you handled this policy. Your meetings, as you  
6 said in our previous discussion, tended to be informal,  
7 ad hoc with a small A and small H, as you said, and it  
8 was the Foreign and Defence Secretaries who were there,  
9 but not other Ministers.

10 Do you feel on reflection that having more stress  
11 testing of the policy of that kind that I have described  
12 might have helped to highlight some of the weaknesses in  
13 it such as the weaknesses in aftermath planning that  
14 later became apparent which you and President Bush have  
15 acknowledged?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, in one sense I would like to  
17 say yes, because it would be in a way an easy enough  
18 concession to make. My frank belief is it would not  
19 have made a great deal of difference, no. The committee  
20 meetings that we had, small A, small H, ad hoc meetings,  
21 I think there were 28 of them, 14 of which were minuted.  
22 I had the right people there, by the way, and I think  
23 this comes out in Andrew Turnbull's evidence, no-one was  
24 saying to me "Do it a different way". I mean, if  
25 someone had I would have listened to it, but I have to

1 say to you in addition when I looked, for example, at  
2 Mrs Thatcher's War Cabinet, it didn't have the  
3 Chancellor of the Exchequer on it. You know, it is  
4 not -- you have there the people that you need there.

5 The bigger point you are making is: but was there  
6 anyone really testing the validity of this policy, and  
7 my answer to that, Sir Roderic, is this. People were  
8 testing it the whole time. So, for example, through  
9 this period, because I was frankly concerned about the  
10 position that Robin would take -- he was a former  
11 Foreign Secretary; he knew this issue very, very well --  
12 I had several meetings with him during this time, when  
13 he was absolutely saying to me "Well, I don't know. Is  
14 it really worth taking him on? He is a terrible man who  
15 has done these terrible things but is it really worth  
16 it?"

17 In respect of the planning, however, there was  
18 a lot of detailed planning going on. The trouble is  
19 there was nothing that was putting us on notice about  
20 the problem we ended up with.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We are going to come back to that at  
22 a later stage.

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I suspect had you had people  
24 there, first of all in the run-up to the conflict  
25 frankly they would have been stress testing whether

1 military action, rather than the aftermath. Even if  
2 they had been there, the questions they would have been  
3 asking were the questions we were asking: humanitarian,  
4 environmental.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On both counts it might have been useful  
6 if they had been stress testing whether military action  
7 or perhaps whether military action now. That's another  
8 question.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Can I just make a point?

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, of course.

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: When you go through these detailed Cabinet  
discussions, you see the

12 summaries of the points people are making. You can  
13 see many of these points people were making, but in the  
14 end they were -- look, one of the things about this that  
15 I think in retrospect and in hindsight we lose is that  
16 everybody found this issue difficult. There was  
17 nobody -- not even Robin was sitting there saying "Look,  
18 I think this is clear".

19 So what was happening throughout was that people  
20 were saying to me in a sense, "Look, do your best on  
21 this to get the Americans down a multilateral route,  
22 because if you can get them down it, it is going to be  
23 a lot easier for all of us". People were actually far  
24 more worried about the politics than they were about  
25 anything else, because, you know, as some of the papers

1       make clear, here we were. We had just been reelected,  
2       another landslide. We were probably the most successful  
3       centre left government in the world. Suddenly I am  
4       about to go into an alliance with a right-wing  
5       conservative Republican President. That was the thing  
6       that worried them most. The thing they were stress  
7       testing most of all was; what are you going to do with  
8       the government if we are forced to go into alliance with  
9       President Bush? That was the most difficult thing in  
10      a way politically, and the thing was throughout, and  
11      this is why I go back to September 11th, my view was  
12      I was not oblivious to the difficulties, but in the end  
13      were we going to stand firm and deal with this threat  
14      alongside America or not? That was the issue. You  
15      know, you can go round this 1,000 times but you come  
16      back to that same basic challenge.

17    SIR RODERIC LYNE: If it wasn't difficult I don't think we  
18      would all be sitting here now. We have just spent the  
19      last year and a half being asked to conduct an Inquiry  
20      into it. It is a very difficult issue.

21           I would like now to move back. We have been  
22      discussing the situation in the spring and summer of  
23      2002, but I would like to go back a bit to late November  
24      and early December 2001.

25           On 26th November President Bush said at a press

1 conference that if Saddam refused to let weapons  
2 inspectors back in, he, meaning Saddam, he would "find  
3 out" what would happen.

4 Now that set off quite a lot of media speculation,  
5 and this is only about, what, ten weeks after 9/11, that  
6 the President was shifting towards thoughts of military  
7 action against Iraq.

8 In the days that followed that, whether this is  
9 coincidental or not I don't know -- the papers don't  
10 show -- you received a lot of advice on Iraq and the  
11 focus, as I say, up to this point had very much been on  
12 Afghanistan. You had a note from Jonathan Powell which  
13 he described in his evidence to us rather diffidently,  
14 a note which was he said in his evidence about  
15 encouraging people in Iraq to resist.

16 You asked for and received from the Foreign Office  
17 a note on options over Iraq, and the Foreign Office's  
18 advice from the Foreign Secretary's office was that  
19 there were "No anti-terrorist grounds for Stage 2  
20 military action against Iraq". They suggested  
21 a ratcheting up of containment, and they warned that the  
22 1991 uprisings had failed for want of outside support  
23 and that military intervention for the purpose of regime  
24 change would be illegal.

25 So that was the Foreign Office advice.

1           Thirdly, as you mention in your statement to us, you  
2           received an expert paper from SIS, the Secret  
3           Intelligence Service. Actually in earlier evidence it's  
4           been established that there were three papers from SIS.  
5           In the published evidence of the Inquiry's last session  
6           with Sir David Manning there is a quotation from one of  
7           these papers which reads as follows:

8           "We discussed", that is to say a discussion is  
9           clearly referring to between SIS and Sir David, "how we  
10          could combine an objective of regime change in Baghdad  
11          with the need to protect important regional interests  
12          which would be at grave risk."

13          That paper was also described in this evidence  
14          session as setting out a route map for regime change  
15          very openly.

16          Sir David commented on that "That regime change at  
17          this stage, of course, is not about invading Iraq."

18          So that advice came in and then on 3rd December you  
19          spoke to President Bush on the telephone. Then you sent  
20          him a paper which Sir David Manning delivered to  
21          Dr Condoleezza Rice during a visit to Washington on 5th  
22          December. The paper was dated 4th.

23          Now those records of your phone conversation,  
24          Sir David's visit and the paper you sent have not been  
25          declassified, but I wonder if you could give us the gist



1 of your conversation with the President on 3rd December  
2 and of the message which you then sent to him via  
3 Sir David?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. First of all, I have to go  
5 back and study that because that was not one of the ones  
6 that I thought you would ask me about, but I am very  
7 happy to go back to that 3rd December 2001 and look at  
8 it again, but the first paper I received, which is the  
9 Iraq options paper I think is worth looking at from the  
10 Foreign Office, because you say it concluded there are  
11 no anti-terrorist grounds for Stage 2 military action  
12 against Iraq. That was on the basis we saw no link  
13 between Iraq and Al Qaeda. That does not deal with the  
14 point, however, that post September 11th WMD takes on  
15 a different significance.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because that letter goes on to  
18 say:

19 "There is real reason for concern about Iraq's WMD  
20 programmes principally chemical, biological weapons and  
21 long range missiles."

22 It then has an annex A, which is just worth looking  
23 at for a moment, because when it asks -- and this has  
24 been declassified:

25 "What is Iraq doing?"

1           This is the answer the Foreign Office gave me:

2           "Iraq is concealing information about large  
3           quantities of chemical and biological munitions agents  
4           and precursors. It is concealing up to 20 long range Al  
5           Hussein missiles. It is actively pursuing chemical and  
6           biological weapons and ballistic missiles. It is  
7           seeking to rebuild a nuclear weapons programme and most  
8           importantly barring entry to the inspectors."

9           Now that was not exactly a reassuring paper on  
10          Saddam.

11       SIR RODERIC LYNE: No. That was indeed the existing  
12          situation that they were describing, yes. There is no  
13          argument about that.

14       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What I think is very important,  
15          because I think when we come to the SIS officer's  
16          evidence, and I would like specifically to draw  
17          attention to that, because I think it is very important,  
18          in his papers, some of which warned -- one of which in  
19          a sense said, "Look, this is going to be very, very  
20          difficult if you try getting regime change in Iraq, so  
21          watch out". Another paper, however, said "On the other  
22          hand, leaving him there is also very, very  
23          difficult".

24          When he gave evidence to you, I think he gives  
25          evidence which is really, really important in

1           understanding that all the way through there were these two  
2           views. There was not ever one view, namely containment  
3           is working. What on earth are you focusing on regime  
4           change for. All the way through the system, in a sense, like  
the politicians,

5           were saying "Look, carry on containment and hope that  
6           works", but on the other hand I think one of the option  
7           papers actually says to me, by implication you cannot  
8           stop the WMD programmes unless you actually remove  
9           Saddam. I think it actually says that or something like  
10          that.

11       SIR RODERIC LYNE: These were the views. My question is  
12          what did you say to President Bush?

13       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am leading you to that. When  
14          you then get to the evidence -- when you then get to my  
15          conversation with President Bush I am in a situation  
16          then when I am saying to him, "Look, we are going to  
17          have to deal with this issue. We accept that. After  
18          September 11, the calculus of risk has changed and  
19          changed fundamentally. We cannot allow Saddam Hussein  
20          to be in breach of UN resolutions". So I am signaling  
21          that I am up for the policy of handling and dealing with  
22          this issue and we are going to be with America in doing  
23          that.

24                We then I think from memory had a discussion about  
25          all sorts of different aspects of that and how it might

1 be done, and so on and so forth. For me, as I said  
2 again publicly, I was in no doubt it would be beneficial  
3 for the world to get rid of Saddam Hussein and to get  
4 rid of his regime. On the other hand, I was saying  
5 "This is going to be difficult precisely because of the  
6 things listed in the paper from the SIS officer".

7 If I just quote from his evidence to you, because  
8 I think it is important particularly for the public  
9 actually to understand what he was saying. He said in  
10 his evidence to you:

11 "I remember saying to somebody at that time that the  
12 lack of our response to the re-emergence of Iraq as  
13 a serious regional power is like having tea with some  
14 very proper people in the drawing room and noticing  
15 there was a python getting out of a box in one corner.  
16 I was very alarmed at the way that Iraq was eroding the  
17 sanctions regime and evading it. It had been successful  
18 in seeing us off with propaganda since the end of the  
19 First Gulf War."

20 Then he goes on to say:

21 "I want to say something very quickly about WMD. So  
22 many people think of WMD as being rather like tanks and  
23 missiles and aeroplanes, things you could look at. In  
24 my own mind I always thought of WMD as being contained  
25 really in the brains of the experts who understood them

1           and were able to produce them sometimes at very short  
2           notice. Nuclear would be slightly different under that  
3           heading, but we dealt with the Iraqi nuclear threat, but  
4           Iraq's potential, its capability in the WMD field was  
5           very dramatic. Our understanding was that Iraq cracked  
6           the Iran/Iraq war with a sarin attack in which 45,000  
7           Iranians died. So the idea of putting an end to this  
8           problem was not something I would advocate, but I could  
9           see the force of the desire to do it to be decisive."

10   SIR RODERIC LYNE: I don't think anyone would disagree with  
11           that. When you say that discussed with the President  
12           how to deal with it, what sort of ideas were you  
13           discussing with him? Were you discussing with him --  
14           was this beginnings of a discussion about regime change?

15   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, regime change was their  
16           policy, so regime change was always part of the  
17           discussion.

18   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was it your policy?

19   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it wasn't our policy to have  
20           regime change but it was our policy to deal with the WMD  
21           issues.

22   SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were not proposing at this stage  
23           to President Bush that we should join in a policy of  
24           regime change? It was their policy, not our policy?

25   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: All the way through -- and I think

1       this is what I said publicly at that time as well -- if  
2       it became the only way of dealing with this issue then  
3       we were going to be up for that, but I think from  
4       memory, but I will have to go back and look at it,  
5       I think the Americans themselves or Condi Rice certainly  
6       laid out to David Manning they were looking at three  
7       options at the time actually. I think there was the  
8       military option obviously, there was containment and  
9       possibly regime change with internal opposition. You  
10      know, the Americans from 9/11 onwards, this was on their  
11      agenda. There is no doubt about that.

12     SIR RODERIC LYNE: The Foreign Office talked about a Stage 2  
13      military action against Iraq. There I think I am right  
14      in saying they are referring to the idea in Washington  
15      that there should be a Stage 2, or a Phase Two I think  
16      it was more often called, of the war against terror.  
17      Having started with Afghanistan that was not going to be  
18      the end of it.

19               Now did you agree with the idea that Iraq should be  
20      encompassed in a Phase Two of the war against terror?

21     THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Absolutely in this sense, that --

22     SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't think we needed to finish with  
23      Afghanistan first?

24     THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I thought we had to deal with all  
25      problems arising out of this issue. So I think again

1 from memory I actually was raising all sort of issues to  
2 do with Somalia. I was raising issues to do with the  
3 Middle East peace process. I was raising issues to do  
4 with Lebanon. My view was -- this was at the heart of  
5 the foreign policy debate that still rages on today. My  
6 view was this was all part of one issue in the end, and  
7 that you had to deal with each and every individual part  
8 of it, that you couldn't, as it were, although it would  
9 be good in one way, say, "Look, we will deal with it  
10 sequentially. We will tackle Afghanistan now and maybe  
11 if there's a problem in Yemen we will tackle that  
12 later". That was not my view.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So how did you react to the Foreign  
14 Office, the Foreign Secretary's advice through his  
15 office, in effect, that proposed ratcheting up of  
16 containment and rather steered away from the idea of  
17 supporting uprisings, let alone military intervention  
18 for the purpose of regime change. Did you agree with  
19 that?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, they were not quite saying  
21 that. What they were saying was, "Look, there is  
22 a policy of containment". We can see this in the  
23 options paper. I think from memory it says it has been  
24 partially successful and it lists certain successes.  
25 They go on to say "However, it's not actually stopped

1       him doing what he is doing". I think there is -- is  
2       this declassified, the options paper of 26th March or  
3       not?

4   SIR RODERIC LYNE: A version of it has appeared in the  
5       public domain, the options paper of March. I cannot  
6       quote from it directly, but you can quote from the  
7       version that has appeared from the public domain under  
8       the Cabinet Secretary's rules. I think I am correct in  
9       saying that. It is hard to see if I am being corrected  
10      by the Chairman. I am not. You can quote from your own  
11      paper.

12   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have not read the press report.  
13      That options paper actually gives quite a good summary.  
14      I don't suppose there is any problem in reading it. It  
15      says:

16                "Tougher containment" -- this is the sort of  
17      summary, if you like "would not reintegrate Iraq into  
18      the international community as it offers little prospect  
19      of removing Saddam. He will continue with his WMD  
20      programmes, destabilising the Arab and Islamic world and  
21      impoverishing its people, but there is to greater threat  
22      now that he will use WMD than there's been in recent  
23      years so continuing containment is an option."

24                So that was the two sides of the argument, and then  
25      which side you came down on really depended on whether



1       you thought Post-September 11th we had to be change  
2       makers or whether we could still be managers. Up to  
3       September 11th we had been managing this issue. After  
4       September 11th we decided we had to confront and change,  
5       and that's, you know -- even today that is the issue,  
6       because, as I say, we face exactly the same challenge  
7       over Iran. What do you do? Do you say we have to  
8       change this or not?

9       SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to come back to Iran later  
10       on, if I may. I have been advised I misled you over the  
11       quotation. You were meant to quote from the actual  
12       version of the paper not the version that appeared in  
13       the public domain. So my apologies for that.

14       If I could come back to President Bush and the paper  
15       you sent to President Bush. Were you at this stage,  
16       which is pretty early in the post-9/11 process, were you  
17       inclining at a strategy, looking at a strategy that  
18       would build up in stages towards a possibility or  
19       probability of military action of some kind or another  
20       against Iraq to deal with Saddam Hussein?

21       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, I could see where this was  
22       heading the same as everybody else.

23       SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were looking at that with the  
24       President in a sort of active sense?

25       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. It was very obvious you had

1 to deal with the issue. There were two ways of dealing  
2 with it: change of heart or change of regime. That was  
3 more or less as it remained throughout.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So were you looking at specific ways in  
5 which one could deal with it?

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course, but in the end the  
7 basic issue was how are we going to deal with it and, as  
8 I say, when I was giving the shape of our policy  
9 development, a lot of people were saying to President  
10 Bush: "Never mind the UN and never mind ultimatums. It  
11 is our policy of the American government laid down by  
12 President Clinton, inherited by you. Go and get him  
13 out".

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why did you need to send him a paper,  
15 having had a conversation on the phone?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because one thing I found in this  
17 was when I was trying to open up the possibility of  
18 getting a change in American policy, it helped to set it  
19 down in writing to him.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So your Foreign Affairs advisor flies  
21 over to Washington with a paper. This is not a casual  
22 conversation. Did it then lead to sort of follow-up?

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, then you really have a sort  
24 of build-up. I think I got a JIC assessment in March  
25 2002. We then went to see the Americans in Crawford in

1 April, but it was -- this was evolving at quite a fast  
2 rate, and the question was could we in a sense -- could  
3 we in a sense -- this thing was going down a track  
4 towards regime change. Could we put it into a somewhat  
5 different track where you said ultimatum and then  
6 a further different track where you said but through the  
7 UN. That's where we were going.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was this effectively the beginning of the  
9 track that led towards regime change?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I think the beginning of the  
11 track that led towards regime change was straight after  
12 September 11th.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But in terms of your discussions with  
14 President Bush?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I would say absolutely clear from  
16 the very outset. I mean, he was going to change that  
17 regime if they didn't let the inspectors back in.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will turn to Sir Martin Gilbert again.  
20 Martin.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can I look for a moment at your very  
22 important minute to Jonathan Powell of 17th March 2002.  
23 I have a number of questions from that. You wrote to  
24 Jonathan Powell:  
25 "In all my papers I do not have a proper worked out

1 strategy on how we would do it."

2 Can you tell us what the "it" in that sentence  
3 means, "how we would do it"?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. How we would either get  
5 Saddam to cease being a threat peacefully or to get him  
6 out by force.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So this was then the clear view that  
8 you had that somehow there was no third way?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't think there ever was  
10 really after September 11th. As I say, this is not  
11 something I was simply saying privately. I was saying  
12 it publicly. So by the time you get to April, if you see my  
13 press statements with President Bush and the speech  
14 I made the next day I was being very open about it, he  
15 had to let the inspectors back in any time anywhere or  
16 action would follow. Really what this paper is more  
17 about is the politics, because I can see politically for  
18 the centre left that, you know, they were going to be  
19 extremely concerned. I was obviously going to get  
20 a huge political problem out of it.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So I suppose on that aspect, on that  
22 political aspect, your next remark in the minute, "the  
23 immediate WMD problems don't seem obviously worse than  
24 three years ago". Does this mean that you on the one  
25 hand didn't believe that Saddam was now posing a growing

1 threat or that this would be a difficult case to make?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, it was the case that  
3 following September 11th, it wasn't that he was doing  
4 any more than he had been before. It was that our  
5 assessment of the risk of allowing him to do anything  
6 had changed, but also the latter point as well you just  
7 made, yes. It was also that, the politics of it.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Another point you make in this minute  
9 was:

10 "So we have to reorder our story and message.  
11 Increasingly I think it should be about the nature of  
12 the regime."

13 We do intervene as per the Chicago speech. What  
14 story did you have in mind that had to be reordered?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: The context of this is, as the  
16 note makes clear, is if you are going to build  
17 a coalition for this, to put it very bluntly, there are  
18 people on the right who would basically support this as  
19 a security issue very easily. There are people on the  
20 left who don't maybe take quite the same view on the  
21 security questions. For those people it is the nature  
22 of the regime and therefore the combination of the  
23 regime and the security threat where the argument would  
24 be most persuasive.

25 As I think I said to you in my evidence before, one

1 of the problems here is that there has grown up this  
2 very binary distinction between regime change on the one  
3 hand and WMD on the other. For me it was always linked  
4 together in this sense, that a regime of the nature of  
5 Saddam's, and you think of the hundreds of thousands of  
6 people he killed, the million casualties in the  
7 Iraq/Iran War, the gassing of the Kurds, clearing of the  
8 Marsh Arabs, a regime of that nature is clearly a bigger  
9 threat with chemical, biological and nuclear capability  
10 is a bigger threat than a regime which is benign.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You say: "We have no inhibitions,  
12 where we reasonably can, about nation building." Does  
13 that essentially mean that the removal of Saddam Hussein  
14 is an end in itself justifiable on the nature of his  
15 regime?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, again as I have said many,  
17 many times on this, the nature of the regime could not  
18 justify in itself the intervention. It is, however, why  
19 I think we should be proud of having got rid of him. So  
20 that's, if you like, the right way of putting it.

21 I mean, you know, as I set out in that Chicago  
22 speech, and I still am by inclination on the liberal  
23 interventionist side of the debate. Many people aren't,  
24 but the basis of this was the security risk changing  
25 after September 11th. So if September 11th hadn't

1           happened we would have carried on in the same way  
2           frankly that George Bush and I first discussed this back  
3           in I think February 2001.

4   SIR MARTIN GILBERT:   Thank you.

5   SIR JOHN CHILCOT:   I'd like to turn to June and July 2002 in  
6           the context of your exchanges with President Bush and  
7           Donald Rumsfeld.   In the Inquiry's statement request to  
8           you, Mr Blair, we asked about two specific statements,  
9           the one you made to President Bush after the meeting of  
10          23rd July 2002, and also to Defence Secretary Rumsfeld  
11          in June 2002.

12               The Cabinet Secretary would not agree to their  
13               disclosure.   In communicating his decision to us, the  
14               Cabinet Secretary wrote and I quote:

15               "A UK Prime Minister may be less likely to have  
16               these exchanges or allow them to be recorded if he is  
17               concerned that this information would be disclosed at  
18               a later time against his wishes."

19               Are you content to tell the Inquiry what was in  
20               these statements?

21   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:   I am very content to discuss the  
22           basis of them.   What I do believe and I am not going to  
23           hide behind the Cabinet Secretary -- it is not my way --  
24           I think it is extremely important that the British Prime  
25           Minister and the American President are able to

1       communicate in confidence, and if something is given in  
2       confidence it should be treated like that, but I am very  
3       happy to tell you the basis of what I said.

4       SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Regarding your comment first  
5       of all to President Bush in the note of July 2002,  
6       Sir David Manning told us about his concern regarding  
7       the opening sentence, he told us, and I quote him, "It  
8       was too sweeping" and that he tried to talk you out of  
9       it. He said it seemed to him -- his phrasing was "To  
10      close off options" and he didn't think that was  
11      a sensible place to be.

12      Concluding this quotation:  
13      "It went further than we should have gone."

14      Nonetheless you did retain the opening sentence.  
15      Can I ask why did you think it was particularly  
16      important?

17      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think I did actually change the  
18      opening sentence, but in -- however --

19      SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I was going to ask whether you amended  
20      the original wording?

21      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: So I did actually accept one  
22      suggestion of David's. Frankly I think he would have  
23      preferred me not to have given any undertaking at all.

24      What I was saying to President Bush was very clear  
25      and simple. It is: You can count on us. We are going



1 to be with you in tackling this, but here are the  
2 difficulties. As you see, the rest of the note is  
3 actually about all the issues and difficulties.

4 Look, in the end you have a very clear and simple  
5 decision to take here. America is going to tackle this  
6 issue. The first question is: do we want it to be  
7 a coalition? My belief was it was extremely important  
8 for the international community to hold together at this  
9 point. I didn't see September 11th as an attack on  
10 America. It is an attack on us, if you like, the west.

11 American could do it unilaterally. Of course they  
12 could, but I would prefer them to do it multilaterally.  
13 So in a sense what I was saying to America was "look" --  
14 and by the way I am absolutely sure this is how George  
15 Bush took it "Whatever the political heat, if I think  
16 this is the right thing to do I am going to be with you.  
17 I am not going to back out because the going gets tough.  
18 On the other hand, here are the difficulties and this is  
19 why I think the UN route is the right way to go".

20 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The Andrew Rawnsley book quotes you  
21 saying at about the end of July, so it must be the same  
22 event, Rawnsley quotes you as saying, having said to  
23 President Bush, quoting from Rawnsley, quoting you:

24 "You know, George, whatever you decide to do, I am  
25 with you."

1                   Is that about right?

2   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it is not what I said. What

3                   I said is what I said in the note, and with the greatest

4                   respect to Andrew Rawnsley I don't think he was present

5                   at the meeting.

6   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: No. He was quoting what you said to him<sup>2</sup>.

7   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What I said to him.

8   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So I understand.

9   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have not heard about that.

10   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I suppose just to round off on this,

11                   because it is very important and central as to how far

12                   there was a commitment and what the nature of the

13                   commitment was, thinking also about what you said to

14                   Donald Rumsfeld on 5th June, you said in your statement

15                   to us about that:

16                   "I could not and did not offer some kind of blank

17                   cheque in how we accomplished our shared objective."

18                   But if you used the sort of language that Rawnsley

19                   cites or that we have seen in the note you sent to

20                   President Bush, are those wholly consistent in terms of

21                   the understanding that the Americans formed?

22   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sure. I don't think the Americans

23                   were in any doubt at all about what was being said and

24                   why it was being said. I can't recall all the precise

25                   conversations I had, but by the way, this is entirely

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Rawnsley in his book *The End of the Party* refers to interviews with officials as the basis for his material.

1 consistent also with what I was saying publicly.  
2 I don't think it was a great secret that I was right  
3 alongside America after September 11th and continued to  
4 be, and one of the reasons why when we had the Crawford  
5 meeting there was so much international focus is that  
6 Britain and America were standing together.

7 What I was saying to the Americans was this, because  
8 I was trying to get them very substantially to amend  
9 their position. Their position had been "We are going  
10 to do it". Then their position had been because I had  
11 asked them "Okay with an ultimatum." Now their position  
12 with huge opposition within his system was going to be  
13 "We are going to put this back in the lap of the United  
14 Nations". Some of the people in his administration were  
15 saying "You are crazy. You are going to put it back  
16 into the bureaucracy of the UN. They will swallow it  
17 up. You will be back to all this playing around. In  
18 the meantime you have this guy doing what he is doing,  
19 sitting there and nothing happening."

20 So I was having to persuade him to take a view  
21 radically different from any of the people in his  
22 administration. So what I was saying to him is "I am  
23 going to be with you in handling it this way. I am not  
24 going to push you down this path and then back out when  
25 it gets too hot politically, because it is going to get

1 hot for me politically, very, very much so."

2 I did this because I believed in it. I thought it  
3 was the right thing to do. I also believe it is  
4 consistent with my public statements and, frankly,  
5 whatever phrasing I used, I accept entirely I was saying  
6 "I am going to be with America in handling this.  
7 However, we should handle it this way". That was in the  
8 end what he agreed to do. The single thing that is most  
9 important over anything else in this whole business  
10 about the politics about the decision before we went to  
11 war, is that 1441 represented a huge compromise on his  
12 part and a huge opportunity for the international  
13 community to get its act together.

14 Once it became clear that Saddam had not changed but  
15 was carrying on in the same way, I think it would have  
16 been profoundly wrong of us to have gone back to the  
17 Americans and said, "I know we said that we would be  
18 with you in handling this, but now we are not".

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I'd like to ask Sir Roderic  
20 to pick up on Resolution 1441. Just before I do I think  
21 I would like to say for the record, because I said to  
22 the Cabinet Secretary that we were disappointed that it  
23 was not possible to see the statement, which, of course,  
24 we have seen, and that disappointment continues, but  
25 there it is.

1                   Roderic?

2   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  You, of course, have got all these

3       notes.

4   SIR JOHN CHILCOT:  Indeed.

5   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  Yes.

6   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  Just a short question on the Attorney

7       General's involvement in advising on Resolution 1441, as

8       you will have seen, Lord Goldsmith said in his statement

9       that he was not being sufficiently involved in the

10      meetings and discussions about Resolution 1441 and the

11      policy behind it that were taking place at Ministerial

12      level, and he says:

13                "I made this point on a number of occasions."

14                Given the importance that you have placed on Lord

15      Goldsmith's understanding of the negotiations, why

16      wasn't he allowed to be more closely involved in the

17      negotiation of 1441 as well as in the discussions which

18      lay behind it?

19   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  Well, I have to say I think I had

20      more to do with Peter Goldsmith on this resolution than

21      I can ever recall on any previous military action that

22      we took.  Now --

23   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  1441?

24   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  Yes.  Now I have read what Peter

25      has said now, and obviously that's something it would be

1       sensible to have the Attorney General -- I think in  
2       retrospect it would have been sensible to have had him  
3       absolutely in touch with the negotiating machinery all  
4       the way through, because I think then we wouldn't  
5       probably have got into the situation where he thought  
6       provisionally, at least, that we needed another  
7       resolution, because I think had he known of the  
8       negotiating history real time as we were going through  
9       it we could have avoided some of the problems later.

10    SIR RODERIC LYNE:  Yes.  I mean, I think he would agree with  
11       you there.  Obviously he has quoted in his statement  
12       a precedent where an earlier Attorney General under your  
13       government was much more closely involved in 1998 in the  
14       negotiating of Resolutions 1154 and 1205.

15       So the regret is obviously mutual.

16    THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  I have to say that I actually  
17       don't recall being involved much with the Attorney  
18       before in the 1998 thing, but obviously I have read what  
19       Peter said.

20    SIR RODERIC LYNE:  Well, the Attorney was involved in the  
21       negotiations and was involved extensively I think with  
22       the Foreign Office and the FCO's legal advisers in 1998.  
23       It was being led from there.

24    THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  Right.

25    SIR RODERIC LYNE:  I mean, in his statement he says that he

1        wasn't involved in discussions about 1441. Between the  
2        time of his meeting with you on 22nd October, when he  
3        told you that the draft then in contemplation did not  
4        authorise the use of force, until 7th November when the  
5        text was, as he puts it, all but agreed, but you say you  
6        were very much involved with him over this resolution.  
7        These two statements don't seem to fit together.

8        THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. What I am saying is I was  
9        more involved -- I recall having more meetings with  
10       Peter about the legality of this issue than I did on any  
11       of the other occasions.

12       I did actually -- there was a meeting I think on  
13       17th October, which we then minuted out, including to  
14       Peter, where we set the objectives for the resolution.  
15       Then he and I had the meeting on 22nd October, and --  
16       I mean, I agree in retrospect it would be better if he  
17       had been there, because we would have then -- he would  
18       have been sensitised to the evidence that has been given  
19       to you by Stephen Pattison and by Iain Macleod, Stephen  
20       Pattison being the head of the then Department of the  
21       Foreign Office, and Iain Macleod being the legal advisor  
22       and the legal counsellor for the UN process and they  
23       explained why the Resolution 1441 did meet our  
24       objectives and significantly changed in the days leading  
25       up to its adoption.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Iain Macleod is the legal counsellor  
2 advising Jeremy Greenstock in New York. The Foreign  
3 Office legal advisors working in London, Sir Michael  
4 Wood and those working to him, as has come out from the  
5 respective evidence, took a very different view. They  
6 took the same view as the Attorney General, and the  
7 Attorney General took the view, as you know, that at  
8 this time he took the view that 1441 did not authorise  
9 use of force unless there was a further resolution, but  
10 you have said in your statement that 1441 "Achieved our  
11 objectives".

12 Now how could it have achieved our objectives if  
13 your Attorney General, your senior legal officer was  
14 telling you that it hadn't?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, this is the very point that  
16 I am making. What was happening was -- and this is why  
17 frankly with retrospect it would have been better if he  
18 had been very closely involved with this negotiation --  
19 because what was happening was we had agreed on 17th  
20 October that there were clear objectives for the  
21 resolution and those objectives were, and I think we  
22 actually say this very plainly, the ultimatum goes into  
23 1441. If he breaches the ultimatum action follows. So  
24 this was the instruction given. I mean, I can't  
25 remember exactly what I said after 22nd October, but



1 I should imagine I said "Well, you had better make sure  
2 it does meet our objectives".

3 As Stephen Pattison's evidence to you makes clear,  
4 there were changes the Americans put in in the final  
5 evolving stages of this negotiation, and the thing that  
6 was problematic for me throughout, and it is why, you  
7 know, I wrote on a later note from Peter "I just don't  
8 understand this" is that the whole point about our  
9 instructions to our negotiators were, "Make sure that  
10 this resolution is sufficient because we can't guarantee  
11 we are going to go back into a further iteration of this  
12 or a second resolution".

13 My view -- let's not go through all this again --  
14 was the important thing about 1441 is that it said "This  
15 is your final opportunity" and what's more it specified  
16 what constituted a breach, namely a failure to fully,  
17 unconditionally and immediately to comply with the UN  
18 inspectors. So we believed that out of this we got  
19 a resolution that was valid, but, of course, that became  
20 a continuing debate with Peter then over the next two or  
21 three months.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So clearly there was no disagreement  
23 between you and him about the objectives that were  
24 supposed to be achieved, but at the end of it he said  
25 that one specific objective, authorising use of force

1 without need for recourse to a further resolution, had  
2 not been achieved, and that must have been  
3 a disappointment to you, but we should I think probably  
4 --

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: More than that. We had to make  
6 sure it did. I don't know -- I mean, as I say, I have  
7 no recollection of specific instructions going out after  
8 that meeting, but I am sure I would have said to our  
9 folks "He had better make sure it does meet that  
10 objective".

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it didn't. He is saying at the end  
12 it didn't.

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What he said -- as I just pointed  
14 out to you -- the resolution did evolve even after 22nd  
15 October. I didn't know this, by the way, at the time,  
16 so I am not relying on that, as it were. Peter came to  
17 the view first that on balance it still required  
18 a second resolution, and then once he went through the  
19 negotiating history that actually it didn't.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At the time the resolution was adopted  
21 and, indeed, through until February the following year  
22 he took the position that a further resolution was  
23 needed, that it hadn't achieved the objectives,  
24 precisely because as he sets out in his note, changes  
25 had been made in the wording that gave him great

1           difficulty. So that was the position. I think we  
2           should move on.

3   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I suggest we should take a ten-minute  
4           break now. I remind those in the hearing room if you  
5           wish to leave the room you will need to be back here  
6           within ten minutes so we can resume in a timely manner.

7                               (Short break)

8   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think Sir Roderic would like to make  
9           a short point.

10   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just to say, Mr Blair, we have checked or  
11           rechecked the Cabinet records between April and  
12           September of 2002 and the records show that there wasn't  
13           a substantive discussion of Iraq in that period as I had  
14           indeed previously said, but the subject came up twice.  
15           On 9th May the Foreign Secretary briefed the Cabinet  
16           that the Security Council was on the point of endorsing  
17           the revised system of sanctions against Iraq, goods  
18           reviewed list, and on 16th May he reported the  
19           successful conclusion of those negotiations. So that's  
20           the --

21   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Does that include the period of  
22           the recess, by the way?

23   SIR RODERIC LYNE: 9th May and 16th May.

24   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sorry. The period you were  
25           referring to?

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The period I was referring to was between  
2 April and September and therefore obviously would  
3 include the summer recess.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I would like to ask some general  
5 questions about legal advice, because Lord Goldsmith in  
6 his witness statement states that he felt he was being  
7 discouraged from providing his advice and cites his  
8 conversation with Jonathan Powell on 11th November and  
9 his meeting with Jonathan Powell, Sir David Manning and  
10 Baroness Morgan on 19th December as examples. Were you  
11 aware that he felt he was being discouraged from giving  
12 formal advice?

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think it was more that we knew  
14 obviously when we came to the point of decision we were  
15 going to need formal advice. We knew also this was  
16 a very tricky and difficult question. It was important  
17 actually that he gave this advice. I think the only  
18 concern, and I am speaking from memory here; generating  
19 bits of paper the entire time on it, but, I mean, it was  
20 obviously important that he was involved.

21 I should say something about my approach to the  
22 office of the Attorney General. I actually changed, in  
23 a sense, the traditional way Attorney Generals were  
24 appointed. Up until about 20, 30 years ago and  
25 certainly going back in time they were usually Members

1 of Parliament who were lawyers, barristers and who were  
2 eminent barristers but MPs at the same time.

3 With the changing circumstances with people  
4 expecting, perfectly understandably, MPs to be more  
5 full-time, it became actually quite rare to have  
6 significant practicing barristers who were MPs. So  
7 usually the Attorney General had been an MP, John  
8 Morris, for example. He was pretty much the last of his  
9 kind.

10 I decided really it was best to go and take a person  
11 who was what I would call a proper lawyer and then put  
12 them in the House of Lords and make them Attorney  
13 General. I did that first with Charles Falconer and  
14 then with Peter Goldsmith. That were amongst probably  
15 the top ten lawyers of their generation. So someone  
16 like Peter was a lawyer through and through and a very,  
17 very good one. So if he was giving advice it had to be  
18 taken seriously.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. So he was not wrong in  
20 supposing that he was not being encouraged to put advice  
21 in writing from time to time?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: And my understanding was, and this  
23 is how we had done it up to now, was that once you got  
24 to the position of asking for advice you get a formal  
25 advice. Now I had not previously had a situation --

1 I don't see why you shouldn't, by the way, on  
2 reflection, but I had not previously been in a situation  
3 where I was getting advice of a provisional nature in  
4 writing.

5 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You said in your own statement that Lord  
6 Goldsmith's advice on 1441 was always going to be  
7 influenced by knowledge of the negotiating history of  
8 1441, which was adopted in New York on 8th  
9 November 2002. I wonder then why did it take until the  
10 end of January/early February 2003 before it was  
11 arranged for him to meet Sir Jeremy Greenstock and the  
12 American lawyers, when he had been raising these  
13 concerns ever since October.

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: And in retrospect it would have  
15 been better if we had put him alongside them  
16 straightaway. I think that was probably because we were  
17 then saying; okay, it may be we can get a second  
18 resolution. Right. It's not because we believe it is  
19 legally necessary. I didn't believe it was legally  
20 necessary. Peter was advising it was. That gave us  
21 an added incentive, if you like, to go and try to get  
22 it. I think politically at that time that was the  
23 pre-occupation. How did you get that second resolution,  
24 because we had been -- it was certainly politically  
25 a lot easier to do it. As Peter himself was saying, if

1       you could get it in the right terms that would take  
2       account of any legal issues, but I am very happy to say  
3       in retrospect I would have had him alongside the  
4       negotiating team and it would have been better if he had  
5       been seeing the American lawyers back in November 2002,  
6       and indeed, I mean, I was -- I thought of this as I was  
7       going back over the papers again, I can only say the  
8       political pressure was just enormous at that time in  
9       December, January, February 2002/2003, and I think it  
10      would have been very hard not to have pushed for the  
11      second resolution, but I wonder in retrospect whether it  
12      would have been better simply to have -- I know, if we  
13      had done it differently and had him there alongside, as  
14      I say, the lawyers at the beginning, we would have just  
15      camped on that resolution.

16    SIR JOHN CHILCOT: When you received Lord Goldsmith's draft  
17      advice of 14th January 2003, Jonathan Powell suggested,  
18      and I am quoting:

19                "We should get Jeremy Greenstock over to suggest  
20      alternatives to him", him being Lord Goldsmith, and you  
21      said, and I quote:

22                "We need to explore whether we can revive  
23      self-defence or whether the United Nations Security  
24      Council could have a discussion that makes plain there  
25      is a breach without a second resolution."

1           Now those comments suggest that you were focusing  
2           not only or mostly on the importance of a negotiating  
3           history, but rather that you were keen to find  
4           an alternative that might convince Lord Goldsmith there  
5           was a legal base for military action. Was that really how it  
6           was?

7   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think it was both actually.  
8           I think I am right in saying that Peter himself  
9           mentioned -- I think this is in square brackets -- that  
10          it had been suggested he talk to Jeremy Greenstock and  
11          indeed that he should. So in a sense he had already  
12          raised that issue. I was -- I think I was simply  
13          casting about. I mean, this was -- I was saying "Have  
14          a look at this point. Have a look at that", but the key  
15          thing was indeed that he was to speak to Jeremy.  
16          I can't remember when the issue of him speaking to the  
17          Americans came up, but all the time what I was -- this  
18          was also part of the negotiating history for the second  
19          resolution. All the time -- and this is why in the  
20          end -- because there had been an original concept  
21          actually about the second resolution. I mean, I have  
22          now gone back through these papers and frankly seen  
23          papers I wouldn't have seen at the time.

24                 There was a concept at some point of having a kind  
25                 of two-step thing where you had a resolution where the



1 UN Security Council would express a readiness to  
2 authorise all necessary means followed by another  
3 resolution if there was a breach. That was really on  
4 the understanding that we would have with the other  
5 members of the Security Council that if Blix said "They  
6 are not cooperating", then you would have, as it were,  
7 almost automatically necessary resolution authorising  
8 necessary means would flow.

9 Then at a later time we thought, "No, we can't get  
10 into that" because supposing the Russians and French say  
11 "We are not authorising action", then it is better to  
12 encompass it all in that one resolution.

13 So I was still in my mind thinking what happens,  
14 though, if one of the Permanent Members of the Security  
15 Council accepts there is a breach and so Resolution 1441  
16 should apply in reviving 678, but they then just say "We  
17 are not going to do it".

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we would like to pursue that  
19 thread a little later on.

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Okay.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just on the point about Lord  
22 Goldsmith's -- the evolution of his advice. Throughout  
23 the time when he was advising there was no legal base  
24 for military action in 1441 alone, the policy -- your  
25 policy of joining with the US in military action did not

1 change. Did that mean you assumed he would eventually  
2 be brought to change his mind?

3 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, but, you know, I was in the  
4 situation where he had given this provisional advice.  
5 There was a debate still going on, and remember I was  
6 keeping maximum pressure on Saddam and I was trying to  
7 keep this coalition together, because by then we had got  
8 over 40 nations in this coalition. Right? So we had  
9 actually created a situation which I desired, which is  
10 it wasn't just the US and it wasn't even just the US and  
11 the UK. By then Australia was in it. We had Japan in  
12 it. We had south Korea in it. We had a majority at  
13 that time of the European Union members. My desire was  
14 to keep maximum pressure on Saddam because I hoped we  
15 could get a second resolution with an ultimatum because  
16 that meant we would avoid the conflict altogether, or  
17 then have a clear consensus for removing Saddam. So  
18 I was having to carry on whilst this internal legal  
19 debate was continuing and try to hope we could overcome  
20 it.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Roderic, over to you on legal  
22 matters.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just following through this point, you  
24 have referred in your statement to provisional advice  
25 and you have just referred to it again from Lord

1 Goldsmith. There is one specific point I would really  
2 like to clarify with you.

3 This is that on 30th January, knowing you were going  
4 to see President Bush the following day, Lord Goldsmith  
5 wrote you a specific letter reiterating his advice on  
6 whether or not the resolution authorised the use of  
7 force. He said:

8 "You might wish to know where I stand on this."

9 He notes that on 14th January he has given you  
10 a note setting out his provisional views and says he is  
11 preparing a more detailed note of advice.

12 Having said that and that he still has to have  
13 further consideration of that, including he hopes with  
14 his American counterparts, but having said all of that,  
15 he says:

16 "I'm not convinced this will make any difference to  
17 my view."

18 He then says:

19 "I remain of the view that the correct legal  
20 interpretation of Resolution 1441 is that it does not  
21 authorise the use of military force without a further  
22 determination by the Security Council."

23 He reiterates that at the end of his letter:

24 "Having considered the arguments on both sides, my  
25 view remains that a further decision is required."

1           So on this specific point he is not expressing  
2           himself tentatively. He is saying "Before you see  
3           President Bush will you please register that this is  
4           where I stand?" Sir David Manning minuted to you "Clear  
5           advice from the Attorney General on the need for further  
6           resolution".

7           Having had that advice, what you actually said to  
8           the President, as you say in your statement, was that  
9           you repeated your strong commitment, given publicly and  
10          privately, to do what it took to disarm Saddam.

11          Did you not feel constrained in making that  
12          commitment by the advice that the Attorney General was  
13          continuing to give you?

14   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. I was going to take the view,  
15          and I did right throughout that period, there might come  
16          a point at which I had to say to the President of the  
17          United States, to all the other allies "I can't be with  
18          you". I might have said that on legal grounds if  
19          Peter's advice had not, having seen what the Americans  
20          told him about the negotiating process, come down on the  
21          other side. I might have had to do that politically.  
22          I was in a very, very difficult situation politically.  
23          It was by no means certain that we would get this thing  
24          through the House of Commons and so on.

25          So I was going to continue giving absolute and firm

1       commitment until the point at which definitively  
2       I couldn't, because had I raised any doubt at that time,  
3       if I had suddenly said "Well, I can't be sure we have  
4       got the right legal basis". If I started to say that to  
5       President Bush, if I had said that publicly, when I was  
6       being pressed the whole time "Do you need a second  
7       resolution, is it essential you get a second  
8       resolution?" and I was having to hold that line very  
9       uncomfortably, by the way, especially in the light of  
10      what Peter had said, but I wasn't going to be in  
11      a position where I stepped back until I knew I had to,  
12      because I believed that if I started to articulate this,  
13      in a sense saying "Look, I can't be sure", the effect of  
14      that both on the Americans, on the coalition and most  
15      importantly on Saddam, would have been dramatic. If the  
16      leading ally had stood up and said "Well, I can't be  
17      sure".

18    SIR RODERIC LYNE: Surely if you had privately warned the  
19    President your Attorney General was advising you that  
20    you needed a second resolution that would have  
21    reinforced the argument with him for getting one?

22    THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: He knew perfectly well we needed  
23    a second resolution. We had been saying that to him  
24    throughout. If I had started raising -- we had not had  
25    the final advice yet, and he had not been through the

1 different iterations. As he explained to you in his  
2 evidence -- one of the things about how the legal advice  
3 is presented, if Peter was absolutely definitive one way  
4 and then came absolutely definitive the other, what he  
5 actually says throughout is "It is on balance this". On  
6 balance it was this side. He saw Jeremy Greenstock  
7 which moved him somewhat because he was aware of the UK  
8 side of the negotiation. Then when he saw the Americans  
9 it moved him over the line to the position where he said  
10 on balance it is lawful.

11 Now I was not going to be in a position where I was  
12 going to start putting that problem before the President  
13 of the United States until I was in a position where  
14 I knew definitively I had to.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although in the period in question your  
16 senior advisor in his conversations with President  
17 Bush's national security advisor presumably was  
18 conveying the message that this was pretty difficult for  
19 you?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I mean, that would not have been  
21 a revelation.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't want to say that to the  
23 President?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, he knew it was pretty  
25 difficult on the politics. If I had started raising

1        legal issues at that point with the President, I think  
2        it would have started to make him concerned as to  
3        whether we were really going to be there or not and what  
4        was really going to happen.

5            Now I would have had to have done that, by the way,  
6        because in the end whatever I thought about the legal  
7        position, the person whose thoughts mattered most and  
8        definitively were Peter's, but I wasn't going to do that  
9        until I was sure about that.

10           Now was it difficult throughout that period? Very,  
11        very difficult, as you rightly say to me in the  
12        statement. I was answering questions in the House of  
13        Commons interviews and so on. I was having to hold the  
14        political line in circumstances where there was this  
15        unresolved finally debate within the UK government about  
16        the legal position, but I was aware of the fact I had  
17        not just the United States as our key ally and our  
18        military alongside their military -- right -- working on  
19        the basis they were going to be there, 40 nations lined  
20        up, all of whom had real political difficulties backing  
21        this, and obviously the prospect, which is still the  
22        prospect I hope we find ourselves in, with Saddam  
23        confronted by an international consensus.

24           If I had through that period in January and February  
25        gone out and said anything that indicated there was

1 a breach in the British position, that there was a chink  
2 of light that had opened up, it would have been  
3 a political catastrophe for us.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think there is a difference between saying it  
5 privately to the President and exposing that flank in  
6 public.

7 I wonder if I can just seek clarification on another  
8 one of these complicated legal points where I am of course at  
the disadvantage of not being a lawyer but you touched on  
9 just now.

10  
11 On 15th January 2003 you told the House of Commons  
12 that, and I quote all of this:

13 "There are circumstances in which a UN resolution is  
14 not necessary, because it is necessary to be able to say  
15 in circumstances where an unreasonable veto is put down  
16 that we would still act."

17 Now Lord Goldsmith, as you know, has said in his  
18 statement to us that these words of yours were not  
19 compatible with the advice that he had given to you the  
20 day before.

21 Did you understand at the time that your words about  
22 an unreasonable veto were inconsistent with the legal  
23 advice?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I was making basically a political  
25 point. However, I accept entirely that there was



1 an inconsistency between what he was saying and what  
2 I was saying there, but I was saying it not in a sense  
3 as a lawyer, but politically. One thing I just point  
4 out here is that -- because this was a very, very  
5 difficult situation. I was trying to hold the line, as  
6 I say, and my position was a little more elaborate than  
7 the two quotes that you've taken from either the news --  
8 I think it was a Newsnight thing, an interview --

9  
10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I was quoting from the House of Commons,  
11 but you made a similar point to Jeremy Paxman on  
12 6th February.

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have gone back through both the  
14 House of Commons and the interview. Elsewhere in both  
15 I expressed it slightly differently. It is worth just  
16 letting me say how I expressed it there.

17 I was actually trying to deal with this point.  
18 I fully accept, and this is really what Peter was  
19 saying, you can't have a situation where there is a veto  
20 but I come along and say "There is a veto but I just  
21 don't agree I am afraid. I think it is unreasonable, so  
22 we are acting anyway".

23 My point was this, and that's why I phrased it  
24 differently in other answers in the House of Commons and in  
25 other answers in that interview. My point was this, and it

1 goes back to something else I said in the papers, what  
2 happens if it is accepted there's a breach but still they  
3 veto?

4 Now I think Peter -- and that's why in the end  
5 I didn't pursue this point -- would just say "tough.  
6 That is just the way it is". My point is this. If the  
7 whole point of 1441 was to say "This is your final  
8 opportunity. You have to comply fully," and it was  
9 accepted he is not complying fully, how come the revival  
10 argument didn't work, because those were precisely the  
11 circumstances in which 678 should be revived?

12 So I was making a slightly different point there,  
13 and in any event I was making a political point, but,  
14 you know, I think Peter says it was uncomfortable for  
15 him. It was uncomfortable for me. That's why, by the  
16 way, at that time I was saying "We have to get him  
17 together with the Americans and resolve this once and for  
18 all".

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you really distinguish when you are  
20 speaking to the House of Commons as Prime Minister  
21 between making a political point and a legal point when  
22 you are making a point about a legal interpretation of  
23 UN resolutions? If you say to the House of Commons "I  
24 am not going to defer to an unreasonable veto," would  
25 they not assume that you are speaking with authority as

1 a Prime Minister, not just making a political point  
2 while your Attorney the day before has told you "This is  
3 not a valid point"?  
4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I understand that. The fact is  
5 what I was being asked about was whether a second  
6 resolution -- if you go back to the House of Commons,  
7 for example, the then leader of the Conservative Party  
8 was saying "Well, is it essential or is it merely  
9 preferable? I had said it was preferable. Clare Short  
10 I think said it was essential. I was trying to hold  
11 that line in circumstances where, as I say, it was very,  
12 difficult but I wasn't -- I mean, look, in the end I was  
13 less making a legal declaration, as it were, because  
14 I could not do that, but a political point, if there was  
15 a breach we had to be able to act, and the thing that I  
16 think is worth just pointing out throughout this period  
17 of time is that we were going for this second  
18 resolution. It was always going to be difficult to get  
19 it, but we thought we might. You know, the  
20 conversations the Americans were having with the French  
21 really turned bad, I would say, in February, as it were.  
22 just a bit earlier than that it had been a little more  
23 hopeful. Both President Bush and myself were trying to  
24 work on the Russians and President Putin. So I was  
25 trying to keep up maximum pressure to get that then.

1           Now if I had started saying -- if I had, as it were,  
2           really put into their hand the fact that, you know, he  
3           is desperate for it and can't do without it --

4   SIR RODERIC LYNE: You would have put your neck on the  
5           block. I think I do now understand this and thank you  
6           for that clarification. Essentially you are in  
7           a situation in which you can't be totally confident,  
8           rightly, as it turns out, that you are going to get  
9           a second resolution. You know there is resistance not  
10          only from the French but from the Russians and others.  
11          They signalled that at the time 1441 was passed in their  
12          explanations to vote. Therefore you don't want to put  
13          your head in the noose by committing to the proposition  
14          "I have to have it for legal reasons". In order to  
15          preserve that point politically and not cross that line  
16          politically you end up having to cross the line of legal  
17          advice drawn by the Attorney General?

18   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: In the end it is not the basis on  
19          which we took the action.

20   SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, but I am talking about the basis on  
21          which you spoke to the House of Commons on 15th January.

22   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: As I say, when you actually --  
23          I tried to choose my words carefully all the way  
24          through. In the two quotes you have I chose them less  
25          carefully, but actually earlier I made it very clear

1 I was talking in circumstances where -- I think  
2 I actually say in the Newsnight interview where a member  
3 accepts there is a breach but nonetheless vetoes.  
4 I will send you those quotes.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have those quotes. Thank you.

6 I think that point is clear.

7 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I will turn now to  
8 Sir Lawrence Freedman, who would like to talk about  
9 inspections. Lawrence.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. You told us before the  
11 break the public demand from November 2001 was to get  
12 the inspectors back in. When making this demand from  
13 that point did you ask for and receive advice about what  
14 would happen if the inspectors did get back in? Did you  
15 ever have grounds for supposing that the return of the  
16 inspectors would be able to find proof one way or the  
17 other on WMD? I am talking now before the inspectors  
18 did actually go back in?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, I think the view of our  
20 systems was, and certainly the intelligence services was  
21 the likelihood Saddam would play around, but I always  
22 thought it was possible he would realise that this was  
23 the moment of choice. As I say in my statement to you,  
24 I think one very interesting thing is to compare Gaddafi  
25 in Libya with Saddam in Iraq. Gaddafi in Libya came to

1 a view and they opened themselves -- this was after the  
2 Iraq invasion Libya basically made full disclosure. It  
3 cooperated properly. Its experts talked to the  
4 inspectors. They disarmed. If you look at South  
5 Africa, again it was through the people responsible for  
6 the programme talking to the inspectors they disarmed.

7 Now Saddam -- look, you would have to say I was  
8 pretty doubtful and so was our system that he would  
9 cooperate, but it was possible he would.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You received advice from officials  
11 in July that the inspectors would need at least six  
12 months. Is that the amount of time you had in mind  
13 going into 1441 that UNMOVIC would need to do its job?

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: For me it was never a matter of  
15 time but a matter of attitude. You could have given him  
16 longer than six months if he was cooperating but if he  
17 was not cooperating it wouldn't really matter whether --  
18 we can come to this later because I think it is a very,  
19 very important, because I do not accept that if Blix had  
20 carried on doing his inspections we would have found out  
21 the truth.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will be coming to that very soon.  
23 I just want to get the groundwork sorted out beforehand.

24 Under Resolution 1284, which set up UNMOVIC, there  
25 had been a clear timetable that they would operate to,

1           which potentially included at the end the suspension at  
2           least of sanctions and you understood that that was the  
3           potential timetable involved?

4   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  Of course.  I had absolutely no  
5           problem given time once it was clear he had, as it were,  
6           opened up and decided "This is it.  I know now the  
7           choice I face and I am going to choose to cooperate".  
8           Then I think it would have been a completely different  
9           situation.

10  SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:  From what you say in your statement  
11           and your book you appear to have concluded quite early  
12           on in December 2002, following the Iraqi declaration of  
13           7th December, that there was no prospect of Saddam  
14           complying with the requirements of 1441.  Is that  
15           basically correct?

16  THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:  Yes.  It's basically correct,  
17           because the -- I think you have the intelligence  
18           reports.  The intelligence reports were that he didn't  
19           intend to cooperate, that the declaration wasn't  
20           correct, but there was also a very significant piece of  
21           intelligence at that time, which was -- and this by the  
22           way remains valid as far as I know -- that Saddam had  
23           said that anybody who cooperated with overseas  
24           interviews would be treated as a spy, in other words,  
25           executed.

1           Look, I mean, the information as such that was  
2           coming to me was not looking very optimistic.

3   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the inspectors only went in on  
4           November 27th?

5   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sure. Absolutely.

6   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So they had not really had a chance  
7           to find out for themselves yet?

8   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. That is why it was very  
9           important obviously to wait until Blix had come back and  
10          started to report.

11   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So basically you have the inspectors  
12          back in, which had been the demand, but you are already  
13          anxious about whether having this demand acceded to is  
14          going to really change the game. The issue now is not  
15          having inspectors back in but how well they do.

16                Now you have talked about timetable. You said you  
17          didn't care how long it took, but you also told us in  
18          your statement or acknowledged that President Bush was  
19          expecting to launch a military attack on 10th March.  
20          That changed by about a week.

21                Did that ever leave you enough time to see whether  
22          UNMOVIC could do its job?

23   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the timeline was pressing it  
24          is true, and that was again a very complicated  
25          situation, because -- the Americans took the view it was



1       absurd to think Saddam was going to change his mind,  
2       because he wasn't. Therefore -- and also by the way  
3       they and our own military were by then fully ramping up.  
4       Indeed, as the prospects of military action got closer,  
5       so Saddam began to cooperate a little bit more.

6               So, no, the reason I sought yet a further  
7       postponement with another ultimatum at the end was in  
8       order to give more time, but I have to say, to be very  
9       frank about it, more time would not have bought us  
10      anything unless it had been absolutely clear that it  
11      came with an ultimatum.

12   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will explore that a bit more in  
13      a moment.

14               Sir Jeremy Greenstock told us:

15               "We were on a timetable of American making which we  
16      couldn't escape from."

17               So is it fair to say that we were caught between the  
18      American desire for early action with an international  
19      desire for the inspectors just to get on with the job?

20   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, yes, of course it was  
21      a pressure that we were under, and my way out of this  
22      ultimately, because this is what I decided to do -- the  
23      whole reason that I came out with this idea at the end,  
24      which was to say, "Okay. We will get Blix to set out  
25      five benchmarks of what Saddam has to do", because some

1 people are saying give them more time. The Americans  
2 are saying let's go for it. So I tried to find a way  
3 through at that point which said "Here are the  
4 benchmarks. We will take them from Blix himself but it  
5 has to have an ultimatum in it".

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think it would have been  
7 helpful if the benchmarks had been set right from the  
8 start, because one of the problems with this process was  
9 until that point there was not a clear sense of what  
10 would constitute a resolution?

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Except that -- you might have done  
12 that, except that 1441 I think it actually specifies the  
13 things he is supposed to do.

14 Now what you then get during the course of the  
15 initial inspections is some practical sense of where  
16 there's a problem, and really this all came to  
17 interviews for me in the end. That was the critical  
18 thing, because, you know, I had -- I don't know exactly  
19 when I did this, but I had studied -- we had not got to  
20 Libya by that stage -- I had studied some of the  
21 disarmament frameworks that had been successful up to  
22 then, and it all depended on your technical experts  
23 sitting down with the inspectors and saying, "Look, this  
24 is what happened. Here is the genesis of our programme.  
25 This is what we have been doing". When you come at

1 a later time, as I say, it is actually very instructive  
2 to look at how the Libyans disarmed. It wasn't the  
3 political leaders they gave the instruction. The actual  
4 work was done by the technical experts.

5 Now the problem all the way through, and we can go  
6 through this about Blix, and Hans Blix was -- we have  
7 had a profound disagreement about Iraq but he is a very  
8 decent and honourable man and I am sorry we have had  
9 this disagreement, but in the end I think it is clear  
10 from his statements at the time that this cooperation  
11 specifically on interviews wasn't forthcoming.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I am not sure that's the case. Can  
13 I quote to you directly from his March 7th report, which  
14 was the last one he made? He explains in his March  
15 7th report that there had been improvement on this  
16 issue. The Iraqi side seems to have encouraged  
17 interviewees not to request the presence of Iraqi  
18 officials, the so-called minders, or the taping of the  
19 interviews." He talks about the possibility of taking  
20 them outside Iraq. "Nevertheless, despite remaining  
21 shortcomings, interviews are useful. Since we started  
22 requesting interviews, 38 individuals were asked to  
23 private interviews, of which ten accepted our terms,  
24 seven of these during the last week".

25 So it is not the case that there was a complete

1 blank on interviews. They were happening and they were  
2 happening -- and he again told us in evidence to us,  
3 under the conditions that UNMOVIC wished for.

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, by 7th March it is  
5 absolutely correct the Iraqis were being more  
6 forthcoming than they had been earlier, not surprising  
7 since we had approximately 300,000 troops down there,  
8 but if you actually track the development of this -- by  
9 the way, the very point you are making, Sir Lawrence is  
10 the reason I have tried to come to the benchmarks. So I  
11 will come to that in a moment.

12 If we actually go through it, interviews without  
13 minders is turned down on 17th January. On 6th February  
14 Blix comes to see me and again says he is worried about  
15 the interviews. By the way, one of the things he is  
16 saying to me throughout is, "I am very worried about  
17 this idea that you ask for interviews abroad, because  
18 their families may be killed". Well, you know, as  
19 I used to say to him, "Hans, if he is going to kill  
20 their family, it doesn't exactly constitute full  
21 cooperation with the ...

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then --

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: If I just say at the 6th February  
24 meeting it is worth quoting what El Baradei, who was also  
25 there, admittedly not in charge of that part of the

1 inspection, but is the head of the Atomic Energy Agency.

2 "El Baradei made the following points", it says. "The  
3 next Baghdad visit would be crucial. The Security  
4 Council was clear. Not all members agreed with the US  
5 timing but all recognised it. Iraq was not cooperating.  
6 Unless there were clear signs of an Iraqi change of  
7 heart on cooperation, both process including interviews  
8 and substance, UN Resolution 1441 would have to be  
9 implemented. Not allowing interviews was a lack of full  
10 cooperation."

11 By then we were several --

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The message was now also getting  
13 through and the suggestion that nothing was changing  
14 clearly is incorrect. Things are changing. You  
15 mentioned the desire to get people to come out of the  
16 country, which, as you say, Blix was very worried about  
17 and had been worried about right from the start of  
18 Resolution 1441 being passed. In that same statement  
19 I cited earlier, the March 7th, one: "Interviews outside  
20 the country might provide such assurance. It is our  
21 intention to request such interviews shortly."

22 Then he told us in evidence:

23 "I never thought you would get very much out of it.  
24 Not only would it have been trouble but we would have  
25 been driven to it in the end. I think the push was so

1       hard. So we would have persuaded the Iraqis and said  
2       this is what you need to do, if you pick up someone you  
3       should order them to come along with us".

4             The point is that you were getting progressively  
5       more cooperation at this time?

6   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Let me make two points in relation  
7       to this. The first is we were going to get more  
8       cooperation progressively because he knew he was about  
9       to be invaded if he didn't cooperate. If you track this  
10      through -- I think even Hans Blix admits this -- the  
11      pressure on him was the threat of military action. That  
12      wasn't going to be what would remove this issue. What  
13      we needed was not a tactical belief by him that he  
14      should string out some more cooperation as the advent of  
15      military action came closer. We needed a genuine change  
16      of heart on his part that meant that the past was going  
17      to be changed and he would adopt a different  
18      perspective, and the importance of the Iraq Survey Group  
19      report, which is the authoritative report which is what  
20      they found after they could conduct interviews, is that  
21      he never changed his heart on this issue at all.

22            The second point I would make, however is this. You  
23      are right in this way. One of the puzzles to me all the  
24      way through was how do I get out of a situation where  
25      the French are saying, "Look, he is cooperating. Okay.

1 It is not what 1441 says but he is doing some  
2 cooperation. So give it more time", with the Americans  
3 saying, "Look, we made a deal with everyone. One final  
4 chance. Full unconditional immediate cooperation or  
5 else. So he is not fully cooperating so why are we  
6 still debating this?"

7 So for the very reason you give, Sir Lawrence, what  
8 I was trying to do at the end then is say, "Okay. How  
9 do we find a way through those two Polar positions? It  
10 is to say you, the Americans, must agree to a situation  
11 where there is a specific agreed set of benchmarks and  
12 he knows what he has to do, of which interviews is  
13 actually the critical one, and you, the French, have got  
14 to agree that if he breaches that ultimatum, then action  
15 follows".

16 The trouble was I couldn't get the two bits together  
17 I am afraid.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will talk about that difficulty  
19 in a moment. Can I just go through quickly through the  
20 points you have just made there? First on intent, and  
21 obviously anybody who has read the ISG report knows they  
22 stress that the intent was there, although in the  
23 short-term the intent was to develop tactical chemical  
24 weapons and ballistic missiles and the ballistic missile  
25 part of that was being dealt with by UNMOVIC. They were

1       destroying engines and missiles.

2               However, under Resolution 1284 one of the things  
3       that UNMOVIC was supposed to do was to set up  
4       an on-going monitoring and verification system so that  
5       even if sanctions were lifted, and they might only have  
6       been suspended, there was still a way of monitoring what  
7       was going on. There would still have been an arms  
8       embargo. There would still have been a safeguards  
9       agreement and IEA inspectors could go back in. It  
10      wasn't as if he would suddenly be unleashed and be free  
11      if the inspections had been able to run its course?

12   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. Here is the situation and  
13      here is the judgement you have to make about it. Saddam  
14      Hussein had known for many years that he should be  
15      letting inspectors back in. The demand to put back in  
16      inspectors was not a new demand. He had been in breach  
17      of UN resolutions going back over ten years. The  
18      inspectors had effectively left in 1998 as a result of  
19      non-cooperation. There was a history of concealment and  
20      deception. I think we can agree on that.

21             He finally under threat of military action agrees to  
22      let the inspectors back in. Now let's suppose in  
23      March 2003, and this is why ultimately I am on the  
24      American side of this argument, let's suppose in March  
25      2003 we had said "Okay. He is doing enough. We will



1 stand down the troops. We'll let UNMOVIC carry on its  
2 task and we will try and set up this new institution.  
3 We will have a new smart sanctions rather than the  
4 broader sanctions than before", my point is very simple.  
5 I don't doubt there are all sorts of things we could have  
6 persuaded him to do with 300,000 troops down there. The  
7 question is, though, because at some point those troops  
8 would have to go back home, if he had not changed his  
9 mind about his essential belief in the importance of  
10 these weapons, and the evidence is -- I mean, I know it  
11 is never described, because no-one describes it -- but  
12 it is not just the ISG, Robin Butler's report also, that  
13 he continued to harbour both nuclear and chemical  
14 ambitions. What we have to pose is not a question of in  
15 March 2003 would he have carried on cooperating? Would  
16 he have carried on cooperating when all that military  
17 pressure was off him, when he would then have had no  
18 tough sanctions, unlimited amount of oil money? As we  
19 know from these papers, he retained the technical  
20 know-how, the scientists and the intent. Is that a risk  
21 that even knowing what we know now we should run?

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Your difficulty was that you set in  
23 motion a process -- you got the international community  
24 to agree under Resolution 1441. You had been demanding  
25 the inspectors to return. The inspectors had returned.

1       The initial cooperation had not been good. Now the  
2       initial cooperation was much better. Hans Blix was  
3       saying this progressively. It wasn't just military  
4       force as you mentioned in your statement. Getting  
5       sanctions lifted was obviously a major incentive for him  
6       as well.

7           The problem with the argument you have just put is  
8       why bother with the inspections process at all, because  
9       the cooperation was coming. There was more of it. If  
10      you still didn't think this was going to do the job, why  
11      set the process in motion at all?

12   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because here is the situation.

13       You declare 1441. You have given him a final chance for  
14       full, immediate and unconditional cooperation. Now at  
15       that point he can make a big decision, which is to say,  
16       "I am going to put aside my concealment, my lack of  
17       cooperation, all the things I have done in the past and  
18       I am going to cooperate fully". He doesn't.

19           So he is in breach of 1441. The part of the problem  
20       in this is frankly that those who supported 1441, which  
21       was not on the American side of the argument, got  
22       buyer's remorse in the end. They agreed they could be  
23       given a final opportunity. Then they wanted another  
24       opportunity.

25           The point about his change of heart and the

1       important point about the Iraq Survey Group and the rest  
2       of the evidence is that if he had not taken that  
3       decision really to put the past behind him and turn over  
4       a new leaf, yes, it's true whilst that military pressure  
5       was there he might cooperate, but when it wasn't there  
6       he was going to be back and he was going to be back with  
7       far more money with, the international community having  
8       built up this great consensus, it would then have  
9       disintegrated.

10       That's why I think when you look at this today and  
11       you ask. Okay. Supposing we had all backed off in  
12       March 2003 and left Saddam there, what do we actually  
13       think would be happening today? Personally I think it  
14       is at least as arguable -- I am not going to say it is  
15       certain because nobody knows -- it is at least as  
16       arguable that he would have been developing in  
17       competition with Iran.

18       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It may or may not. We will come  
19       back to the problem --

20       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sir Lawrence, it is really  
21       important. "May have been" is my justification for this.  
22       I was not prepared to run this --

23       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You had set in motion a process  
24       which was rather abruptly discontinued.

25       Can I just ask you about this "clusters" proposals

1       you are putting forward and why it had difficulty.  
2       According to Jonathan Powell you did try to extend the  
3       timetable. You had asked the Americans for nine more  
4       weeks. President Bush he said that he wouldn't have  
5       agreed to this. He might have agreed to a little time but  
6       not nine more weeks. Do you recall that?

7       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. We were asking -- I don't  
8       know exactly what the timeline was, but yes, we were  
9       asking for more time. The Americans I think -- I am not  
10      sure about this, but I think our own military would have  
11      been also anxious about a time that long -- but, you  
12      know, we could have probably come to a compromise  
13      somewhere on it I guess. That's not the problem we got  
14      into in the end. The problem was, and this is where  
15      this whole business to do with the Second Resolution and  
16      the attitude of France which would I like to deal with  
17      in light of things that have been said to you, the  
18      problem was that there was no consent for an ultimatum,  
19      and whether it was nine weeks or one week, without  
20      an ultimatum it would be pointless.

21      SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I will come on to that in a second.  
22      Can I just check on the military position? We  
23      understand that you were briefed by the chiefs on 15th  
24      January. Were you advised that it would be possible to  
25      maintain combat readiness for a number of months beyond

1 March?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I can't recall exactly what I was  
3 advised about. I am very happy if that was the case. I  
4 am sure at a pinch we could have done it, yes. By the  
5 way, that wouldn't have stopped -- you know, if we had  
6 managed to get the ultimatum and the debate had simply  
7 been about time, I think that would have been a very  
8 interesting discussion with the Americans that would  
9 have been quite difficult I think.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on that in terms of our  
11 relationship with the Americans at the time, on  
12 6th March Geoff Hoon's Private Secretary wrote to David  
13 Manning that for a variety of reasons:

14 "One UK division is now likely to represent a higher  
15 and more significant proportion of the overall combat  
16 power available in the early stages of the ground  
17 campaign. For example, on current assumptions it is  
18 likely to contain nearly 30% of the available tanks."

19 So this doesn't make it sound like an optional  
20 extra?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, by then we were absolutely  
22 essential to it which is exactly what gave us the  
23 leverage in the situation.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you did think you had leverage in  
25 asking for more time?

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I can assure you when I went to  
2 President Bush and said to him "Look, I want to put a  
3 new resolution down with benchmarks and an ultimatum."  
4 It was a very difficult conversation, because he was  
5 saying "Look, we have gone through this. This is the  
6 evolution. Okay. We first of all agreed to you having  
7 an ultimatum and not just doing it. Then we agreed to  
8 the UN route for doing the ultimatum and we agreed that  
9 the inspectors should go in and we can try to resolve it  
10 peacefully. Now you are telling me six months or five  
11 months on from that when actually it is clear he is not  
12 cooperating fully, that you want another ultimatum".  
13 So it was a difficult conversation, but we did have  
14 real leverage in that situation and I was prepared to  
15 use it. The problem was we couldn't get agreement to  
16 the ultimatum, because I would not have been in favour  
17 of another resolution, never mind him, which didn't have  
18 a clear authorisation of force at the end of it.  
19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I will carry on but Baroness Prashar  
20 has a question.  
21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much. Mr Blair,  
22 I want to ask a couple of questions about what finally  
23 brought the UN process to an end. In your statement you  
24 deal with your attempt to secure the support of Mexico  
25 and Chile in order to get at least a majority vote in

1 the United Nations Security Council. You say in your  
2 statement that:

3 "On 9th March President Bush said he thought there  
4 were nine votes which would be enough".

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Or maybe eight. If that's what  
6 I said that's ...

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's what you said in your  
8 statement.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Okay.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You said in the House of Commons on  
11 18th March "Last Monday we were getting very close with  
12 it. We very nearly had the majority agreement", but  
13 Sir Jeremy Greenstock told us that he never felt "We got  
14 close to having nine positive votes in the bag." How  
15 close did you believe you were to a majority of votes?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I thought we had come pretty close  
17 to it actually. I mean, I have somewhere a list of the  
18 calls I was making at that time and I was literally on  
19 the go virtually round the clock trying to herd up the  
20 members of the Security Council. The Americans, you  
21 know, who can be pretty emphatic in these circumstances  
22 with their allies, were putting major pressure on.  
23 President Bush said to me in that call, if I said nine  
24 then nine it is, but in any event we were there to get  
25 a majority. I think we could have got Chile and Mexico

1        actually if the French position had been less emphatic,  
2        but it wasn't in the end, and they felt unhappy.

3            So, I mean, Jeremy is right. It was always going to  
4        be difficult. On the other hand, I thought it was  
5        possible, yes.

6    BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was it the French position or was it  
7        that President Bush was losing patience with the United  
8        Nations process?

9    THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it was really more to do with  
10       the fact here was the situation. You see, we had been  
11       carrying on discussions with the French and Germans as  
12       well -- although they didn't have a veto, they were  
13       an important player because of their relationship with  
14       France -- so both President Bush and I were having quite  
15       close conversations with the Germans. You know, we  
16       thought at a certain time that the French with a little  
17       bit of German pressure actually might abstain rather  
18       than veto, and you never knew what might happen with the  
19       Russians, because they would calculate it on a pretty  
20       tough assessment of their interests in the end, but it  
21       was possible that the Russians could be persuaded by the  
22       Americans not to veto.

23            So no, he hadn't lost patience, but what then  
24        started to happen going into February I think, the  
25        French position hardened and then I think it became very



1       obvious to me that the old traditional divide was back,  
2       you know. The British were going to be with the  
3       Americans. The French were going to be the people who  
4       marketed themselves as not being with the Americans.  
5       After all this was a big -- you know, we can talk about  
6       how this was affecting our relationships around the  
7       world, but countries were also looking at how they  
8       looked in this situation for their allies, and I think  
9       in the end Russia and France decided look -- I am sure  
10      they were sincerely against it but they also decided we  
11      are going to make a point of being here against it.  
12      Sometimes people are against things but they don't push  
13      it too far. Ourselves and other traditional allies were  
14      going to be with America. I don't think it is that  
15      President Bush lost patience with it. I think it is  
16      just became apparent then we were not going to get  
17      a second resolution passed in the Security Council.  
18      BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My understanding is -- you talked  
19      earlier about benchmarks -- Chile and Mexico wanted  
20      three weeks and President Bush would not agree, would  
21      only give a week. Do you think that was a factor?  
22      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I think had I gone back  
23      to him and said "I have got the ultimatum. I have got  
24      agreement to an ultimatum", I think we would have got  
25      the extra time. The problem was, as he kept saying to

1           me perfectly understandably, "Look, I hear what you are  
2           saying, but can you guarantee you can get the French on  
3           board for this?" And of course I couldn't.

4   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you are saying you didn't go back  
5           to him because you thought the French position was  
6           hardening?

7   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I thought actually by then I think  
8           the French position had hardened to the point where they  
9           were clearly going to veto a resolution with  
10          an ultimatum.

11   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Sir Lawrence, back to you.

12   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just stay on this for a moment  
13          because it is quite an important moment? You said in  
14          your statement that the French statements of opposition  
15          and Chilean internal politics made President Lagos say  
16          that he could not support what was going to be not only  
17          a resolution doomed to a veto but one strongly attacked  
18          by certain P5 members. Presumably the French statements  
19          of opposition is President Chirac's press conference?

20   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well more generally I think. It  
21          was being made -- the position for the non-P5 members on  
22          the Security Council, particularly countries like Chile  
23          and Mexico, when a situation like this happens, they are  
24          caught effectively between a rock and a hard place. At  
25          one level they want to be with America. They are major

1 allies of America in one sense. On the other hand, they  
2 have public opinion but most important they have  
3 Permanent Members of the Security Council taking a hard  
4 line against this, and in those circumstances those --  
5 I mean, in my experience the non-permanent members of  
6 the Security Council say "Look, I don't want to get into  
7 this really". So I think whereas President Lagos was at  
8 one level quite sympathetic and he is a very smart,  
9 intelligent, capable leader and he was looking for a way  
10 to be constructive, when France came out with such  
11 a heavy position, then I think he decided "Look, this is  
12 going to be too difficult". Also because once France  
13 said "we are going to veto anything with an ultimatum in  
14 it", it was going to be pointless anyway.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think -- let's leave what the  
16 French actually said for a second. Can you just clarify  
17 the importance of a point Baroness Prashar raised about  
18 the impact of the reluctance of the Americans to extend  
19 the deadline, because you rather dismissed the  
20 importance of that, but can I just quote you from  
21 President Bush's memoir Decision Points on page 247  
22 where he describes his conversation with President  
23 Lagos:

24 "He talked about giving Saddam an additional two or  
25 three weeks. I told him a few more weeks would make no

1 difference. Saddam has already had years to comply. It  
2 is sad to have come down to this, I said. I said one  
3 last time how he planned to vote. He said no."

4 On that it is reasonably clear that what decided  
5 President Lagos was that the amount of time he thought  
6 it reasonable to put for an ultimatum was not there?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I don't think that was  
8 the -- I mean, it's difficult at this time to judge, but  
9 that wasn't his basic concern. The basic concern of  
10 President Lagos was that you are asking me -- this is me  
11 asking him -- you are asking me to put myself in  
12 a position where I am going to line up with you guys in  
13 circumstances where the French and Russians are going to  
14 attack this very heavily and in circumstances where  
15 because they are going to veto, you are not going to get  
16 the resolution anyway, so ...

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, as we know, President  
18 Chirac's statement was specifically "ce soir". That was  
19 a very strong statement. Another and although two or  
20 three weeks may not have made a difference to him, it  
21 was not necessarily ruling out a deadline. There are  
22 two factors at work here. There is certainly a strong  
23 French view but there is a strong American  
24 view. You described it to us earlier in our  
25 conversation they were caught in a sense between these

1 two views?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, that's true, but I have to  
3 emphasise this, particularly in the light of all the  
4 things that have been said about whether we are  
5 misrepresenting the French view or not. We never  
6 misrepresented the French view. The French view was  
7 absolutely clear. It wasn't that they were against any  
8 second resolution. They would perfectly happily have  
9 agreed a second resolution provided it meant a third  
10 resolution and they would agree a third resolution  
11 provided it meant a fourth one.

12 What they were not prepared to do in any set of  
13 circumstances, never mind ce soir, was that they were  
14 not prepared to agree to a resolution with an ultimatum.  
15 So we were caught in a situation where the Americans  
16 were quite rightly saying to us "What they are prepared  
17 to agree is basically a rerun of 1441 except possibly  
18 weaker. Well, that's useless."

19 In the end, and I am very happy because I have the  
20 French President's interview here to go through it, he  
21 had come to the view that inspections were working, and  
22 therefore that should be the route that we dealt with  
23 Saddam and we should not deal with him by force,  
24 whatever the circumstances, and that anything with  
25 an ultimatum -- his point was not time. Jacques

1 Chirac's point was not the time for this resolution to  
2 operate. His point was if it has an ultimatum in it,  
3 I don't want it.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The French had earlier talked about  
5 the possibility of a time limit and I think we have been  
6 through the question of what the French actually said.

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It is just important in the light  
8 of what Stephen said to you. We have not misrepresented  
9 their position. Their position was absolutely clear.  
10 Anything with an ultimatum they were going to veto.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just, just to conclude this  
12 and Sir Roderic wants to come in on this point as well,  
13 on the afternoon of 12th March you had a conversation  
14 with President Bush. Again we have to rely on you to  
15 tell us what it said. Presumably you discussed whether  
16 Chile and Mexico were coming along and had to accept  
17 that they weren't.

18 Did you discuss the line that you should take about  
19 the role of France in the failure to set a second  
20 resolution?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I can't recall. I mean, I will go  
22 back and again refresh my mind on the note, but, I mean,  
23 it wouldn't have mattered much frankly. I mean, the  
24 line we were going to take on France was the line.  
25 I mean, it was the line we took, and that was as much

1           for our own reasons.

2           I mean, the French/American relationship by then had  
3           become very scratchy and very difficult. I was actually  
4           always very keen to remain on good personal terms with  
5           Jacques Chirac, and despite what everyone always writes  
6           about this, I actually both liked, admired him and had  
7           a great deal of time for him both as an individual and as  
8           a leader. We just both disagreed on this fundamental  
9           question of extremism and what to do about it. You  
10          know, we wouldn't have wanted frankly to take the same  
11          position as America, who were after France in a rather  
12          more aggressive way.

13       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to clear this up, because you  
14          have alluded to it already, we have been told by Matthew  
15          Rycroft there was a conscious decision for domestic  
16          political presentation to be conveyed on the French when  
17          he failed to get Chile and Mexico to sign up.  
18          Sir Stephen Wall told us that it was his view that  
19          Chirac's words did not rule out the possibility of  
20          French future support for resolution, that you knew that  
21          and that you knew what you were claiming was not what  
22          Chirac had said, which I am sure you would like to  
23          comment on?

24       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, I would like to comment on  
25          it, because it is simply not correct. I have a great

1        admiration for Stephen and he was a fantastic colleague  
2        to work in Number 10 with me, but he was not handling  
3        this particular issue, and the fact is that the French  
4        were, of course, going to various people and saying "Oh,  
5        no, the British are quite wrong about this. We are not  
6        opposed to a second resolution." That was absolutely  
7        correct with one rider, which often wasn't added, which  
8        is as long as it has not got an ultimatum in it.

9                So when you go to the French President's actual  
10        interview, which I have somewhere here. In that  
11        interview what President Chirac said was:

12                "There is this proposal of a new resolution setting  
13        an ultimatum."

14                It goes on:

15                "To start with there was talk of 17th March, then of  
16        a possibility of a British amendment to postpone the  
17        date of the ultimatum a bit. It is of little  
18        consequence, in other words we move from the course of  
19        action involving the pursuit of the inspectors in order  
20        to disarm Iraq to a different one consisting of in so  
21        many days go to war. The question is you don't want  
22        that. France won't accept it and so will refuse that  
23        solution."

24                That's the context which he then goes on to say  
25        "Regardless of the circumstances, France will vote no".



1 I then say when I am asked in the House of  
2 Commons -- I am asked what is the French objection and  
3 I say on 18th March, the debate authorising conflict:

4 "The problem with the diplomacy was that when it came to  
5 an end -- it came to an end after the position of France  
6 was made public and repeated in a private conversation,"  
7 between myself and President Chirac, "and it said it  
8 would block by veto any resolution that contained  
9 an ultimatum."

10 So I was not alleging they would say no to any  
11 resolution. They, of course, would say -- they would  
12 agree to a resolution that didn't have an ultimatum in  
13 it because that would then mean a further resolution  
14 afterwards. So the position was really very clear on  
15 both sides.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I wouldn't give a textual exegesis,  
17 but you could say it was the particular ultimatum of  
18 about a week on offer, but I think Sir Roderic wanted to  
19 ...

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, but it is the very point that  
21 he is making here, Jacques Chirac, is that time isn't  
22 the issue for him. It is the ultimatum that's the  
23 issue.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just one slightly separate but similar  
25 point on that same episode. I mean, what is clear is

1       that the Americans had a deadline for military action,  
2       as you yourself have said, and therefore they must have  
3       wanted very much to wrap up the process of negotiations  
4       at the United Nations on a possible second resolution  
5       and bring it to an end.

6           What is not clear is why we continued those  
7       negotiations for nearly a week after President Chirac  
8       had made a statement which the government in its motion  
9       to the House of Commons on 18th March described as  
10      making it not possible to secure a second resolution in  
11      the United Nations.

12          In your book you say that you had decided that we  
13      should table the five tests anyway. We did so in the  
14      early hours of Thursday, 13th March. They were  
15      immediately rejected by France. Jacques Chirac gave  
16      a very strong statement that he would not support  
17      military action whatever the circumstances.

18          But he had actually made his statement on 10th  
19      March, which was four days before you tabled the five  
20      tests.

21          Why did you go ahead and continue those  
22      negotiations, and indeed they continued beyond 13th, and  
23      effectively I think to the following Monday that Jeremy  
24      Greenstock finally withdrew the draft resolution? Was  
25      it because you didn't really believe that Chirac's

1 statements ignored the end of the process, but were we  
2 continuing negotiations at this point not in  
3 particularly good faith?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. It was very simply this, that  
5 obviously this was a second best thing now, because  
6 France had made it clear, you are right, on 10th  
7 March -- I think it was actually Dominique de Villepin  
8 put the statement out on 13th March, but what we decided  
9 was, look, even if you can't get the resolution because  
10 they have said they will veto, nonetheless you would  
11 have some greater, if you like, political authority if  
12 you could at least get a majority of members of the  
13 Security Council to say they would agree such  
14 a resolution even vetoed. So it wasn't --

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mean by voting for it?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, by voting for it.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Then you would have had a vetoed  
18 resolution?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: You would have a vetoed  
20 resolution.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That would undermine the authority that  
22 you had in 1441 for going to war?

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it would not have undermined  
24 that because we were saying that we accept that we  
25 believed we had authority anyway in 1441, but it would

1       have allowed us politically to say we had the majority  
2       of the Security Council. So had we ended up in  
3       a situation where Chile and Mexico had said "We are with  
4       you". We would have probably put this resolution down,  
5       had it vetoed --

6   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now it is clear you have not got them?

7   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It became clear during that period  
8       we had not got them.

9   SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was certainly clear by the Wednesday  
10       and on the Thursday you table the clusters and the  
11       negotiations go on for another four days?

12   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: We were trying to do everything we  
13       could to build that majority. I am not sure exactly the  
14       time when it became clear we are not going to get  
15       anywhere.

16   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, didn't you agree with President  
17       Bush when you spoke to him on the afternoon of the  
18       14th that the game was up?

19   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: The game was up in the sense that  
20       it was we were not going to get a resolution. This was  
21       the second best. Okay. Our preference was to have got  
22       a resolution that passed the Security Council, but, as  
23       I recall it, what then took place was a thought that  
24       I had that at least you might -- and I think this was  
25       stimulated also in conversations with Cabinet colleagues

1 as well -- and, you know, I was very conscious that  
2 I had Cabinet members who were unhappy about this or --  
3 and so on, that it might give us some political weight,  
4 I mean not much frankly, but some if we could say at  
5 least we have a majority of members on our side, even  
6 though we knew we were not going to get the resolution.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am not sure it is entirely clear at  
8 this point, but I don't think we should spend too much  
9 time on it because I know we have a lot of material to  
10 go through, so perhaps we should move on.

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It is simply a political point.  
12 If you can say "Well, we didn't get the resolution  
13 because France vetoed but nonetheless we got the  
14 majority of the Security Council in our favour," it  
15 would allow us to say that. At that point you are right  
16 that the political -- you know, you are at the point of  
17 political decision. You know you are going to have the  
18 vote in the House of Commons, because we actually gave  
19 the House of Commons a vote on this. it would have  
20 helped me. I would have definitely used this in terms  
21 of the presentation of the case if I had been able to  
22 stand up and say "Well, we didn't get the resolution,  
23 but nonetheless we had a majority of the Security  
24 Council with us".

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I can see that it helped the presentation

1 of the case that we appeared to be going on with  
2 negotiations up to the last moment, and I note that by  
3 Wednesday we had effectively concluded that we weren't  
4 going to get the nine votes. I think that's probably  
5 where we are left. This is I think a point of tactical  
6 detail.

7 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Back to you, Lawrence. Time is  
8 beginning to press.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Jack Straw told Parliament on 25th  
10 November 2002 and I quote:

11 "Material breach means something significant, some  
12 behaviour or pattern of behaviour that is serious.  
13 Among such breaches could be action by the government of  
14 Iraq seriously to obstruct or to impede the inspectors,  
15 to intimidate witnesses or a pattern of behaviour where  
16 any single action appears relatively minor but the  
17 actions as a whole add up to something deliberately and  
18 more significant, something that shows Iraq's intention  
19 not to comply."

20 Would you agree with that as a definition of  
21 material breach?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, absolutely.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's not a low bar, the point that  
24 Jack Straw would make?

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. You could have made

1 an argument that said the declaration in December was  
2 a breach. I think some of the American system at that  
3 time tried to claim that actually. My attitude was  
4 "Look, it is" -- and this is the advice given to me,  
5 "Look, this is not a proper declaration" and on and so  
6 forth, but you can't just say "Okay. We are going to  
7 take action now".

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The previous time you had taken  
9 action against Iraq in December 1998 Richard Butler as  
10 head of UNSCOM reported to the Security Council that  
11 Saddam was not cooperating with the inspectors. Was it  
12 your expectation that Hans Blix would be able to do the  
13 same or would do the same? I mean we are talking now  
14 December/January.

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, he was obviously going to be  
16 coming back to the Security Council, as indeed he did  
17 regularly to report. I mean, it would be a matter for  
18 him to cite how often he did that, but given the history  
19 of this we were going to expect very early and  
20 significant signs that Saddam had genuinely changed the  
21 position of his regime.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Hans Blix clearly wasn't giving you  
23 a definitive statement that Iraq was not complying.  
24 Indeed, he was saying cooperation was improving. The  
25 Attorney General's office wrote to you on 14th March

1 asking you to confirm that it was your view that Iraq  
2 had committed further material breaches as specified in  
3 Resolution 1441 and Matthew Rycroft replied the next day  
4 confirming that.

5 When you replied were you working with the sort of  
6 definition I cited earlier from Jack Straw in mind?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, absolutely.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you tell me the process that you  
9 followed then before giving that determination?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: We went back over the Blix reports  
11 and it was very obvious to me, particularly on the  
12 subject of interviews, that they weren't cooperating.  
13 They were cooperating more, as you rightly say. They  
14 started to give out a little bit more, but there was  
15 absolutely nothing to suggest that this cooperation was  
16 full, immediate and unconditional. It was actually not  
17 full, not immediate. In fact, even Blix himself said it  
18 wasn't immediate even on 7th March and not  
19 unconditional.

20 In addition to that I had I think JIC assessments as  
21 well, which I think are still outstanding, where it was  
22 clear that Saddam was putting heavy pressure internally  
23 on people not to cooperate. Although I did not know  
24 this at the time, but we now know he actually sent the  
25 Vice President along to address a whole group of Iraqi



1 scientists and experts to say "You had better not be  
2 found with any material that is a problem for the  
3 inspectors", whereas, of course, his actual obligation  
4 was that they should have been offering any material.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, there is an interpretation  
6 of that, which is simply that he was nervous that there  
7 had been freelancing and that the point of that was to  
8 make sure nobody did have anything, because they  
9 shouldn't.

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, we can -- yes. I think  
11 freelancing and Saddam --

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have both read the ISG report.  
13 Can I just clarify when you said "We ought", who was the  
14 "we"? Was it just your office or did you consult more  
15 widely?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am sure I would have spoken to  
17 Jack particularly at the time. I mean, I don't  
18 recollect this. This literally was the whole time  
19 a conversation going on. I mean, our view was that he  
20 was not cooperating in the terms of 1441, and that by  
21 the way remains my view today that he wasn't, and that  
22 he, in fact, never had any intention of doing that.

23 Now it is correct, as you rightly say, and we have  
24 been over this once before, that he was offering up  
25 more, but he was not offering up -- you know, even in

1       February he wasn't offering up what they were asking  
2       him.

3       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally on this you mentioned  
4       something from Hans Blix that you quoted in your book,  
5       and this is from the 7th March statement and you quote  
6       at page 427 of your book:

7                "It is obvious that while the numerous initiatives  
8       which are now taken by the Iraqi side with a view to  
9       resolving some longstanding, open disarmament issues can  
10      be seen as active or even proactive, these initiatives  
11      three to four months into the new resolution cannot be  
12      said to constitute immediate cooperation, nor do they  
13      necessarily cover all areas of relevance."

14      The paragraph then continues:

15                "They are nevertheless welcome and UNMOVIC is  
16      responding to them in the hope of solving presently  
17      unresolved disarmament issues."

18      This brings us back to the crux of the issue, that  
19      you stopped the process at a time when it was getting  
20      more results, where the Iraqis had agreed to aerial  
21      surveillance, where they had agreed to interviews, and  
22      UNMOVIC was already starting to destroy ballistic  
23      missiles, and when the IEA had been able to say there  
24      was no nuclear programme.

25      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but what we have to do is

1 make a judgement here, Sir Lawrence. Was the reason  
2 why -- first of all, 1441 didn't say, "Over the coming  
3 period of time you should increase your levels of  
4 cooperation". It said there had to be full, immediate  
5 and unconditional cooperation, and there plainly wasn't.

6 Now the judgment you have to make about this is:  
7 does that pattern of behaviour, very reminiscent of his  
8 previous behaviour, does that indicate that actually if  
9 once you withdrew -- because you were going to have to  
10 get rid of the troops at some point. You couldn't keep  
11 them there forever. Right? So does that pattern of  
12 behaviour indicate that this is someone who, once the  
13 threat of military action was withdrawn, was then going  
14 to be carrying on with this, you know, eking out of bits  
15 of cooperation, or is your judgment that in the end,  
16 once the threat of military action was withdrawn, he'd  
17 be back to his old games?

18 Look, we don't know the answer to that question, but  
19 I do point to the Iraq Survey Group and say it is at  
20 least as arguable he would have been back to his old  
21 games as it is arguable he would have become a different  
22 Saddam.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The basic problem was you had to  
24 make that determination at that time, because that's  
25 when the Americans wished to go to war, and whilst not

1        talking about eking it out indefinitely, a few more  
2        weeks might in the end have made a lot of difference.

3        THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: You see, the question is -- this  
4        is the whole nub of this, which is -- the question is:  
5        would it have made a difference? Yes, it is absolutely  
6        true that he may have carried on giving more  
7        concessions. That wouldn't have removed the problem of  
8        Saddam unless those concessions were made in good faith,  
9        in good heart, because he decided to change.

10        Now you are right the American military timetable,  
11        of course, it was a pressure, and that's very clear and  
12        obvious, but the whole purpose of tabling that  
13        resolution at the last gasp, as it were, was to give us  
14        a way of resolving particularly this issue of interviews  
15        through the ultimatum.

16        You know, this is the debate that even now people  
17        still have, you know. Would it have been a situation  
18        where Saddam would have changed genuinely or would it  
19        have been a situation where once more he out-foxed the  
20        international community and had gone back to his old  
21        games?

22        We can't answer that question now, but I say if you  
23        look back on the record of the man, the things he did,  
24        you know, it is not as if he never developed these  
25        weapons. He developed them and used them, and we now

1 know that he saw their use as essential to having  
2 defeated the Iranians, and that he saw having nuclear  
3 and chemical capability as a central part of the  
4 stability and maintenance of his regime.

5 Now all I say to you is we can't tell at this point  
6 in time whether he would have changed or not, but I say  
7 it is at least surely, surely arguable that he would  
8 have not changed, been there with a lot of money and  
9 still with the same intent, in which case he was a risk,  
10 and in which case if we are being in my view prudent and  
11 responsible about it, it is not a risk we should be  
12 running.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That assumes that the process had to  
14 end at that point, but --

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It doesn't just assume that  
16 actually. It assumes he had a change of heart, but  
17 anyway I think we've ...

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In just a few minutes we will take a  
19 very short break, but before we do I will ask Sir Martin  
20 to open up a new question. Martin.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could stay with the pre-March 20th  
22 period and look at the question of how the decision was  
23 made for the United Kingdom to take responsibility for  
24 southern Iraq, in your previous evidence to us you said:

25 "I think from January onwards it was clear that we

1       were going to have responsibility for the south",  
2               but on 6th March 2003 you are recorded as saying in  
3       a document we released today:  
4               "The issue of sectorisation would need to be  
5       addressed. This should be covered in the Phase IV  
6       plan."  
7               In your statement to us you say:  
8               "We took the decision to take on responsibility for  
9       the south sector following Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon's  
10      note to me of 19th March",  
11              but that note said that:  
12              "It would be premature to take a view on the merit  
13      of sectors at a time when Iraq still wasn't in  
14      a stabilised situation under our control."  
15              Can you tell us exactly when the decision was made  
16      for the United Kingdom to take responsibility for the  
17      south and who was involved in that decision?  
18   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Right. I mean, because you  
19      helpfully indicated you wanted to ask me about this, I  
20      have gone back through the papers again. I mean, look,  
21      from January 2003 it was obvious -- not obvious,  
22      sorry -- it was agreed we would be going in through the  
23      south.  
24   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Militarily.  
25   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. So we would be, as it were,

1 with de facto responsibility for that area. I think  
2 Mike Jackson gave evidence to you which said really in  
3 a sense our responsibility for the aftermath in that  
4 sector grew out of the fact that this was our area of  
5 operations in the conflict.

6 We then -- it is correct we had a meeting on  
7 6th March, which I have a briefing note for, on  
8 sectorisation. I didn't resolve that finally then.

9 There was then a Cabinet Office note of 19th March  
10 to Matthew Rycroft for the ministerial meeting saying,  
11 "We should decide on sectors, and then a joint Foreign  
12 and Defence Secretary minute is coming to you" -- that's  
13 the one on 19th -- "and then David Manning thinks this  
14 should go on the agenda for tomorrow, but Clare Short  
15 wants a chance to comment on her return on 21st March,  
16 so we will put it on tomorrow's agenda".

17 So we didn't take a final view then, but their note  
18 to me was the expectation is the UK forces would be  
19 responsible for a task focused on Basra. I then had  
20 that meeting with them.

21 On 21st March Matthew Rycroft then notes out to the  
22 Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence:

23 "The Prime Minister is grateful for the joint minute  
24 from the Foreign and Defence Secretaries. He agrees  
25 with the Foreign and Defence Secretaries' proposals,

1 provided there is a satisfactory resolution",

2 and then I list certain issues.

3 Then again the Foreign Office write to Matthew  
4 Rycroft, and then what happens is that we establish at  
5 some point then the Ad Hoc Committee, capital A, capital  
6 H this time, with Jack Straw in charge, and out of that  
7 comes the view we should be responsible for that sector  
8 and this should be part of a joint occupying power and  
9 responsibility. I have to say, though, it was always  
10 pretty obvious that's where we would end up.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yet there was no specific decision  
12 during this time when obviously a lot of pre-planning  
13 was going on?

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think the specific decision  
15 ultimately was taken when we then got resolution 1483.  
16 Most of the discussion here was not really about whether  
17 we should be responsible for the south or not. It was  
18 about the UN role. Then what happened was there were  
19 these Ad Hoc Committee meetings that Jack was chairing  
20 were happening day in and day out. They were going  
21 through all this in an immense amount of detail, legal  
22 advice and so on. Peter Goldsmith was on it. Then we  
23 got 1483, reported it to Cabinet and agreed it.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In your statement you say to us, "I was  
25 also keen that this be our area of operation, the south,



1       because it seemed to me the south would be more  
2       manageable",

3               but in the Joint Intelligence Committee assessment  
4       of 19th February, which has been declassified and is now  
5       published, it concludes:

6               "We have limited intelligence on the particular  
7       conditions in the south and also that post-Saddam the  
8       security situation in the south will be unpredictable."

9               How was this caveat factored into the decision?

10      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, it was obviously going to  
11       be -- sorry. I have got the paper here now. It was  
12       obviously going to be unpredictable. I mean, these  
13       situations always are, but, you know, my calculation  
14       about this was really very deliberate.

15              One of the things that we were always very concerned  
16       about was obviously Sunni/Shia divisions and  
17       difficulties, and then also with the Kurds obviously  
18       potentially a problem there too. So one thing that  
19       there was a lot of thought the whole time was we had to  
20       make sure that we dealt with this issue.

21              The benefit of the south was that it was Shia  
22       absolutely predominantly. So I felt we were going to be  
23       in an area of operation where it was frankly going to be  
24       easier for us, and actually if you look at the overall  
25       levels of violence, I think I am right in saying that

1 overall I think the figure -- it may even be -- I think  
2 overall I think only about 1% or 2% of the violence  
3 overall in Iraq following the invasion was actually  
4 centred in or around Basra.

5 So that was the reason why I was -- I mean, you  
6 know, what they were warning of was obviously right and  
7 important, but we felt that we had a better chance of  
8 managing this.

9 I would just draw attention also to what they say  
10 about Iran too, because basically they conclude -- and  
11 this is what obviously changed very dramatically --  
12 their basic view is that it is unlikely that Iran would  
13 be aggressive.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Mr Blair, we are going to deal with Iran  
15 after the break.

16 Can I suggest we take a break at this moment?  
17 Ten minutes. Can I ask everyone in the room, if you  
18 must leave the hearing room, please be back within  
19 ten minutes. Please start coming back as soon as you  
20 can. Thank you very much.

21 (Short break)

22 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, let's resume, and I will turn to  
23 Baroness Prashar to start some questions.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

25 Mr Blair, now moving on to the question of the

1       aftermath and planning and so on, in your book you  
2       comment, and I will quote:

3               "We are going to be in a position of nation  
4       building. We must accept the responsibility and  
5       acknowledge it and plan for it at the outset. There was  
6       clearly a failing in respect of Iraq."

7               Now you obviously accept there was a failing. Why  
8       do you think that planning didn't take place early on?  
9       Because we have declassified Jonathan Powell's note to  
10      you, which was sent to you on 19th July, when he said  
11      that:

12              "We need to plan for the day after. Loya Jirga and  
13      the peace meeting in Afghanistan have worked, but we had  
14      to scramble to get them ready in time. We need to be  
15      working on this now for Iraq."

16              So obviously there were a number of other people  
17      warning you about early planning. Why didn't the  
18      planning take place early on?

19      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Planning did take place. The  
20      question now is, I mean, in the light of what we now  
21      know and with hindsight: should we have been focusing on  
22      different things? So in September, as you have heard in  
23      the evidence to you, the officials were meeting. We had  
24      ad hoc meetings ourselves. There was a lot of meeting  
25      going on in the Ministry of Defence, the Department of

1 International Development, in the Foreign Office.

2 The trouble was we were planning (a) on an  
3 assumption that Iraq had a functioning bureaucracy and  
4 civil service, which in the end it didn't, and (b) our  
5 focus really was on humanitarian, environmental and the  
6 possibility of use of chemical/biological weapons and so  
7 on. I mean, I would say there was a significant amount  
8 of planning that went on, unfortunately directed at the  
9 wrong things.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But I think the humanitarian  
11 planning only covered the immediate consequence of the  
12 invasion. What we want to know is what is the longer  
13 term planning for post-Saddam, because in a way, yes,  
14 things were considered. It is the longer term planning,  
15 because in his recent book Lord Mandelson writes:

16 "'What happens after you have won?', I asked Tony in  
17 January 2003. 'You can go in there, you can take out  
18 Saddam, but what to do you do with Iraq? You are going  
19 to have a country on your hands and I don't know what  
20 your plan is. Who is going to run the place?'"

21 You replied:

22 "'That's the American responsibility. It's down to  
23 the Americans'."

24 Again in early March when according to an interview  
25 with Andrew Rawnsley Iain Duncan Smith expressed concern

1 to you there was no clear plan and you reportedly  
2 replied, "Don't worry. That's in hand."

3 In your statement you say of the aftermath planning:

4 "Of course, as with everything else, the bulk of the  
5 planning would be done by the US, who were going to  
6 provide over 90% of the assets for the operation."

7 So was the assumption, that the Americans would  
8 actually do most of the planning?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the Americans, of course,  
10 would have the primary responsibility, but let me be  
11 absolutely clear I was most certainly not thinking it  
12 was to be left to the Americans. The reason why we had  
13 done a lot of planning ourselves was precisely because  
14 we knew we were going to be part of the aftermath, and  
15 there was planning that really fitted into three  
16 categories. One was in the Ministry of Defence, the  
17 other was the Department for International Development  
18 and the other was the Foreign Office.

19 The reason there was all the iterations even before  
20 the invasion of what would be the structure of  
21 government, how would we transit from Saddam to the  
22 coalition and out through a legitimate form of Iraqi  
23 authority, I most certainly was not thinking it should  
24 just be left to the Americans.

25 Now it is true, and it is a real issue, this, to be

1       very blunt about, and one of the things I will refer to  
2       in the lessons learned, that where the Americans are  
3       going to be providing well over 90% of the assets, you  
4       know, you are not going to be in a position where you  
5       are the driving party, for example, of what was  
6       happening in Baghdad.

7               One of the reasons why I was keen for us to  
8       concentrate on the south was precisely because I thought  
9       the south was an area where we would be in charge, as it  
10      were, and, you know, we would have an interaction with  
11      the Americans in Baghdad, but we weren't going to be in  
12      a position where the Americans were going to give us  
13      a veto over everything that happened. That was not  
14      going to be the case.

15             The one thing -- I think when we look back on this  
16      now, but particularly in the light of our experience in  
17      Iraq and in Afghanistan, I think there are things that  
18      we didn't believe would be problems then that obviously  
19      are going to be problems in this type of situation, and  
20      I also think that you need a far deeper analysis of the  
21      type of nation building and state building capacity that  
22      you require. All of that I would agree. What  
23      I wouldn't say is we were not focusing on these things,  
24      because we were.

25   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: If I were to suggest to you that

1       that deeper understanding and planning could have taken  
2       place, because earlier this morning when you were  
3       talking to Sir Roderic Lyne, you talked about you did  
4       not test the policy, because the policy was agreed, but  
5       were the implications of the policy understood, because  
6       Lord Williams of Baglan, who, as you know, was a special  
7       advisor to Robin Cook and to Jack Straw, has made  
8       a statement and says, and I quote him:

9               "Plans for a military campaign are usually based on  
10       calculations of risks involved, but it is apparent that  
11       in the case of the Iraq this was only done in the most  
12       narrow sense".

13       We were focusing on a military campaign but we did  
14       not really test out what the implications were, so we  
15       did not equip ourselves with the capacity, the resources  
16       and so on.

17       THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think that's far too stark  
18       a comment made with the benefit of hindsight frankly.  
19       As you have heard from many people who were engaged in  
20       this planning process -- for example, I think, Karen  
21       Miller was talking to you about the interactions there  
22       were in government from September onwards with  
23       officials, with the whole Foreign Office infrastructure  
24       on things like how would we work out the right form of  
25       Iraqi government and so on and so forth? You know, DFID

1 weren't simply looking at humanitarian. They were  
2 looking at reconstruction issues and so on. Clare  
3 Short's letters to me in October 2002, which we can go  
4 to, describe in detail all the things that DFID are  
5 doing about the various issues they are concerned with.  
6 Of course, in the immediate aftermath the Ministry of  
7 Defence and the military were going to be in charge.

8 You know, one of the things I want to say about this  
9 planning -- because I accept in retrospect failings in  
10 the American system have been set out in their report  
11 that was done on them and they've accepted them. Certainly if  
12 we knew then what we know now, of course, we would be  
13 looking at different things.

14 I do make this point, however. Yes, it is true that  
15 when we got in there, we found a very different  
16 situation. I think Andy Bearpark gave you evidence,  
17 however, that basically about 10% of the original plan  
18 survives from contact with the reality on the ground.  
19 That's true in Bosnia. It's true in Kosovo. It's true  
20 everywhere.

21 These problems that we had were resolvable very  
22 fast. That wasn't the problem we got into. The fact is  
23 if we had carried on with the same security situation in  
24 2003 into 2005 and 2006, we would not have had the  
25 problem we ended up with.



1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Let me just go back to the  
2 pre-planning stage, because I think we were aware about  
3 how dysfunctional the US system was. Conversations were  
4 taking place. Do you think we had sufficient visibility  
5 of the Americans, what they were doing? Were we making  
6 enough effort to influence them? Were you yourself  
7 taking an interest in this area?

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, I was. I mean, I was raising  
9 this with President Bush. Look, there was an issue  
10 which you know, because you have had evidence about it,  
11 which was this switch from the State Department in I  
12 think January 2003 to the Department of Defense. That's  
13 one of the things that the Americans themselves have  
14 gone back over.

15 The only thing I say -- for interest -- I didn't see  
16 this at the time -- I went back and looked at the State  
17 Department plans, which were very detailed.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When would that be?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have only looked at them -- I've  
20 only seen them, as it were, now. They were published or  
21 they were brought into being, these plans, I think  
22 around about January 2003.

23 The thing I would emphasise, though, is when you  
24 read their plans, they were on the same assumption as  
25 us, which is look, there is a functioning infrastructure

1 of government, and your basic -- yes, you may get  
2 security issues and so on and so forth, but your basic  
3 problem will be humanitarian.

4 Those State Department plans are very detailed and  
5 very good. They don't address the problem we ended up  
6 with.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Would it be true to say there was so  
8 much concentration on the second resolution, on the  
9 diplomatic course and on the campaign planning itself  
10 that attention wasn't paid to a clear strategy for the  
11 aftermath?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. Again I think -- look, you  
13 are absolutely right in saying there was a huge amount  
14 of -- I mean, my -- I was absorbed enormously by the  
15 politics and I accept that.

16 However, I think at virtually every meeting you have  
17 got a minute of I continually say the aftermath is  
18 vital. Sometimes I even say the aftermath is the issue.

19 Insofar as we were getting information about what we  
20 thought would happen, you know, we were trying to draw  
21 this in from all sorts of sources, including Iraqis who  
22 had recently left the country, and so on.

23 When I look at what actually happened really after  
24 March 2003 -- and by the way I don't minimise the  
25 problems, because when I went to Iraq at the end of May

1       2003, I came back in a high state of anxiety -- but none  
2       of these issues were insurmountable. They were  
3       surmountable.

4           Now if we were to plan something like this again,  
5       would we do it differently? Yes, of course we would.  
6       Of course we would, not just in the light of the  
7       knowledge we have now about the security problem, but  
8       also I think there are far better government mechanisms,  
9       like the Stabilisation Unit that we set up in 2004.  
10      Yes, I think all of this is very sensible.

11           I want to make one other point about it, by the way,  
12      which is I think there is not just a need for us to have  
13      that capacity. I think it is a vital thing for the EU,  
14      possibly for NATO and for the UN to have that capacity  
15      as well. I am not sure from my experience since leaving  
16      office that that capacity is there in the way it needs  
17      to be.

18      BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, I really want to concentrate  
19      in terms of our planning pre-the invasion, but you would  
20      accept we could have done better than we did?

21      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I do accept that, yes. I have  
22      made it clear all the way through that -- I mean,  
23      I don't believe it would have resolved -- any changes we  
24      made would have resolved our basic problem, since  
25      I think the problem is far more fundamental than

1 anything to do with bureaucracy or right structures of  
2 government and so on, but yes, of course. If we were  
3 sitting down today now, if we were in a situation of  
4 nation building again, I think there are changes in our  
5 approach that certainly should be done. I mean, I have  
6 got thoughts on those which I can give you later.

7 I think there isn't -- the single most important  
8 thing, though, I would say about the planning is the  
9 real issue is what you focus on less than the structure;  
10 in other words, you could say that we should have had  
11 one Minister focusing on the pre-planning, but I would  
12 debate that actually, but you may conclude that, but  
13 I don't think that was the core of the problem. The  
14 core of the problem was the focus of what that planning  
15 was.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Well, it seems to me that the focus  
17 of the problem was the assumptions we made and we didn't  
18 actually try to work closely with the Americans, but we  
19 will move on.

20 I want to look at the question now --

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think we did try. It wasn't  
22 always very easy.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I want to move on to the question of  
24 resourcing the occupation. Your statement implies that  
25 you were not aware that there were serious concerns

1       about resourcing issues, yet on 5th March in advance of  
2       a Ministerial discussion on 6th the Iraq Planning Unit  
3       advised Ministers, including yourself, that:

4               "A UK division's likely area might contain up to 20%  
5       of the Iraqi population and somewhere between  
6       \$400 million and \$2.4 billion might be needed in the  
7       first year. This is well beyond the financial and  
8       implementing capacity of DFID and MoD and there is  
9       a risk that UK could end up becoming responsible for  
10      a large and expensive commitment potentially in the  
11      medium term. If you become responsible for funding,  
12      staffing as well as implementing reconstruction in the  
13      British sector, the burden will be onerous. We judge  
14      this would be very likely to be beyond the resources of  
15      the UK alone."

16             Now in the face of this advice, did you seek to  
17      limit the UK's liability in Iraq?

18      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, I didn't, because --

19      BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why?

20      THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because I was absolutely sure,  
21      one, that if we required more resources, we'd provide  
22      them.

23             I mean, I have gone back through these papers and  
24      I cannot recall a time when someone said to me, "We need  
25      this resource in order to make sure that the Iraqi

1       effort succeeds" and I was saying "No".

2               Gordon Brown made it very clear throughout in the  
3       meetings we had, and I believe, to be fair, that he  
4       honoured that commitment, that we would provide the  
5       resources necessary.

6               However, what I did do as a result of that -- so it  
7       wouldn't make me reduce our commitment at all. What  
8       I did do, though -- and this was part of the discussion  
9       we had with the Americans as well, as we obviously had  
10      to get international support for this as well -- we then  
11      put in train a whole thing of debt relief I think for  
12      the Iraqis. Then there was an international pledging  
13      conference. We were raising money for them, but money  
14      wasn't the problem. It really wasn't the problem.

15              I mean, one of the things I am somewhat frustrated  
16      by when I re-read the evidence, and I think there is  
17      again possibly a lesson here, is that obviously further  
18      down the chain there were people saying to you, "Look,  
19      we have got resources issues here and problems that we  
20      had". I was saying to the people we sent out to Basra,  
21      "If you have a problem, tell me. I want to know".

22              Now I think there was a time in May or June 2003  
23      when I have a vague recollection of Hilary Benn actually  
24      asking for more money, some \$30 million or something.  
25      He got it. You know, if people wanted -- this was so

1           important for us that if it had been a resource problem,  
2           we would have paid the bill.

3   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As you say in your statement, you do  
4           say:

5           "There was never any suggestion the UK troop levels  
6           might be inadequate to fulfil our obligation as  
7           an occupying power."

8           Does this mean that you were actively told that  
9           there would be adequate troops, or no-one told you there  
10          would be a problem, or did you seek advice on this  
11          point?

12   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, they were giving me advice,  
13          which is, "This is what we think we can do". My  
14          assumption is if they are saying they think they can do  
15          it, then they can do it.

16          Now, of course, we would have had discussions about  
17          that at the time, but in essence we had both the troops  
18          and the resources to manage this if the security  
19          situation hadn't dramatically changed, and the  
20          difference between this and Bosnia or Kosovo is the  
21          heart of the problem.

22          Look, I actually went back and looked at some of the  
23          papers in relation to Kosovo. People were making the  
24          same complaints there. When we went in, we found chaos  
25          and difficulty. There were all sorts of problems arose.

1       We couldn't get the people there fast enough. There  
2       were issues to do with the resources. They all got  
3       resolved.

4           These ones would have been resolved in the end. If  
5       you -- I mean, I know what Hilary Synnott said to you in  
6       his evidence, but if you actually track his telegrams,  
7       there is anxiety and concern occasionally flagged up  
8       very strongly, but when he leaves in 2004, he is on  
9       balance optimistic, not pessimistic.

10          You know, I think one of the most interesting pieces  
11       of evidence was given to you by General Dutton I think  
12       it was, who said when he was asked to go out in 2005, he  
13       was asked to go out really on the basis this thing is  
14       moving in the right direction. Now this is two years  
15       after we are in there. So any of the planning problems  
16       or the bureaucracy issues, long we could have resolved  
17       those.

18          The problem, General Dutton goes on to say, is  
19       mid-2005, because I think his term of duty straddled  
20       that period. Suddenly it flips. It flipped not because  
21       we were not taking the right decisions back home, but  
22       because the enemy we ended up fighting, which was  
23       militia backed by Iran, were causing us the trouble.

24       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The sense you get from some of the  
25       evidence is you were very ambitious. For example, if



1       you look at the question of policing, Sir Jeremy  
2       Greenstock said to us you wanted it done quickly:

3               "... and he said, 'Try and do it by the end of 2003  
4       if you possibly can', and John and I looked at each  
5       other. We decided we'd better see whether we could do  
6       anything to help, but we realised it was an extremely  
7       ambitious request."

8               So there was pressure in terms of doing things  
9       quickly and the ambitions were high, but it was never  
10       backed up by any proper analysis of the resources and  
11       what capability was required in terms of staffing.

12   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, not quite, because I think,  
13       I mean, so far as resources was concerned, I mean, that  
14       was not the issue being raised with me. If someone said  
15       to me, "I have a great plan but I need the resources",  
16       I would have said, "You will have them".

17               The thing about the military and civilian is you are  
18       always looking for a situation where you are in the  
19       civilian phase, because the military phase is very  
20       expensive. These civilian sums of money we are talking  
21       about from DFID, I mean, okay, they are large sums of  
22       money, but in government terms hundreds of millions.  
23       When you're talking military, you're talking billions.  
24       So for us if there had been a resource issue around  
25       policing, that would have been easily resolved.

1           Now I saw that evidence from Jeremy. It is true  
2           I was urgently trying to get this going. I think again  
3           -- and I have read the evidence that has been given to  
4           you by various of the police people we sent out there --  
5           I think actually civil policing -- and I can speak to  
6           this a bit in my responsibility now out in Palestine --  
7           civil policing is a vital part of the picture, I think  
8           far more so than we realised at the time, and I would  
9           certainly say that going into any such situation in the  
10          future, you have to have a fully and comprehensively  
11          worked out plan for that, because you will almost  
12          certainly find that the police resources that are there  
13          are corrupt or useless.

14   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In your statement you refer to the  
15          common challenge of delivery. Do you feel the  
16          government machine was up to delivering your aspirations  
17          for Iraq?

18   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think they were up to  
19          delivering it, and I think they were delivering it.  
20          I mean, the officials we sent out there and the people  
21          working for us out there were fantastic people. I mean,  
22          they were amazingly committed people.

23          The trouble was the security situation then  
24          basically dislocated the reconstruction effort, and the  
25          thing is occasionally through this you get a kind of

1 theme, which is: well, if you moved faster on  
2 reconstruction, you may not have got the same security  
3 problem.

4 I would really dispute that. I mean, the whole  
5 point about these terrorist activities is that they were  
6 directed at stopping the progress. They were not  
7 expressions of frustration at the progress. They used  
8 to -- we would repair the electricity. These militia  
9 would come in and blow them up. You know, they would  
10 try to stop the oil production, you know. Even today,  
11 I mean -- we can come to where there are many, many  
12 improvements in Iraq today, but the terrorism, as we  
13 have seen from the last few days, continues. The  
14 Americans are drawn down. The British are out. It  
15 carries on. That's because the purpose of this  
16 terrorism was nothing to do with standing up for Iraq.  
17 It was to do with preventing Iraq getting on its feet as  
18 a functioning democracy. That's still the aim of the  
19 terrorists, which is why it's still important today that  
20 the decent people in Iraq, and they are the majority,  
21 actually succeed.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the question of  
23 consultation with the USA and being an occupying power?

24 Now in your statement you say:

25 "It is correct that we sought a formal memorandum of

1 understanding with the USA about ORHA. It was quickly  
2 superseded by arrangements we agreed at the meeting in  
3 April 2003 at Hillsborough with President Bush and in  
4 discussion at various levels between the US and the UK  
5 governments."

6 In our reading of the record of Hillsborough we  
7 could find no reference to these arrangements.  
8 Furthermore, there is clear evidence of you seeing  
9 colleagues and officials expressing frustration with the  
10 lack of US consultation two months after Hillsborough.

11 I think Jack Straw wrote to you on 5th June saying:

12 "We are jointly liable for all decisions but there  
13 are many complaints that we are being sidelined in CPA  
14 below Sawers' level."

15 If all this had been resolved at Hillsborough, why  
16 did these concerns still persist?

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I don't think they were all  
18 resolved at Hillsborough. In the end the thing with  
19 Hillsborough was we were back into another UN situation.  
20 That was the focus point of my meeting with George Bush,  
21 plus the Middle East peace process. So the issue  
22 between the two of us there at Hillsborough was over the  
23 United Nations' role, because again American did not  
24 want the UN in. We were clear that the UN had to be in,  
25 and I got a paper from the Iraq Planning Unit saying in

1        essence that Iraq couldn't be run by the UN and the UN  
2        didn't want the lead role, but the UN had to have an  
3        important role, and this was raised with President Bush  
4        and finally resolved.

5            We also had an issue on the peace process, because I  
6        was very determined -- I can't remember exactly when the  
7        road map was published, but this was all to do with the  
8        Middle East peace process, and I also was very fixed on  
9        that.

10           Now on the consultation with the Americans, look,  
11        I think there were, and probably there always will be --  
12        you know, you are not going to get a situation in which  
13        everyone is happy with everyone and so on, but one of  
14        the reasons why I was sending people of the calibre of  
15        John Sawers, who had worked for me, Jeremy, who was our  
16        key guy at the UN, was I wanted a top level person in  
17        there making sure as things transited to Ambassador  
18        Bremer that we had the opportunity to make our views  
19        known.

20           Now sometimes that didn't work, and Jack's note is  
21        an expression at the frustration of that, but, look,  
22        given the disparity of the assets that were being  
23        deployed and given the fact down in the south we were  
24        really running our own show, I think it would be  
25        a little harsh actually to say the Americans were not

1 consulting us at all, and I know they would certainly  
2 disagree with that.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But when you talk about the  
4 individuals, do you think we were putting too much  
5 premium on the individuals solving the problem without  
6 really getting the relationship right, because, okay,  
7 the disparity of the resources was there, but we had  
8 ultimately joint responsibility, and therefore we had  
9 the right to be consulted?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sure, and I think what the  
11 Americans would say is that they did. I mean, you ask  
12 whether the particular individuals matter. In my view  
13 this is all about individuals. So with someone like  
14 John Sawers I would have complete confidence that he --

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I didn't say that. I said were we  
16 putting too much premium on individuals without having  
17 a framework within which to work at having a strategy?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. What I was really going to  
19 say was because you can't predict all these situations  
20 as they are arising, really in the end -- look, you  
21 could have agreed some formal memorandum with the  
22 Americans. That wouldn't have been what made it work.  
23 What would have made it work was my relationship with  
24 the President obviously, Jack's relationship and so on.  
25 David Manning and Condi Rice were constantly talking --

1 I mean, David Manning and Condi Rice had an  
2 extraordinarily close working relationship. I should  
3 imagine they were speaking to each other often several times  
4 a day. You will see from all the various different  
5 notes David was often raising these issues with her.

6 The key thing was to have someone like John  
7 alongside Ambassador Bremer, because I formed a very  
8 clear view of Ambassador Bremer when I met him, which  
9 was he was a really able, tough-minded person. You  
10 know, he was someone who knew his own mind, so I wanted  
11 a strong person alongside him.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, prior to the United Nations  
13 Security Council Resolution 1483 the UK was the  
14 occupying power for the ground it occupied in Iraq, but  
15 after the 1483 it was joint occupying power for all  
16 Iraq, and in your statement you say:

17 "I was fully aware of the responsibility that came  
18 with this and so were my colleagues."

19 You also say:

20 "It is correct that as the joint occupying power we  
21 would share legal responsibility for the whole of Iraq  
22 with the US whilst in effect the responsibility for  
23 practical implementation would be with the US. It has  
24 to be emphasised that, although we together with the US  
25 were to constitute the occupying power under the UN

1 resolution, the US was providing the overwhelming amount  
2 of manpower and resources."

3 How did you think the UK was going to exercise its  
4 obligations as a joint occupying power?

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It was more how was it going to  
6 make sure that it got alongside the decision-making  
7 process? I mean, this issue to do with whether we were  
8 solely responsible for the south and the Americans  
9 responsible for the rest or we were joint occupying  
10 powers, I mean, that's an interesting debate, but  
11 I think our view -- and, you know, there was an Ad Hoc  
12 Committee meeting every day resolving and talking about  
13 these issues -- was it was going to be to our advantage  
14 actually to make sure we were joint partners with the  
15 US, because that both gave us a locus in Baghdad but  
16 also meant they had some responsibility for our area  
17 too.

18 So I think this was a perfectly satisfactory way of  
19 resolving it. We did actually have a lot of people in  
20 and alongside the US. You have the evidence of Andy  
21 Bearpark. Andy went in from us. Andy, you know, is  
22 a sort of colourful character. I mean, he was  
23 effectively handling large amounts of American money and  
24 resources. Just to put this in perspective, what he was  
25 handling up to Baghdad, despite the fact we actually



1        weren't there, was more than the whole of what was going  
2        into the south.

3            So, you know, when people say the Americans were  
4        sort of not treating us properly, I really don't think  
5        that's correct, you know. I think in any of these  
6        situations you are going to get glitches, friction,  
7        difficulties. They were resolvable.

8            One thing I would like to say about Ambassador  
9        Bremer and his time -- and I know he has given you his  
10       statement -- I actually think he did a pretty good job  
11       in charge of the CPA. The fact is when he was there,  
12       Iraq was on an upward path, and really it was in later  
13       times that we got into the difficulties.

14           You know, I know there's a lot of debate about  
15       de-Ba'athification and so on, and you will have heard  
16       a lot of evidence on that, but he was someone who knew  
17       his own mind, but I have to say I did not get the  
18       impression he was refusing to discuss it with the  
19       British. On the contrary, we had Brits working  
20       alongside in very senior positions.

21       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I want to come back again. Why did  
22       Jack Straw write to you on 7th April, when he said:

23            "Colleagues also felt strongly the US must not be  
24       allowed to take UK support for granted, otherwise, as  
25       the US ultimately call the shots, we risk being caught

1 in a position of sharing responsibility for events in  
2 Iraq without holding corresponding power to influence  
3 them"?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course they are absolutely  
5 right, which is why we would be pushing the whole time  
6 but that's a struggle you would expect to have. You are  
7 going to be in a situation where you are in there  
8 working alongside the US. I should imagine exactly the  
9 same thing would have happened in Bosnia, Kosovo,  
10 Afghanistan. It is just the way it is. Jack was  
11 perfectly rightly passing on to me from colleagues in  
12 a sense "Look, get on to your partner Bush and tell him  
13 we have to be properly involved in this".

14 After I came back from Iraq on the 29th I made sure  
15 I met President Bush and frankly gave him a pretty clear  
16 situation -- sit rep up of what was happening and the  
17 problems.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How effective was that channel of  
19 communications because a number of witnesses have  
20 commented on the importance of the channel of  
21 communication for resolving issues. Were you confident  
22 what you agreed with President Bush would be translated  
23 into action on the ground, because if a lot rested on  
24 that channel of communication, how effective was it in  
25 practice?

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: The truth is these things are only  
2 as effective as the two top decision makers can be in  
3 circumstances where they are not actually on the ground.  
4 So you had to have in parallel to that -- that was why I  
5 chose John Sawers particularly and then later Jeremy to  
6 go alongside the Americans -- you have to have people  
7 who are there on the spot, because whatever President  
8 Bush and I agree, you then have systems and the American  
9 system, you know, if anyone has ever dealt with them --  
10 I have now dealt with three different Presidents and  
11 those in charge of their systems -- it is a vast  
12 behemoth of a system. You need to make sure messages  
13 are getting in at the ground level as well as the top  
14 level.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How confident are you what was said  
16 between you and President Bush was percolating down to  
17 the ground and that action was actually taken?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have to say I think they did  
19 take action. You will have seen from what happened with  
20 Ambassador Bremer, I mean, he got moving pretty quickly.  
21 He did start to turn things round.

22 Now, you know, was it difficult in the first bit  
23 with the transition from ORHA to the CPA? Yes, it was  
24 and the Americans in their own analysis of planning say  
25 this should have been done completely differently now

1       and I think Jerry Bremer would say that to you as well.  
2       I can't say there were things where I was ringing the  
3       alarm bell with President Bush and he was not doing  
4       anything. On the contrary when I met him and went through  
5       item by item the things that had to happened. When I  
6       went to him, and again his system was completely  
7       resistant to this, to get the UN into Iraq, they did  
8       come in.

9             It is very important to understand this, and I think  
10       it comes out from some of the evidence, our concept was  
11       very, very clear. The suggestion is somewhere in the  
12       question to me that somehow we had different objectives  
13       moving from the different stages of this transition, it  
14       was absolutely clear we wanted to go from coalition to  
15       a sort of provisional authority, Iraqi governing  
16       council, and the purpose was to put the UN in so that in  
17       our view the UN over time took over.

18   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That we know, but I just want to  
19       come back to how effective the channel of communication  
20       was, because you referred to Andy Bearpark, but he also  
21       told us "If you are in a Downing Street/White House  
22       conversation there is a limit to how many issues can be  
23       raised and certainly a very distinct limit as to how  
24       many issues can be resolved."

25   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: That's true. I would accept that

1 completely. What I am saying is when you have big  
2 issues -- the UN coming in was a big, big issue. If you  
3 get the UN in this situation the great advantage is that  
4 it has a whole set of infrastructures itself that deal  
5 with things like development, schooling.

6 If you take the situation that I am involved in now,  
7 if you took the UN out of Gaza there would be very  
8 little there. So the UN has this huge infrastructure of  
9 capacity. Our purpose was to bring the UN in in  
10 an important role. Sergio Vieira de Mello was obviously  
11 critical to this and was an exceptional leader and  
12 person. Unfortunately, and this is why, as I say, the  
13 issue is what happened to security, because what  
14 happened was they killed him and many of his staff in  
15 August 2003.

16 You know, one of the things that's important to  
17 recognise, and some people -- I think Lord Williams  
18 suggests this -- is without the UN authority you don't  
19 have the necessary consent amongst the population. The  
20 truth is those people we were fighting in Iraq didn't  
21 care about the UN. In fact, they wanted the UN out as  
22 much as us.

23 In the end I think any of these questions -- yes, it  
24 is true you can't resolve everything in a telephone  
25 conversation between Prime Minister and President, but

1       the big ticket items I was absolutely on those with  
2       President Bush and as far as I know action was following  
3       from that.

4   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   Okay.   Can I move on to -- because  
5       you raised earlier the question of Iraq's bureaucratic  
6       capacity.   Again in your memoirs you imply you were  
7       depending on a functioning Civil Service, that the basic  
8       infrastructure of government was intact and capable, but  
9       given that Iraq had been under the grip of  
10      brutal and corrupt tyrants and had been through mass  
11      insurrections and two debilitating wars and, as was  
12      widely reported, had been further debilitated by  
13      12 years of sanctions, had its leadership removed by  
14      a third war, so was it prudent to plan on the assumption  
15      of a functioning rather than a degraded state apparatus?

16   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR:   When you look back on this with  
17      hindsight, you can say "no".   All I say to you is that at  
18      the time there was quite a lot of work on this.   What is  
19      interesting, I came across the other day in preparing  
20      for the Inquiry is a comment of Kofi Annan's that he  
21      made at a press conference in April 2003, where he  
22      referred to a functioning Iraqi Civil Service, and the  
23      Americans and ourselves were of the view that with this  
24      in part because of the nature of the Saddam regime,  
25      there must be a pretty good functioning Civil Service

1       there. We were obviously taking advice as well from  
2       people who had recently left Iraq.

3           One of the lessons of this undoubtedly is that in  
4       any situation where you are removing an oppressive and  
5       brutal regime assume the worst, assume actually as  
6       a result of that brutality and oppression what you may  
7       have is a hard security apparatus, but actually not  
8       a governing bureaucracy with any integrity there.

9           Again, by the way, I think that was a resolvable  
10      problem. If we had got into essentially a security  
11      situation where we had had internal elements and former  
12      Saddam regime people and so on and a certain amount of  
13      looting, criminality all of that, we could have managed  
14      that and formed the governing structures of Iraq fairly  
15      easily.

16   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I bring you back? You said that that  
17      was your information, but we have declassified a letter  
18      which was sent by Matthew Rycroft and he wanted some  
19      information that you requested on the assessment of the state of  
the  
20      Iraqi civil service and bureaucracy. Can you recall  
21      whether you received that information and what was the  
22      assessment made?

23   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. What actually happened there  
24      was I think, if this is I think in early April 2003?

25   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What happened is obviously when we  
2 were in there after the conflict had begun and now we  
3 are actually in Iraq, we were going to get -- have real  
4 time real information, as it were. We were not going to  
5 be relying on reports. We would have our own people on  
6 the ground, and, of course, what became very, very  
7 apparent very quickly was that the assumption that had  
8 been made about the state of the Iraqi bureaucracy was  
9 not correct.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But, you know, there was a JIC  
11 assessment report, I think it was 19th February and  
12 again that stated:

13 "Overall there is a risk of a wider breakdown as the  
14 regime's authority crumbles."

15 So there was information, there were signs there if  
16 you looked very carefully what the likely consequences  
17 were going to be?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, again, in hindsight you can  
19 go back and pick out these things and say "We should  
20 have considered this more important". I actually think  
21 now when I look back on it the intelligence that Al  
22 Qaeda sent to Al-Zarqawi into Iraq in 2002, May 2002,  
23 that should have triggered an assessment on our part  
24 that was rather different from the assessment we came  
25 to, but this is with the benefit of hindsight.



1           If you take the overall impression of all the bits  
2           of information we had, this was not my conclusion.  
3           Andrew Turnbull has given you his evidence. The  
4           conclusion of the system, both ours and the Americans,  
5           and what I am saying to you is interestingly the same  
6           conclusion was reached by the UN bureaucracy, was that  
7           this wouldn't be a collapsed government. You might have  
8           all sorts of different problems, but that was not going  
9           to be a problem.

10           I just want to emphasise, however, I think again  
11           that would have been a resolvable problem but for the  
12           issue we got into.

13   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

14   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I will turn now to Sir Martin  
15           Gilbert about what happened.

16   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I'd like to look briefly, Mr Blair,  
17           into the insurgency story. We will come on to the roles  
18           of Iran and AQ in a moment, as you commented yourself it  
19           merits a special section. I want to ask you about your  
20           statement to us that what we found in Iraq was not what  
21           we anticipated. You told us no-one identified what came  
22           to be the problem.

23           We have published the declassified records of your  
24           meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on 15th January 2003,  
25           that is more than two months before the beginning of the

1 conflict. This highlights the risk of serious violence  
2 in the event of rapid collapse of Saddam's regime.

3 Two particular phrases. It speaks of internecine  
4 fighting between the Sunni and Shia populations and  
5 ethnic groups that irretrievably fracture the country.

6 Can you tell us what you did to ensure that these  
7 risks would be addressed?

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. There was a real worry about  
9 the Shia/Sunni issue, and what we did to address it was  
10 to make sure that as soon as possible we had some  
11 governing council, and that's why we formed the Iraqi  
12 governing council, and that was formed very quickly  
13 within months, precisely in order to make sure that the  
14 Sunni and Shia and, of course, the Kurds were all  
15 represented on it. So that was an issue.

16 Actually we didn't get -- the Sunni/Shia fighting  
17 did not start until probably 2006 in earnest after the  
18 Samarra Mosque was bombed deliberately to create such  
19 sectarianism. We were aware of the fact you might get  
20 criminality and looting. People were prepared to deal  
21 with that, and we could have dealt with that. Actually  
22 we did.

23 There is an interesting telegram in late May 2003  
24 which actually describes that because of the easing of  
25 the security situation in the south, UK troops were

1 engaged more in reconstruction.

2 So, you know, we faced these problems absolutely as  
3 they predicted down in the south. They were not of  
4 an order that gave us concern that the mission might not  
5 succeed. Very quickly we were able to overcome that.

6 Now really that issue, the problem of security, they  
7 weren't warning me of what eventually took place. On  
8 the contrary I think most people thought, most of the  
9 intelligence was a view -- maybe that's more of  
10 a problem you will face in Britain than in Iraq but in  
11 Iran they will want to promote stability.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You say in your book that:

13 "Iraq..." -- we are looking now forward I suppose to  
14 2005 and 2006 -- "...was not Vietnam, which was a battle  
15 fought against a genuine insurgency".

16 You have argued without the intervention of Al Qaeda  
17 and Iran the situation would have been manageable.  
18 That's your phrase, but was there not insurgency in  
19 Iraq? Were there not several insurgencies happening in  
20 parallel?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am not meaning to suggest there  
22 were not former regime elements, disaffected Sunnis that  
23 were operating here, and that's why in the end the  
24 so-called Awakening Policy and the Sons of Iraq policy  
25 was so important. So I am not suggesting there was not

1 an internal problem.

2 What I am suggesting, however, is that what gave it  
3 a completely different complexion was AQ on one side and  
4 Iran on the other.

5 Let me explain that. I think about AQ and its  
6 bombing campaigns were that they were the kind of  
7 spectacles -- again to go back to the evidence you  
8 have about 2003, what were two critical elements? The  
9 two critical elements were the bombing of the UN  
10 headquarters in which so many people tragically died,  
11 which was a massive moment really, and then later the  
12 bombing of I think it was the Al-Rashid Hotel in  
13 October. It was Al Qaeda that were really focusing on  
14 killing the people who were trying to get the country on  
15 its feet, and, you know, I'm not saying that without Al  
16 Qaeda there wouldn't have been a problem, but, I mean,  
17 thousands died. I mean, they are still doing it now.

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we would like to pursue this Al  
19 Qaeda point, if we may. It is really one for  
20 Sir Roderic Lyne. Rod.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I wonder if I can run through two or  
22 three points quite quickly, because I think time is  
23 running along.

24 On Al Qaeda, which you devote a section of your  
25 statement to, Al Qaeda and Iran, you have pointed out

1       that the -- you have argued that the JIC should have  
2       made rather more of the fact that Zargawi was in  
3       Northern Iraq. I wonder if this whole area is one in  
4       which on reflection you feel that the advice given to  
5       you, the analysis that was made, obviously not in the  
6       Prime Minister's office but by experts of different  
7       kinds, was wrong and should have been better. To be  
8       fair to the JIC, they did make a clear judgment before  
9       the invasion, 10th February, that the threat from Al  
10      Qaeda will increase at the onset of any military action  
11      against Iraq. Attacks on western interests are likely.  
12      Of course, they were not just referring to interests in  
13      Iraq but globally.

14             So probably rather understated, but given that we  
15      had by this stage been engaged with the United States  
16      for two years in a global war on terror, as President  
17      Bush called it, and we were about to invade and occupy  
18      an Islamic country with a substantial Sunni population,  
19      shouldn't the experts have anticipated -- I am wary of  
20      hindsight -- wasn't it actually rather obvious that Al Qaeda  
21      would seek to exploit such a situation against us? Why  
22      didn't they tell you that more strongly if they did tell  
23      you that but not very strongly?

24   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I don't think anyone  
25      predicted it in the way that it came to be. I have

1 an explanation of this but it may be different from  
2 others. By the way, they gave me -- they did  
3 an extremely good job for me throughout so I have no  
4 complaint about it at all. I think our understanding of  
5 this is far better now than it was then globally,  
6 I think there was a feeling back then -- there are  
7 really two ways of looking at the extremism. In a sense  
8 this is also -- it comes out in the difference of point  
9 of view. For example, between someone like Jacques  
10 Chirac and someone like me as to how you deal with all  
11 of this.

12 One view of the extremism, which was I think fairly  
13 prevalent at the time, was that this extremism was  
14 a kind of alien encrustment on Islam, on the Muslim  
15 countries and so on, that, yes, it was based on  
16 a perversion of Islam but it was really a very small  
17 number of people who were engaged in this, and that view  
18 I think is still shared by many people today.

19 Now my view is actually different from that.  
20 I think the numbers of people who are engaged in  
21 terrorism or become suicide bombers is very, very  
22 limited, but I think the global ideology that gives rise  
23 to this extremism has far deeper roots, and, you know,  
24 I am out in the Middle East a lot of the time now and  
25 it's the same issue everywhere. It comes up -- it

1 doesn't always come up in issues to do with terrorism or  
2 violence. It is about modernisation. It is about  
3 attitudes to the west and it is deep. It's a lot  
4 deeper.

5 So what happened when you got Al Qaeda coming into  
6 this situation is that it was more than just a few  
7 terrorists. It was backed with the ability to push  
8 an ideology that said the west is fundamentally hostile  
9 to Islam and that's why we have to wage war against  
10 these people and we have to wage war against them and  
11 against the leaders that deal with them.

12 Now that ideology in terms of how it results in  
13 violence is very few people. That narrative about Islam  
14 and the west I fear has a far greater reach than we  
15 would like to accept which is why this problem is not  
16 confined to one area in the world today.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As you rightly say they came into  
18 a situation and they came into a situation that was very  
19 fertile ground for them. We have heard from actually  
20 many witnesses a picture in which during and after the  
21 campaign the situation inside Iraq became very chaotic.  
22 In fact, looting started almost immediately. The  
23 invading and then occupying forces were not able to  
24 ensure law and order. Even arms dumps were not guarded.  
25 We had, of course, dismantled the regime self-evidently,

1 but we had in the course of doing that -- we went on to  
2 dismantle much of the public service through  
3 de-Ba'athification. We disbanded the army. Much of it  
4 melted away, but we could have brought quite a lot of it  
5 back. We didn't.

6 As a result of this post-conflict situation in what  
7 was already a fragile and unstable country a power  
8 vacuum developed and in that situation according to this  
9 line of evidence that we have had, essentially what  
10 happened then was an internal and intercommunal struggle  
11 for power and resources which involved many different  
12 groups.

13 The team that subsequently analysed this for General  
14 Petraeus and General Odierno identified nine drivers of  
15 instability, one of which was Al Qaeda. Essentially it  
16 was an internal conflict which Al Qaeda came into.

17 What I suppose concerns us is whether, given what  
18 was known at the time -- as you rightly say we know more  
19 about it now -- this should not have been factored in  
20 more to the planning and preparations so that enough  
21 resources would have been there on the ground -- they  
22 would have been predominantly American but British  
23 too -- to prevent that power vacuum developing in this very  
chaotic  
24 early situation. That was where our preparations went  
25 wrong?



1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think there is something in that  
2 but I think you can make far too much of it. Yes, of  
3 course, again the Americans have accepted they probably  
4 should have had more and different troops even for the  
5 aftermath. One of the lessons of this undoubtedly is  
6 that what you require by way of way of fighting the war  
7 is quite different from what you require afterwards.  
8 That I fully accept.

9 But I think -- because this really does matter as  
10 a lesson -- I don't think that Al Qaeda stepped into  
11 a power vacuum. You know, if you take Pakistan today --  
12 and after all there have been more people killed in  
13 terrorism in Pakistan in 2010 that I think either Iraq  
14 or Afghanistan -- you can't say that's not a well  
15 functioning state and security services and everything.  
16 Where you have people who are prepared with suicide  
17 bombing to destabilise a country, they don't need  
18 a power vacuum. They simply need people who are  
19 prepared to go and blow themselves up in a street  
20 market. When that happens you destabilise the country.  
21 That's the purpose of it. That is why it's such  
22 a frightening phenomenon. That's what these people do  
23 and they do it, I am afraid, all over.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think nobody is disputing how  
25 unpleasant or ruthless Al Qaeda are or the trouble they

1 are creating in Pakistan, but, of course, the majority  
2 of the people who made Iraq virtually unmanageable were  
3 Iraqis. They were internal. They came from different  
4 groups. Not all of the extremists were Al Qaeda by any  
5 means. In fact, almost every group in the struggle for  
6 power had extremist elements in it and, indeed, still  
7 does to this day, as we see from the pattern of  
8 continuing terrorism that goes on.

9 So to pin quite so much on Al Qaeda, who became  
10 a bigger factor after a while, but the initial phrase was  
11 surely important too, wasn't it?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, the initial stage was  
13 important and that's why it is important to get this  
14 right because otherwise -- my view, and I will come to  
15 this in a moment -- in any situation where you are going  
16 to engage and have to engage in nation building, where  
17 this Islamist extremism is a factor, whatever you think,  
18 and whatever amount of planning you do, you are going to  
19 be in for a hard, relentless struggle, because that's  
20 the nature of it.

21 You see, it's correct that there was this power  
22 vacuum that was there, but actually -- and this is why  
23 I referred you to General Dutton's evidence earlier --  
24 2005, Iraq was getting there, because let's be clear,  
25 whatever these extremist groups were doing the majority

1 of Iraqis were coming out and voting in their elections.  
2 They were in favour, indeed still are today.

3 I mean, I spoke to Minister Allawi, who has won the  
4 most seats in the Iraqi election the other day and he  
5 just said to me "Look, it is very challenging but there  
6 is hope in this country today. We defeated Saddam. We  
7 will defeat the terrorists in the end and your people  
8 and your forces should be proud of what they have done".  
9 These groups in 2004/2005, yes, there was struggle and  
10 fighting, but in the first half of 2004 there were 30  
11 suicide attacks. The first half of 2005 there are 200.

12 Now that's way past these early teething issues to  
13 do with bureaucracy and problems we had and the power  
14 vacuum and so on. This by now is a deliberate attempt  
15 to destabilise the country.

16 The point I would make to you about Al Qaeda is  
17 this. These other groups that were fighting and doing  
18 things, I am not minimising the importance, but the thing  
19 that made it toughest for all of us and toughest  
20 particularly with public opinion, because we were trying  
21 to have to keep our public opinion for a long struggle  
22 here, and I am afraid this is what these groups have  
23 learned from their experience in Afghanistan and Iraq,  
24 is that these -- (a) if you do these spectacular,  
25 ghastly suicide bombings you create an image of a county

1 in chaos. So it is not just the numbers you kill; it is  
2 the image you portray.

3 Secondly, with the roadside bombs, the IEDs, EFPs  
4 and so on, and this is where the Iranian part comes in,  
5 you can aim it at the soldiers of the countries coming  
6 in and the country providing those forces becomes  
7 demoralised by this.

8 So I really do believe this is a fundamental point  
9 here.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Nobody, I think, has or would question  
11 that. We went over that at enormous length last year  
12 and we have covered it elsewhere. We are now  
13 unfortunately short of time. I mean, the important  
14 point is really how do we counter it in a specific  
15 situation like Iraq or how do we minimise the chance of  
16 it growing up? Did we have enough troops there  
17 ourselves? We have heard from General Shirreff that he  
18 was only able to deploy in a really bad time in  
19 Basra 200 hundred troops on to the streets of the city  
20 of 1.3 million, which compared in his view very badly  
21 with Northern Ireland. I am sorry we do not have  
22 a chance to pursue all of this now.

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: If they had said to me "We need  
24 more forces," I would have been talking to them about  
25 it.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am agreeing with you on the importance  
2 of Al Qaeda and the need for further thought on it which  
3 is obviously a lesson.

4 Can I ask just two very quick questions on Iran and then  
5 we have to move on, because Iran you highlighted as part  
6 of the problem.

7 Again the JIC, as you said earlier in the  
8 declassified report of 19th February, told you that Iran  
9 was unlikely to be aggressive, although they had also  
10 warned that Iran would try to meddle in Iraq and would  
11 want to ensure a leading role for its proteges, would  
12 want to minimise the size and duration of a US presence  
13 post-Saddam, had interests throughout Iraq and might  
14 pursue them in the south through armed Shia groups such  
15 as the Badr Corps, all of which turned out to be fairly accurate  
16 but perhaps to a degree understated.

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I also think there were many  
18 comments in that that basically said Iran was not going  
19 to take an aggressive posture.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's what I just said and it says, and  
21 it also talked about active neutrality.

22 My question to you is to what extent should the  
23 advice to you about this have been better, given that it  
24 is no surprise to anybody that the Iranians do not like  
25 the USA and the UK, as Great Satan and Little Satan, and

1        were not likely to share our objectives and particularly  
2        were not likely to welcome a democratic state, which we  
3        would try to create, being installed in Iraq with the  
4        help of the Americans and the British.

5                So shouldn't the JIC, shouldn't other advisers have  
6        worked on a rather more pessimistic assumption that Iraq  
7        was going to seek to try to interfere with our success  
8        rather than cooperate with it or preserve a neutral  
9        stance towards it? If I can just have a fairly short  
10       answer on that, because again we covered quite a lot of  
11       this last year?

12    THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think you might say with  
13       hindsight, yes, but I honestly think it is with  
14       hindsight. At the time people didn't think that. You  
15       know, we had been engaging with Iran over this. We had  
16       been engaging with the new sanctions debate and so on  
17       and no, I think we -- and this brings me to my point,  
18       because you made a point earlier that -- you see, I also  
19       think needs amendment.

20                How do you deal with Al Qaeda? You can't deal with  
21        them unless you deal with the bigger picture, which  
22        includes Iran. That's my view, because I don't think  
23        this is -- I think Iran took a strategic decision and  
24        has now gone down a path of where it believes that it is  
25        an existential threat to the maintenance of this

1       bureaucracy to have progress and modernisation happening  
2       in that region.

3   SIR RODERIC LYNE: That neatly brings me to my  
4       positively final question, which is that one of the  
5       drivers of the decision to deal with Saddam and Iraq, as  
6       we have heard from again numerous witnesses, was the  
7       hope that this would send a very powerful signal to  
8       nations like -- particularly Iran and North Korea that  
9       were trying to develop nuclear weapons, of course,  
10      contacts with Libya were already underway  
11      and  
12      as I think we discussed last year, that  
13      led to a success in the autumn of 2003. Iran with North  
14      Korea was a country of highest concern and it is  
15      a country of even higher concern now for exactly the  
16      reasons you have given.

17           So was the effect of the action we took in Iraq, at  
18      least with regard to the nuclear proliferation the  
19      reverse nuclear proliferation in Iran, the reverse of  
20      what we had intended? Is that how it has actually  
21      turned out?

22   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, I don't think so.

23   SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mean it has deterred Iran?

24   THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. I think to begin with there  
25      was real pressure on Iran. I think we restarted

1 negotiations with them over their nuclear programme.  
2 North Korea came back into six party talks. I think now  
3 we are in a different situation.

4 I want to make this point very clearly, because it  
5 comes out in the paper of Lord Williams, the single  
6 thing that is said most often to me in the Middle East by people  
7 who opposed what I did, was nothing to do with it was a  
8 bad idea to get rid of Saddam. They are well rid of him  
9 and believe that. They said, "You have made Iran more  
10 powerful by getting rid of Saddam". My answer to that  
11 is very simple and it is fundamental to this whole  
12 question. The answer to Iran is not Saddam. That was  
13 our policy back in the 1980s, and all we did was then  
14 create a monster we could not control.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: By getting rid of Saddam's nuclear  
16 weapons by decapitating the regime send a signal to Iran  
17 not to go on developing nuclear weapons?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Obviously it sent a signal to  
19 everyone which is why Libya --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, how did the Iranians react?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Initially they felt that pressure,  
22 now they don't feel the same pressure.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Don't they feel they need them more in  
24 case the Americans have the same intentions towards  
25 them?



1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, that is not the reason why  
2 Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was doing it even under the Shah.

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It is a rather different regime  
5 today. People can take two views about Iran today, but  
6 I will give you my view very, very strongly indeed,  
7 because this is a looming and coming challenge. I am  
8 out in that region the whole time. I see the impact and  
9 influence of Iran everywhere. It is negative,  
10 destabilising. It is supportive of terrorist groups.  
11 It is doing everything it can to impede progress in the  
12 Middle East peace process and to facilitate a situation  
13 in which that region cannot embark on the process of  
14 modernisation it urgently needs.

15 This is not because we have done something. You  
16 know, at some point -- and I say this to you with all  
17 the passion I possibly can -- the West has to get out of  
18 this what I think is a wretched policy or posture of  
19 apology for believing that we are causing what the  
20 Iranians are doing or what these extremists are doing.  
21 We are not. The fact is they are doing it because they  
22 disagree fundamentally with our way of life and they  
23 will carry on doing it unless they are met with the  
24 requisite determination and if necessary force.

25 The fact that -- look, President Obama, not

1       President Bush -- this is an important point --  
2       President Obama goes in March 2009 to Cairo in the heart  
3       of Islam. He makes a speech where he says effectively  
4       "Put aside the Bush era. I am now offering the hand of  
5       friendship. You, Iran can come into partnership. You  
6       are an ancient proud civilisation. We will welcome you  
7       in".

8               What's the response he gets? They carry on with the  
9       terrorism. They carry on with the destabilisation.  
10      They carry on with the nuclear weapons programme. At  
11      some point we have to get our heads out of the sand and  
12      understand they are going to carry on with this. Iraq  
13      is one part of a far bigger picture and right across  
14      that region people are facing that struggle.

15   SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Mr Blair, in a moment we are going to ask  
16      you for the lessons you want to draw from Iraq in  
17      particular and more broadly. Before we do that, and we  
18      have only moments left I think, Sir Martin Gilbert would  
19      like to ask one final question.

20   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to ask a final question  
21      about your stewardship of our Iraqi policy and that's  
22      the Afghan dimension. In your statement to us you  
23      commented:

24               "Afghanistan did not affect decisions on drawing  
25      down troop levels in Iraq. There was explicit

1 confirmation from the military that our proposed  
2 increased deployment in Afghanistan was not dependent on  
3 sticking to the scheduled drawdown."

4 You previously confirmed to us that the suggestion  
5 for raising troop levels in Afghanistan came from the  
6 MoD. General Shirreff told us in his evidence that in  
7 his view a decision had been taken to open up the second  
8 front in Afghanistan before the situation in Iraq was  
9 satisfactorily resolved. Lord Walker told us in his  
10 evidence that the Afghan uplift, as he put it, was  
11 absolutely a breach of the Defence Planning Assumptions.

12 Should the military advice on whether it was  
13 possible to sustain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan  
14 simultaneously have been revised as the situation in  
15 Iraq deteriorated and did you seek such advice?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, my recollection is that we  
17 very specifically did ask whether if we were going to  
18 increase our position in Afghanistan, that was going to  
19 be a problem for us in Iraq and could we maintain both  
20 the uplift and the commitment to Iraq, and my  
21 recollection is that John Reid actually very  
22 specifically asked for this to be done.

23 So yes, this was very much part of our thinking.  
24 Now it would have been difficult as the security  
25 situation -- again, you know, to go back to it, in the

1 first half of 2005 we were still on track. It was in  
2 the second half of 2005/2006 that this thing went bad,  
3 but I would have expected them to come to me and say,  
4 you know, "We can't do this". I am not aware that they  
5 did, although the thing about the military is they are  
6 just fantastically good people in the sense -- if you  
7 ask them to do it, they will do it.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In our difficulties in Basra when we  
9 had eventually to withdraw from Basra and go to the  
10 airport and so on, by then there was simply no way in  
11 which you could readjust the military balance. Wouldn't  
12 it be true to say once Maliki went down into Basra that  
13 we had to abandon our options and certainly abandon any  
14 winning strategy?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, look, again I think what is  
16 happening in Basra today is that for all the challenges  
17 that still remain they are getting somewhere as a city,  
18 and that's because the British forces were there for  
19 years as Iraqi capability built up, but where Basra was  
20 very different from Baghdad was that in Baghdad there  
21 were -- the problem were the attacks on the civilians.  
22 In Basra the attacks were on us. So it was -- I think  
23 the view of the military, and this is where I think  
24 General Dannatt at some point in 2006 actually says "We  
25 are in danger of becoming the problem here". So our

1 perception always was in Basra you needed to get to the  
2 point where the Iraqis did the operation.

3 Now what we did was we wanted to do what I think it  
4 was called operation Salamanca. We then downgraded that  
5 because Maliki said to me "Look, I want to do this as  
6 an Iraqi operation." So we downgraded it somewhat but  
7 in the end the charge of the knights was very  
8 successful. It was done actually, by the way, with  
9 British support and it is why we should hold our heads  
10 high about what we did in Basra.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

12 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Mr Blair, I know you wanted ten minutes  
13 or so to offer us some lessons that you think a future  
14 Prime Minister might benefit from. Would that be a good  
15 moment?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I will do that and I will try to  
17 do that briefly, if I may, Sir John.

18 Actually just before I got to those lessons learned,  
19 I wanted to say something else.

20 At the conclusion of the last hearing you asked me  
21 whether I had any regrets. I took that as a question  
22 about the decision to go to war and I answered that  
23 I took responsibility.

24 That was taken as my meaning that I had no regrets  
25 about the loss of life and that was never my meaning or

1 my intention. I wanted to make that clear that, of  
2 course, I regret deeply and profoundly the loss of life,  
3 whether from our own armed forces, those of other  
4 nations, the civilians who helped people in Iraq or the  
5 Iraqis themselves. I just wanted to say that, because  
6 I think it is right to say it and it is what I feel.

7 (Interruption from public gallery)

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Be quiet, please. Mr Blair.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I will then go to the lessons  
10 learned. I have certain lessons here which I am just  
11 going to give you, which are really to do with the  
12 planning. I then have one or two other political  
13 lessons. One of those political lessons is to do with  
14 the link between AQ and Iran and what I want to say --  
15 this is what I was saying before, so I needn't repeat  
16 myself now -- I wanted to make it very clear to you that  
17 I think you need to look at this issue to do with AQ and  
18 Iran in a broader context and also the linkages between  
19 the two, because I think there are a whole series of  
20 particularly defence intelligence reports from 2005 and  
21 2006 which are very, very important in this regard and  
22 which detail quite extensively the nature of those  
23 activities. So that is one aspect, as it were, on the  
24 political.

25 The second is -- and again I have committed these to

1 writing, which I will give you -- is on our relationship  
2 with America, because I think one recurrent theme of  
3 this is, you know, this decision that we were going to  
4 stand shoulder to shoulder with America, we would be  
5 with America, this American partnership is tough to do.  
6 I mean, it is easy to say; it is tough to do.

7 That is particularly so in circumstances where in  
8 any operation of this size, I mean, America frankly is  
9 going to be in the lead and going to have the  
10 overwhelming amount of resources and assets.

11 So the question that people raise perfectly  
12 naturally is: Is it worth it? I mean, is the pain/gain  
13 ratio really worth it? I think you do have to consider  
14 that. My view obviously is clear that it is. I think  
15 when I look back to Kosovo, I don't think we could  
16 possibly have done that without American intervention.  
17 I think that intervention was absolutely central to  
18 being able to deal with that, and so I believe it's  
19 important we keep that relationship together, but  
20 I think we have to be realistic about it. When we are  
21 in a situation like this we are going to have to accept  
22 that it's going to be difficult and hard, because there  
23 will be situations in which America is determined to go  
24 its own way and where our influence may be at some  
25 levels very great but at other levels they will have

1       their own strategy and their own interests.

2             I do think that means that our emphasis on other  
3       multilateral relationships is also extremely important.

4       I personally think there is an even stronger argument  
5       today for developing both European defence capability  
6       and also nation building capacity, because I think in  
7       both of those areas we could do far more and therefore  
8       have more weight and more leverage if we were in  
9       alongside others.

10            I think that's also true, by the way, of the way the  
11       United Nations do this too. In the work I do now with  
12       the Palestinian authority, where actually we are doing  
13       precisely those things in a sense that were also the  
14       challenge in Iraq, building institutional capacity,  
15       building civil policing and security and so on, what I  
16       have found from that is that no one nation, actually not even  
17       America, is capable of doing that on its own. It is  
18       a cooperative effort and the capacity should be built on  
19       a cooperative basis.

20            The final thing I would say is this, and this is  
21       through my experience of being Prime Minister, not just  
22       in this situation but in other situations too. I think  
23       what does come across as very frustrating is when I read  
24       the evidence of people who have come to you and said  
25       "Well, we can see there was a real problem here



1 particularly on the resource question," and I am in  
2 Downing Street having given a strong instruction to say  
3 "If there is a resource issue, pay the money" and the  
4 Chancellor is agreeable to that.

5 We need to think about when we are in a situation  
6 like this and particularly in the first critical stages  
7 of nation building I think you need a transmission  
8 system of information to the Prime Minister that is  
9 qualitatively different from the one we had.

10 I think, you know, that bit of it I think -- you  
11 know, I changed the Downing Street structure, as you  
12 know, because originally you have one foreign policy  
13 advisor dealing with all foreign policy and Northern  
14 Ireland. I then switched it into effectively three  
15 actually, but one foreign policy dealing with Europe,  
16 and one foreign policy advisor dealing with the rest of  
17 the issues, but I think in retrospect for that first  
18 period you actually need the right situation in the  
19 Cabinet Office/Number 10, a top level ability headed by  
20 a senior person that is going to go direct to the Prime  
21 Minister. That's not to say that your Foreign Secretary  
22 and your Defence Secretaries, your Development  
23 Secretaries are not going to be involved in this, but  
24 what does come out to me from some of the pages of the evidence  
that  
25 have been given to me is a frustration about this.

