

DECLASSIFIED



Cabinet Office

Sir Jeremy Heywood KCB, CVO
Secretary of the Cabinet

70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Email

Telephone
Web www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Margaret Aldred
Secretary to the Iraq Inquiry
35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ

21 January 2014

Dear Margaret,

CHILCOT INQUIRY – CABINET PAPERS

I am writing with my response to the Inquiry's request seeking to declassify and publish all or part of the minutes of meetings of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees relating to the military campaign in Iraq from 2002 to 2009 respectively.

This has not been an easy decision to make given the considerable importance that successive governments have attached to protecting the confidentiality of Cabinet discussions, in order to support collective Cabinet responsibility and effective government. As Cabinet Secretary, I am bound to take these arguments very seriously indeed. However, I have also found the arguments put forward by Sir John Chilcot very persuasive. In particular, where the precise wording of minutes is so critical to the findings of the Inquiry, I do on balance believe it is justifiable to make an unprecedented exception to the usual position about disclosure of Cabinet minutes. I am therefore persuaded to agree to publication of the material requested by the Inquiry.

I am particularly conscious that some may argue this could make it more difficult to defend our handling of future Freedom of Information (FOI) cases for similar requests. However, I believe the circumstances in this case are genuinely different and exceptional.

The Inquiry itself is exceptional in nature. It was established with cross-party agreement, following a debate in Parliament, with a wide-ranging remit to look at one of the most politically salient events of the post-war period. It is difficult to recall an inquiry that has attracted so much media and wider public interest over such a sustained period. The Inquiry took evidence from a large number of witnesses, and will culminate in the publication of a very full, and fully contextualised, report covering events over a ten year period (now some time in the past).

The particular request that Sir John has made is particular and specific. That request followed prolonged and careful consideration by the Inquiry about what information it considers really does need to be published in order for its report to be fair and useful; and



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

extensive discussions between the Inquiry and government about the concerns attaching to publication which has led to the Inquiry focusing in on the information it considers absolutely necessary for publication;


In summary, this is a truly unique combination of factors. On the basis of that combination, which as I emphasise does not in my view create any precedent for the future whether in relation to FOI policy or future FOI requests, I am persuaded to agree to the request.

In turning to the detail, you will see that we have tried to keep the number of proposed redactions and other changes to an absolute minimum. However, there are currently a small number of redactions that Cabinet Office officials will discuss with you.

We have also suggested a small number of amendments where we think that the proposed extract has not properly reflected what the minute of that meeting actually said. These discussions will continue in the normal way. However, I wanted to write to give you my decision on this part of the request.

I will write again shortly with my response on the request to declassify a number of UK/US exchanges.

To,



Jeremy Heywood



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

DECLASSIFIED