

Thursday, 26 November 2009

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

(9.00 am)

(Proceedings delayed)

(9.48 am)

THE CHAIRMAN: Welcome everyone. Just a few opening remarks. The purpose of this session is to examine developments in United States policy towards Iraq between 2001 and 2003 and the UK's response, and we are continuing this theme in hearings next week.

I think I should emphasise that the focus of the Inquiry is, of course, on the United Kingdom Government decisions, actions and policies, but, to understand that, it is important also to understand the development of United States policy and the interaction between them.

So this session will cover foreign policy priorities and decision-making processes in the US administration in the period, the evolution of policy on Iraq and the Middle East in Washington from 2001 until early 2003, including the decision to take military action in March 2003 and the UK's relationship with the United States over the period.

I would like to make two general points again, as before each session, to recall that the Inquiry has access to many thousands of government papers, including

1 the most highly classified for the period we are
2 considering, and we are developing the picture of the
3 policy debates and the decision-making process.

4 These evidence sessions are important in informing
5 the Inquiry's thinking and complementing the documentary
6 evidence. It is important that witnesses are able to be
7 open and frank in their evidence while respecting
8 national security, and I remind every witness that they
9 will be later asked to sign a transcript of their
10 evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given
11 is truthful, fair and accurate.

12 We have with us today Sir Christopher Meyer, who was
13 our ambassador in Washington throughout the period under
14 discussion this morning.

15 Welcome, Sir Christopher.

16 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER

17 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Good morning, I apologise for my
18 delay in coming, for reasons almost beyond my control.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Without more ado, can I turn to
20 Sir Martin Gilbert to open the questions?

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My first question to Sir Christopher
22 relates to the months leading up to the election of
23 President Bush, and I wondered if you could tell us
24 briefly what you learnt yourself during those months of
25 the views of the senior members of the incoming

1 administration, in particular Donald Rumsfeld,
2 Dick Cheney, Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice with
3 regard to Iraq.

4 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It wasn't until fairly late in the
5 day, in that year, that we knew who were going to occupy
6 the chief positions in the Bush administration.

7 So until that became clear, to find out what was
8 going on, what was being planned, it became necessary to
9 speak to members of a group who were known informally as
10 the Vulcans, the Vulcans were a group of American
11 advisers who advised George W Bush when he was the
12 presidential candidate, and when I went down to Texas in
13 early 1999, which was shortly before he declared himself
14 as a candidate, he said to me with very great frankness,
15 "I don't know much about foreign policy. I'm going to
16 have to learn pretty damn fast, and one of the things
17 I'm going to have to do is surround myself with good
18 people".

19 The "good people" turned out to be this group called
20 the Vulcans, led by Condoleeza Rice and Paul Wolfowitz;
21 Paul Wolfowitz, of course, who became Deputy Secretary
22 for Defence. So my team and I focused on this group
23 and, as the year 2000 went by, certain policies began to
24 take shape. I think the most definitive account I had
25 of where the Bush administration was likely to go -- and

1 always bear in mind this was before 9/11,
2 self-evidently -- was a conversation with
3 Condoleeza Rice at the British Embassy on, if I remember
4 rightly, 6 December 2000, followed by a conversation
5 with Karl Rove, who was President Bush's chief political
6 strategist at that time, and over, I suppose,
7 a 90-minute discussion at breakfast on 6 December, Rice
8 spelt out the outlines of the Bush foreign policy.

9 I already had instructions from London to put in
10 a few fixes on how we wanted certain things to develop
11 and I have to say to you that Iraq and the Middle East
12 did not feature very prominently in this account of
13 where Bush's priorities would lie.

14 There was an enormous focus on Russia; not Russia as
15 Russia, but on nuclear missile defence and what was
16 going to happen to the anti-ballistic missile treaty,
17 which she, and later the President, would make, I think,
18 the top foreign policy goal of the period before 9/11.

19 On Iraq -- I just want to say a little bit more
20 about context in a moment, but on Iraq it was, "We need
21 to look at this, things aren't going well. The policy
22 of sanctions is in tatters, the smuggling, Saddam is
23 getting away with blue murder. We need to do something
24 about that".

25 So I suppose the batting order there was nuclear

1 missile defence, Russia in that context, not a lot about
2 the Middle East.

3 I remember her saying to me, "We don't want
4 President Bush to become the Middle East desk officer
5 like Bill Clinton", because Clinton was in the final
6 throes of trying to fix the Arab/Israel problem, which
7 eventually failed, and nor are we terribly keen of doing
8 that in Northern Ireland either.

9 So we got a heavily missile-centric account of
10 foreign policy. I think it was two days later I saw
11 Karl Rove, and he more or less gave me the same account,
12 but emphasising that, as with most Presidents of the
13 United States, in the first few months, you focus on
14 domestic priorities, not on your foreign priorities, and
15 that was the very, very clear message from Rove; it was
16 going to be tax cuts, it was going to be education, it
17 was going to be healthcare for senior citizens.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: It is interesting that in your book
19 "DC Confidential", you write of those first few months,
20 about Colin Powell, that he was always sceptical about
21 belligerent notions for dealing with Saddam Hussein.

22 What were those belligerent notions of those you
23 spoke to at that time?

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: The belligerence of that moment
25 focused on arming and financing Iraqi dissident groups.

1 If you went up on the Hill, as the embassy team and
2 I did quite frequently, what you would hear from the
3 republican senators and their staff was, "There are some
4 really good dissident groups out there. We need to
5 finance them and arm them and shake Saddam's
6 foundations".

7 Now, the group of choice was something called the
8 INC, the Iraqi National Congress, if I remember rightly,
9 most of whose members were located in London and were
10 led by Ahmed Chalabi, who has frequently featured in
11 what has happened in Iraq since then.

12 There was a view on the Republican right that
13 Chalabi and his people were a really valid opposition to
14 Saddam Hussein, and they only needed to be equipped and
15 armed and they would, despite the failure of a rebellion
16 against Saddam several years previously, should be able
17 to do the trick.

18 If you went to the State Department, and
19 particularly to Colin Powell and his deputy
20 Richard Armitage, they would say, "The INC is no good,
21 it is a busted flush. We shouldn't rely on them", but
22 that was the belligerent trend running through the
23 administration before 9/11. "Let's focus on the
24 opposition".

25 Meantime -- and this was the greater strand of the

1 two, if you like -- the focus, particularly from
2 Colin Powell, was on what we termed in London narrowing
3 and deepening sanctions, for a variety of reasons.

4 The sanctions regime itself was pretty tattered.
5 The process of approvals in New York had become totally
6 constipated. There was a heavy propaganda campaign
7 against them. Bush, I have to say, by -- Saddam Hussein
8 himself was saying, "It is the children and women and
9 the defences of Iraq that are suffering from sanctions",
10 and a lot of people bought into this.

11 So we felt uncomfortable, both for technical
12 reasons, the sanctions weren't doing their job, and also
13 because it was being used as a stick with which to beat
14 us around the head. So the duo of Colin Powell and the
15 late Robin Cook focused for, whatever it was, eight,
16 nine months on trying to do narrowing and deepening, and
17 I have to say it failed.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Robin Cook's visit to Washington, for
19 which, of course, you were there, what was his input at
20 that time as regards to the sanctions debate?

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I don't know why I say, this, but,
22 somewhat to my surprise, he had struck up an extremely
23 good relationship with Colin Powell very quickly.
24 Powell had come to London in either 1999 or 2000 to give
25 a kind of motivational speech to the Ministry of Defence

1 on how you handled diversity in the armed forces and the
2 Ministry of Defence itself.

3 This had gone down a storm, and in the margins of
4 that event, he and Robin Cook met in a London hotel and
5 had a very good conversation. I remember Powell coming
6 back and saying, "That Robin Cook, I can do business
7 with him. This is a good guy".

8 Strategically, they saw eye to eye very rapidly. It
9 is a bit like, you know, people say, "Well, Tony Blair
10 was so close to Bill Clinton, how on earth could he get
11 close to George Bush?" Well, Robin Cook had been very
12 close to Madeleine Albright, and he didn't find it
13 difficult to strike up a good working relationship with
14 Colin Powell.

15 So Cook's input I think was appreciated and taken
16 into account by Colin Powell and it was a relationship,
17 of real mutual advantage.

18 Can I just wind back a bit, because I want to say
19 something about the Iraq Liberation Act? Can I do that,
20 because it sets a kind of context?

21 Maybe I'm anticipating a question, in which case
22 I apologise, but to understand the context, it has to be
23 emphasised that the regime change in Iraq was an
24 official United States policy and it went back to the
25 Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, when the Act, the bill, was

1 passed unanimously by the Senate, it was passed by an
2 overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives
3 and it was signed into law by Bill Clinton in October of
4 1998.

5 So regime change, and to quote the Act - "to
6 establish a programme to support a transition to
7 democracy in Iraq", was an official American policy which
8 George Bush inherited from Bill Clinton. The fact that
9 Bill Clinton didn't do much about it was neither here
10 nor there, because he was a bit knocked about after the
11 Lewinsky and impeachment business, but that was the
12 policy that George Bush inherited.

13 Sometimes people say to me, "It was the nutters in
14 the administration, the right wingers, the neo-cons, who
15 invented regime change". Absolutely wrong. This was
16 inherited from a Democrat administration, as were
17 a number of other policies as well.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: At this time, you are stressing that
19 regime change was using the Iraqi opposition, it wasn't
20 direct intervention.

21 Were there groups within the administration, people
22 to whom you were talking, with whom actual military
23 force against Saddam was being discussed at that time as
24 an option?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think so. Whether it was being

1 actually discussed as such in the administration in
2 those months before 9/11, it is very hard to judge, but
3 Paul Wolfowitz, who became Deputy Defence Secretary, and
4 who was the leading neo-con in the US administration,
5 a man of very, very brilliant intelligence, harnessed to
6 a particular view of the world and the way in which
7 Americans should deploy their power -- and I remember
8 him saying to me, years previously, probably in 1997 or
9 1998 when I first arrived in Washington, at which time
10 he was Dean of the Paul H Nitze School of International
11 Relations, "We should invade southern Iraq, seize the
12 oil fields, base ourselves in Basra and from there
13 launch raids in Baghdad, and little by little we will
14 bring the regime down".

15 That was the outer fringe, the extreme fringe, of
16 the belligerence movement, but that, as a policy
17 between, say, January, Inauguration Day, and 9/11,
18 I don't think ever got into the mainstream of the US
19 administration debate, which continued to be focused on,
20 as I say, narrowing and deepening sanctions and, "What
21 can we do with Ahmed Chalabi and his people?"

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So when you were preparing the visit of
23 our Prime Minister to Camp David to see President Bush
24 in February, what briefings were you giving with regard
25 to the dynamic within the administration from the

1 sanctions supporters to the wild men, if you like, of
2 the Wolfowitz type.

3 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: For Camp David -- was it
4 22 February/24 February -- of course, Iraq was not
5 gigantically high on their agenda either.

6 I just have to say one thing, despite the best
7 endeavours of the [FCO] Iraq Inquiry Unit, who have done
8 a fantastic job in assembling the archives, I have not
9 been able to find the four, or was it five, telegrams
10 I sent before the Prime Minister's inaugural visit with
11 the President to refresh my memory of the wisdom or
12 otherwise of the advice that I sent him, but, before the
13 meeting, as sort of diplomats do, Rice and I decided to
14 try and clear away as much of the foreign policy
15 undergrowth as possible in advance so that the President
16 and the Prime Minister could concentrate on creating
17 a strong personal relationship.

18 Condoleeza Rice said to me, "The main purpose of the
19 this meeting is bonding. We want the President and the
20 Prime Minister to bond well", because she was saying at
21 the time that the United Kingdom was the United States'
22 most important friend and ally. So it was important
23 that they should get on.

24 So the two foreign policy issues, at that moment,
25 that were at the top of the agenda, were the

1 anti-ballistic missile treaty and nuclear missile
2 defence. That was the American concern, and we, for our
3 part, were in the throes of developing the St Malo
4 initiative between France and the United Kingdom on
5 building up European defence.

6 So we, on the British side, had a enormous concern
7 that, if the American -- and this was also inherited
8 from Bill Clinton, I have to say, the notion of
9 developing nuclear missile defences. It didn't spring
10 from the loins of George W Bush. We were very, very
11 worried that if the Americans went gung-ho for getting
12 rid of the anti-ballistic missile treaty and started
13 dismantling some of the key elements of old detente that
14 this could unravel -- seriously could prejudice the
15 relationship with Russia and all kinds of other
16 repercussions.

17 The Americans had a counterpart anxiety, which was
18 that, in developing the European defence initiative with
19 the French, we had been seduced in some way by the
20 incredibly cunning French of being led into a trap that
21 would undermine NATO. So what we came up with was
22 a draft joint declaration which would put these
23 anxieties to bed, and that agreement was actually
24 finalised at Camp David by John Sawers, the
25 Prime Minister's foreign policy adviser, and by Rice

1 herself. So that was at the top of the tree.

2 So one of the things I said, if I remember rightly
3 from one of my briefing telegrams, was "This is
4 something we need to defuse. If we are lucky, we will
5 be able to defuse it well in advance of the meeting",
6 which in actual fact is what happened, "Otherwise, the
7 kinds of things we need to talk about are the
8 Middle East", the Middle East much more than Iraq at the
9 time actually.

10 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The tightening of sanctions was on the
11 agenda, but, I take it, not something which was --

12 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, it wasn't. It wasn't a huge
13 item. There was a long discussion of Russia and the
14 President -- at the time, I think Tony Blair was the
15 European leader who had -- I mean, Sir Roderic will
16 confirm whether what I'm saying was right or wrong -- he
17 was the European leader who had the most face time with
18 Putin. He was kind of the Putin expert at the time.

19 Bush was very keen to sort of download Blair's
20 assessment of Putin and where the Putin leadership was
21 going. We spent a long time on that. Iraq came up at
22 the beginning really almost to be dismissed. Part of
23 the problem was that Colin Powell was at Camp David, he
24 had to go, I think he had to go to the region, and so,
25 as soon as the Prime Minister and the President sat down

1 for lunch and had five minutes of politesse between
2 them, the President immediately asked Colin Powell to
3 give his assessment of where things were in the region
4 and what we needed to do about Iraq, and then it left
5 the agenda, as far as I know, never to come back at that
6 particular summit.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You have mentioned bonding, and bonding
8 is obviously an important question.

9 How would you yourself characterise the impression
10 made, first of all at that Camp David summit, by each of
11 the leaders on each other and then looking forward with
12 your experiences going through, say, to the Chequers
13 meeting, how did they relate to each other, and again in
14 particular with regard to Iraq and the Middle East
15 problem?

16 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Of course, the massive anxiety that
17 I had was after the extraordinarily close relationship
18 between George W -- sorry, between Tony Blair and
19 Bill Clinton, that changing gear to a Republican
20 administration and to George W in particular would be
21 very difficult and that the Anglo-American relationship
22 might suffer as a result. So the bonding business was
23 terribly important.

24 The Americans themselves, as I said, recognised
25 this, and I was -- I was really quite anxious about

1 this. I had asked, after the American election finally
2 became clear, after the Supreme Court delivered its
3 verdict, Rove and Rice separately, "The fact that
4 Tony Blair has had this enormously close relationship
5 with a democratic President, is this going to be
6 a problem for us?"

7 Each gave a similar answer, which was basically: it
8 is a good thing for the world that Britain and America
9 are close, and if Clinton and Blair were close, good,
10 that's not a problem for us. As for the future, it was
11 sort of, "By your work shall ye be known", sort of
12 thing. "Let's hope for the best. Time will tell. We
13 are starting with a blank sheet of paper".

14 I did recount this in my book because I thought it
15 such an emblematic moment that, there were the two of
16 them sitting face-to-face across a lunch table up at
17 Camp David, very informal, and with a minimum of
18 ceremony, absolute minimum, I think the President said
19 "Hello, Tony. May I call you Tony? Welcome to
20 Camp David", and Blair, without missing a beat,
21 said, "Hello, George. May I call you George? Great to
22 be here. What are we going to talk about?" Bush said,
23 "Colin has got to go, so let's talk about the
24 Middle East". Just like that. Tshoom!

25 You sort of sensed, and the sense developed as the,

1 whatever it was, 36 hours went on, that, whatever
2 happened in policy terms, whatever substantive issues
3 arose to challenge, these two men were going it get on,
4 and that was exactly what happened. They had a very
5 good weekend together. So did the wives. The press
6 conference probably, when they had the "Colgate" moment
7 which you may remember, the press conference didn't
8 really do justice, I don't think, to the nature of the
9 relationship that already looked promising.

10 So if we look at what happened from that moment up
11 to, say, the Chequers visit in June of that year, and
12 they met at various international meetings from time to
13 time. There was a -- my memory is slightly confused
14 here, but I remember Condoleeza Rice saying to me, "The
15 President has just got back and he said the only human
16 being he felt he could talk to was Tony, the rest of
17 them were like creatures from outer space", or some such
18 phrase. It was a slowly warming relationship all
19 through the year, up to and including the Chequers
20 meeting. Then we had the summer holidays and then life
21 itself changed, for obvious reasons.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have just two more questions before
23 9/11. The first is, during that period -- again
24 focusing on Iraq -- were the members of the
25 administration you were talking to at that time

1 beginning to contemplate removing Saddam by force,
2 perhaps even within a fixed period?

3 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I didn't see that emerging from the
4 interagency process at all. Every now and again, one
5 would say to Condoleeza Rice or to Colin Powell, "How is
6 the Iraq review going?", and they would just say, "Well,
7 we are still talking about it".

8 It wasn't going anywhere, to be honest with you,
9 and, in fact, it looked at the time, technically after
10 the summer break in early September -- it kind of looked
11 like the Bush administration as a whole wasn't going
12 anywhere. It lost a sense of direction very rapidly and
13 I remember sending a telegram on 10 September, literally
14 went out on the eve of 9/11. I think we were about to
15 have a visit by John Prescott and this was a form of
16 briefing for him -- saying, "This is an administration
17 which appears to be running out of steam", was losing
18 a sense of direction --

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Can I interrupt just to ask, did you mean
20 generally across the whole range of policy?

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I do. I'm sort of compressing
22 things here. What had happened domestically was, with
23 immense political effort, Bush -- I mean Bush put all
24 his political capital, most of his political capital in
25 those first few months in getting a big tax-cut through

1 congress, getting benefits and prescription medicine
2 for senior citizens.

3 He got them but they were pyrrhic victories, they
4 exhausted him and he lost his majority in the Senate as
5 a result. Come September 2001, before 9/11, everybody
6 was saying that effort has killed him. Rumsfeld, there
7 was a huge bear market in Rumsfelds, because he didn't
8 seem to be reorganising the Department of Defense as he
9 promised to do. He got lost in detail, so the story
10 went. There was a big bear market in Colin Powells
11 because his narrowing and deepening and what he was
12 doing in the Middle East was going nowhere, and there
13 was a cataclysmic market in Paul O'Neills, who was the
14 Treasury Secretary who was soon to be dismissed.

15 So on the very eve of the great atrocity, it looked
16 like an administration that had got into trouble very
17 quickly.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: Just to round off, Iraq really not figuring
19 very much, if at all?

20 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Iraq was not -- it was like
21 a grumbling appendix, I think is the way I would
22 describe it.

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Could I press you a little bit on that?
24 Because I would very much like to know your view and
25 your perception of what was happening with regard to

1 American policy in Iraq and the No Fly Zones. The
2 escalation in February and then the subsequent
3 developments, how did they fit into the administration
4 of the Iraq policy as to what you saw it as being?

5 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, I'm sorry, I clearly forgot --
6 the No Fly Zones had been a problem under the Clinton
7 administration. People were starting to get anxious
8 about two things. One was that a plane would actually get
9 shot down. What did you do? What kind of reaction did
10 you come up with? Also, there were worries about
11 legality.

12 Typically, greater worries on our side than appeared
13 to be on the American side, and if I remember rightly,
14 this anxiety about how long we could sustain
15 No Fly Zones and stay within the law was a rising
16 concern throughout 2000.

17 But if your question is, "But were the Americans
18 thinking to themselves, if a plane is shot down, we will
19 invade and overthrow Saddam Hussein", it was not in that
20 category. That was not the context in which we were
21 talking about it.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: There would be a retaliation.

23 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: The Americans would say, "Of course.
24 If they shoot down one of our planes, we will kick the
25 s*** out of them for doing it".

1 We had worries, not only about the No Fly Zones
2 themselves and the legitimacy of aircraft overflying,
3 but we were very much concerned by the proportionality,
4 in the legal sense of the word, of any retaliation.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So we were trying to exercise
6 a restraining influence --

7 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I suppose so, but we were never put
8 to the test, thank God, it never happened.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That brings us to 9/11 which was
10 a different sort of test, and I suppose the real
11 question is: at what point after 9/11 did the policies
12 specifically towards Iraq change and sharpen?

13 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, again, I couldn't find any
14 record of this in the archives. On 9/11 itself, in the
15 course of the day, I had a telephone conversation with
16 Rice, and said, "Condolences. Anything we can do to help?
17 Who do you think did it?" She said, "There is no doubt
18 this has been an Al-Qaeda operation", but at the end of
19 the conversation, "We are just looking to see whether
20 there could possibly be any connection with
21 Saddam Hussein".

22 That was the very first time on the day itself that
23 I heard the name of the Iraqi leader mentioned in the
24 context of 9/11.

25 Well, as has been recorded by multiple sources, most

1 of them American, that little reference to
2 Saddam Hussein in that telephone conversation by the
3 following weekend turned into a big debate at Camp David
4 between President Bush and his principal advisers.

5 There was a big ding-dong about Iraq and I debriefed
6 various contacts about this afterwards and the story
7 varied, depending a little bit on who you talked to, but
8 it seemed that Paul Wolfowitz, who was there, although
9 he was not a Cabinet member, he was a Deputy Secretary,
10 he was there with Rumsfeld, argued very strongly for
11 retaliation that would include Iraq.

12 It is not clear from the record to what extent he
13 was supported by Rumsfeld. Some people said Rumsfeld
14 was very strongly behind it, others said Rumsfeld was
15 not, but the decision taken that weekend was that the
16 prime concern was with Al-Qaeda, it was Al-Qaeda in
17 Afghanistan, and Iraq, whatever the policy would be, had
18 to be set aside for the time being.

19 That is, I believe, exactly what Tony Blair was told
20 when he arrived a few days later, on 20 September, for
21 a meeting with the President. Because Blair was
22 extremely concerned, and rightly so, that the reaction
23 to Al-Qaeda -- retaliation against Al-Qaeda would become
24 diluted, dissipated, by looking at Iraq at the same
25 time, which didn't merit it.

1 He had sent Bush a message setting out his views on
2 what needed to be done and he argued very strongly for a
3 laser-like focus on Al-Qaeda and Afghanistan. By the
4 time he got to Washington, on 20 September, he found
5 that the door was already open. He didn't have to argue
6 the case. The President had taken that decision.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: To return to the topic we were looking
8 at earlier about the relationship between the
9 Prime Minister and the President, and also, perhaps,
10 between the Prime Minister and the Americans generally,
11 at his speech to the Labour Party conference in October,
12 he spoke very strongly -- the phrase you often quote,
13 and rightly so:

14 "We were with you at first, we will stay with you to
15 the last."

16 What I would like to know is, how did this speech,
17 in what it said and what it implied, affect your own
18 work in terms of working with the administration, first
19 of all across the general field of foreign policy, and
20 then, again, when Iraq came back on the agenda, with
21 regard to Iraq?

22 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: In those few weeks after 9/11,
23 Tony Blair's reputation in the United States of America
24 was sealed. It continues to this day. The man above
25 all other Europeans who came first out of the slips and

1 who expressed his sympathy for, support for the
2 United States of America in its hour of need with
3 unparalleled eloquence.

4 That speech and that particular phrase which you
5 have just quoted, Sir Martin, resonated enormously
6 around the United States. It is a question of
7 whether -- which resonated more? Was it that, or was it
8 the band of the Coldstream Guards playing the Stars and
9 Stripes at the changing of the guard very soon after
10 9/11, which Condoleeza Rice told me made her break down
11 and cry when she saw it on television.

12 So to be ambassador to the United States of America
13 in the slipstream of this stuff was -- I make no bones
14 about it, a heady and exhilarating experience, because
15 wherever you went -- you didn't have to do anything,
16 just walk through a door -- people would rise to their
17 feet and give you a sort of storming round of applause.

18 So you had to -- you know, you had to be careful not
19 to be swept away by this stuff.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How did this affect, and what was your
21 perspective, on the relationship of the other figures in
22 Britain, the Ministry of Defence, the Prime Minister's
23 office and their American opposite numbers in the
24 aftermath of 9/11? Did they have the knowledge needed
25 of American policy to influence it, again when

1 eventually Iraq emerged?

2 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, they -- I mean, we were
3 sending an enormous amount of advice back to London on
4 how the situation was moving and what we thought were
5 the important issues and the different positions of the
6 different bits of the administration, because, even
7 during the period leading up to 9/11, it became plain --
8 I'm not sure if this is to your point, but I will say it
9 anyway -- it had already become plain that there was
10 a potential problem between Colin Powell, on the one
11 side, and the Vice-President Dick Cheney and the
12 Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on the other.

13 This became, on Iraq policy, and indeed on
14 Arab/Israel policy, the fault line that ran through the
15 administration, a fault line which was never covered and
16 which opened ever wider as the months went by.

17 I think one of our principal purposes, for all
18 Ministers who came through town, even if they didn't
19 deal directly with foreign policy, but certainly for
20 Robin Cook, and, afterwards, Jack Straw, was to say,
21 "Your interlocutor", that's the way I am talking about
22 the Secretary of State now, "in the State Department" --
23 remember there are a lot of people around in this
24 administration who don't agree with him and are his
25 political enemies, and that begs the question of: where

1 was Condoleeza Rice in all of this?

2 I think if you plot a graph through the months and
3 years up to the Iraq war, you have to say that she more
4 and more was in the camp of Colin Powell's enemies,
5 although she didn't actually see her role as, so she
6 said, banging heads together. She chaired the meetings
7 of the so-called Principals Committee.

8 One of the complaints from a lot of people was these
9 meetings ended without any proper conclusion, because it
10 was impossible to reconcile the views of the big beasts
11 who identified -- I'm not quite sure if I have answered
12 your question.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You are answering it. You have used
14 your phrase "big beasts", so what I want to know now is,
15 what was your briefing to the people who were coming
16 over with regard to this fault line in American policy
17 and how did you feel they could influence it?

18 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: If you were talking about Powell,
19 Rice, Cheney and Rumsfeld, there were very few Ministers
20 who came over who actually merited that access. So we
21 can talk about the Prime Minister, by definition that
22 included the President as well. You included the
23 Foreign Secretary, who nearly always got in to see
24 Cheney but didn't necessarily go and see Rumsfeld. So
25 what I used to say to Ministers was, "On whatever aspect

1 of Iraq policy, the State Department are on board, but
2 you are going to have to argue very fiercely with the
3 Vice-President's office and", if they went to see him,
4 "with Rumsfeld's office, and also with Condoleeza Rice
5 how important these matters are".

6 The one thing that ran all through 2002, in
7 particular, was, if it came to war in Iraq, we would all
8 be in much better shape for the war itself and for the
9 aftermath if this was done within the framework of an
10 international coalition blessed by the United Nations.

11 You didn't have to argue that with the
12 State Department. You sure as hell had to argue it with
13 the Vice-President and with Rumsfeld, and, up to
14 a point, with Condoleeza Rice.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That brings me to my last question
16 before I hand over to Sir Roderic Lyne, and it brings me
17 to Crawford in April 2002.

18 What I would like to ask you is this: to what extent
19 did American and British policy towards Iraq merge
20 in April 2002 along the lines that you suggested during
21 that weekend at the Crawford ranch, in particular Bush's
22 commitment at that time, as he put it, to put Saddam on
23 the spot by following the UN inspectors' route and also
24 by constructing an international coalition, which was
25 the Prime Minister's strong input? How do you feel

1 about that convergence of policy at that time?

2 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It took a while for policy to
3 converge -- sorry, if we are talking about Americans,
4 the President accepting, for realpolitik reasons, it
5 would be better to go through the United Nations than
6 not, which was a repudiation of where his Vice-President
7 stood.

8 It took a while to get there, probably until August
9 of that year. I said in my briefing telegram to
10 Tony Blair, before Crawford, a copy of which, again,
11 I couldn't get hold of in the archive -- and by that
12 time there had been a couple of months, maybe more,
13 maybe three months, in which contingency discussion of,
14 "If it came to a war in Iraq, how would you do it?" It
15 was all very -- it was all very embryonic.

16 Of course, while regime change was the formal policy
17 of the United States of America, it didn't necessarily
18 mean an armed invasion, at that time, of Iraq and it may
19 sound like a difference without a distinction or
20 a distinction without a difference, but it wasn't, not
21 at that time, and so I said -- I think as I remember
22 I said to Tony Blair, "There are three things you really
23 need to focus on when you get to Crawford. One is how
24 to garner international support for a policy of regime
25 change, if that is what it turns out to be. If it

1 involves removing Saddam Hussein, how do you do it and
2 when do you do it?" And the last thing I said, which
3 became a kind of theme of virtually all the reporting
4 I sent back to London in that year was, "Above all" --
5 I think I used the phrase "above all -- "get them to
6 focus on the aftermath, because, if it comes to war and
7 Saddam Hussein is removed, and then ...?"

8 The other thing at that time, Sir Martin, which
9 people tend to forget is actually what was blazing hot
10 at the time and a far more immediate problem -- and it
11 wasn't Iraq, it was the Middle East, because the
12 Intifada had blown up, hideous things were going on in
13 the West Bank, the Israeli army were in the West Bank
14 and we had prevailed on the Americans, as one example of
15 British influence working that year, to put out a really
16 tough statement before Tony Blair arrived in Crawford
17 telling the Israelis in summary that they needed to
18 withdraw from the West Bank towns and withdraw soon.

19 Now, let me be quite frank about this. Crawford was
20 a meeting at the President's ranch. I took no part in
21 any of the discussions, and there was a large chunk of
22 that time when no adviser was there, I think -- I don't
23 know whether David Manning has been before you yet, but
24 when he comes before you, he will tell you, I think,
25 that he went there with Jonathan Powell for a discussion

1 of Arab/Israel and the Intifada. I think it was at that
2 meeting that there was a kind of joint decision between
3 Bush and Blair that Colin Powell should go to the region
4 and get it sorted.

5 I believe that, after that, the two men were alone
6 in the ranch until dinner on Saturday night where all
7 the advisers, including myself, turned up.

8 So I'm not entirely clear to this day -- I know what
9 the Cabinet Office says were the results of the meeting,
10 but, to this day, I'm not entirely clear what degree of
11 convergence was, if you like, signed in blood, at the
12 Crawford ranch. There are clues in the speech which
13 Tony Blair gave the next day at College Station, which
14 is one of his best foreign policy speeches, a very fine
15 piece of work.

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How do you assess the balance in that
17 speech between, as it were, potential pre-emption and
18 the UN rule in Iraq?

19 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: There were lots of interesting
20 things in those speeches. It sort of repays a kind of
21 Kremlinological analysis. To the best of my knowledge,
22 but I may be wrong, this was the first time that
23 Tony Blair had said in public "regime change".

24 I mean, he didn't only deal with Iraq, he mentioned
25 other issues as well. But he -- I think what he was

1 trying to do was draw the lessons of 9/11 and apply them
2 to the situation in Iraq, which led, I think, not
3 inadvertently, but deliberately, to a conflation of the
4 threat by Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein.

5 It also drew in spirit on the 1999 Chicago speech on
6 humanitarian intervention. When I heard that speech,
7 I thought that this represents a tightening of the UK/US
8 alliance and the degree of convergence on the danger
9 that Saddam Hussein presented:

10 Compare and contrast with all the hoo-hah about
11 45 minutes, which I gather was the subject of discussion
12 yesterday, which came up in the autumn, what you had in
13 that speech at College Station was a rather
14 sophisticated argument which said -- which was
15 pre-emption, but which said, "Saddam is too dangerous.
16 His record is too bad. The potential threat he presents
17 cannot be ignored".

18 I think, "Doing nothing is not an option", was
19 a phrase in the speech. "So, therefore, we have to do
20 something about it". It was a good speech, but it sort
21 of -- it lost influence as the months went by.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

23 Sir Roderic?

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir Christopher, I would like to come
25 back to Crawford, but before I do so, I would like to go

1 back over one or two of the points you have made up to
2 now.

3 Talking about the summer of 2001, you said that the
4 Iraq review wasn't really going anywhere. Indeed, at
5 a time when you said the administration wasn't going
6 anywhere. That was the period in which Britain and the
7 United States tried, and at the time did not succeed, to
8 get a smart sanctions resolution through the UN Security
9 Council and the effort at that stage failed in July of
10 that year.

11 Is the implication of your remarks that this really
12 wasn't a serious exercise from the point of view of the
13 US administration?

14 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think it was a serious exercise.
15 I think it was a very serious exercise. I know that
16 Colin Powell took this extremely seriously and he
17 devoted a vast amount of energy to it.

18 One of the reasons why people were speculating in
19 the September that his star was on the wane was because
20 he had expended so much energy and had come back with
21 virtually nothing.

22 So I would not say that American efforts in this
23 respect were desultory or half-hearted. What they, and
24 we, couldn't get round were the objections, and
25 particularly the French and the Russians, for the kind

1 of stuff we wanted to put in the new Security Council
2 Resolution, and then there was trouble -- and you have
3 to ask Jeremy Greenstock about this.

4 There were difficulties in the Committee that
5 reviewed embargoed items. There was a row about the
6 items. There was also a conceptual problem we had with
7 the United States which has its origins in the Clinton
8 administration, that you had to construct something
9 which makes the sanctions smarter, threatens
10 Saddam Hussein with dire consequences if he tries to
11 subvert the sanctions or circumvent them, but also
12 offers him the famous light at the end of the tunnel if,
13 against all prognostications, he suddenly became
14 virtuous and came into compliance with the new
15 resolution and those preceding it.

16 For the Americans, for domestic political reasons,
17 acknowledging that there had to be some kind of
18 incentive to Saddam in a resolution was very hard to
19 sell in congress in the light of the Iraq Liberation
20 Act.

21 All that said, they tried hard, I thought.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That included the White House.

23 Colin Powell put a lot of effort into it. Did he have
24 the full backing of the White House on this?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I don't think they were very

1 interested.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They weren't interested?

3 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I mean, Condoleeza Rice kept an eye
4 on it. She was a very diligent person and I think was
5 regularly briefed by Colin, but it was clearly
6 Colin Powell's game. "Here is the ball. You run with
7 it. See how far you get and then come back".

8 But it wasn't as if President Bush popped up
9 regularly and said, "We must have a new Security Council
10 Resolution". That never happened.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As you already said, the other game was
12 regime change, which was established to you as policy
13 inherited from the Clinton administration, but where, as
14 you have also said, the key fault line was whether this
15 was policy that was actually going to be implemented,
16 and how.

17 At what point -- and clearly this was after 9/11 --
18 did the most senior levels of the US administration
19 settle on a policy of the forcible removal of
20 Saddam Hussein's regime as their primary objective?

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think almost very -- once the
22 shock of 9/11 had sunk in, once the anthrax scare had
23 been and gone -- this is -- this followed the month
24 after 9/11. It was something which, when I was in
25 Washington, I didn't give anything like enough

1 importance to. I didn't realise what an impact this had
2 had on the Administration.

3 The anthrax scare was, suddenly, people were getting
4 letters tainted with anthrax. What we now know, and
5 I didn't realise at the time, was this really steamed up
6 the Administration, because they thought the last person
7 who had ever used anthrax aggressively was
8 Saddam Hussein in his own country.

9 So anthrax letters going around the place really
10 spooked people, and if you read a book by
11 Jacob Weisberg called "The Bush Tragedy", this is set
12 out in detail. It led to Dick Cheney suggesting, and
13 being slapped down by the President, that the entire
14 population of the United States should be inoculated
15 against smallpox, which would have led to 20 million
16 deaths, or something like that, through the by-products.

17 So, to answer your question, well before the end of
18 the year, those who had been arguing on the right wing
19 that there was a need to settle accounts with Saddam and
20 do it fast, suddenly got much more traction with the
21 President of the United States. The President himself,
22 as Commander-in-Chief in the war against terrorism
23 suddenly was reinvigorated and found a real purpose for
24 his Presidency, something which had not been evident
25 before 9/11.

1 I think I use a metaphor in that book where I say it
2 was almost as if the people who really wanted to deal
3 with Iraq and deal with it soon, burst out of the
4 closet, the closet door having been blown open by the
5 shock of 9/11. Everything changed after 9/11.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Certainly by the time the President gave
7 his State of the Union address in January 2002, the Axis
8 of Evil speech -- I mean, you say in your book,
9 effectively containment was dead, the President's belief
10 was that Iraq was too dangerous to be left to
11 containment and he had decided at this point that, "The
12 officially mandated policy of regime change" -- I'm
13 quoting from your book -- "should be actively pursued".

14 Now, at this stage, what was the
15 British Government's policy?

16 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: The British Government's policy was
17 one of profound legal objection to a regime change and
18 a belief that it wasn't realistic to seek to overthrow
19 Saddam Hussein.

20 Now, I say that slightly cautiously, because
21 I remember an exchange between the British delegation
22 which comprised John Sawers and Jonathan Powell with
23 Condoleezza Rice in the visit they paid to Washington,
24 which we haven't mentioned so far to see members of the
25 Administration in waiting. So we are talking

1 about January 2001, and we provided for Powell and
2 Sawers to meet a very wide range of people from the
3 Vice-President downwards.

4 One of those meetings was with Rice and there was
5 a brief exchange about Iraq, and I remember John Sawers
6 saying, the forcible overthrow of the Iraq regime was not on
7 . It is not practicable, it is not something we can
8 do. She said, "Hang on a minute, we shouldn't take this
9 option off the table", but the next remark was in the
10 context of Iraqi dissident groups. It wasn't a big land
11 invasion or anything like that.

12 I have wandered off the subject here.

13 So we had a legal problem with regime change and, at
14 the time, the British Government's efforts were still
15 focused on this narrowing and deepening of sanctions,
16 a policy that was dying before our very eyes.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was in January 2001.

18 By January 2002 --

19 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Everything was changing then.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- the British Government was still
21 against regime change, their policy was still
22 containment.

23 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, the lawyers -- well, the
24 policy --

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was it just the lawyers?

1 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: -- it wasn't to abandon containment,
2 but the knowledge that Iraq was under active discussion
3 in Washington, in a way that hadn't been the case
4 before, the signals that we were picking up from our
5 military advisers in the British Embassy, that the
6 thinking was now going ahead on Iraq, that Rumsfeld had
7 been tasked to think about this and come back, and
8 Rumsfeld and Franks -- the general in charge of the
9 Central Command -- was being told to look at all this,
10 that started wheels turning, I believe, inside the
11 Foreign Office.

12 So by the time you have the first meeting between
13 the President and the Prime Minister, which was at
14 Crawford in April 2002, they weren't there to talk about
15 containment or sharpening sanctions. There had been
16 a sea change in attitudes in the US administration to
17 which the British Government, progressively from October
18 onwards, had to adapt and make up its mind where it
19 stood on these various issues.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So at what point between October 2001 and
21 Crawford in April 2002, did your instructions change
22 from you should be advocating containment to the
23 British Government supported regime change?

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I got a chunky set of instructions
25 in March of 2002.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Instructions from?

2 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: From -- very good question. I got
3 the instructions -- David Manning --

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's Number 10 Downing Street?

5 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Number 10 Downing Street. By that
6 time, the Prime Minister's foreign policy adviser,
7 because he had taken over from John Sawers in the
8 previous year. In fact, he was in Washington the very
9 night before 9/11 to meet Condoleezza Rice and others to
10 break himself in as the Prime Minister's foreign policy
11 adviser.

12 So David Manning came over in March of 2002 with
13 a set of instructions to prepare the way for the
14 Prime Minister's visit at Crawford, which would take
15 place on -- what was it, April 6, 7 and 8 of that year?

16 One of the main things that he was seeking to do --
17 and this was new, and I, if you like, borrowed his
18 instructions to do my side of things -- was to say to
19 the Americans, "Look, if you want to do regime change,
20 and if this is going to require military action, you
21 guys are powerful enough to do it all on your own. You
22 can do it on your own, you have got the power to do it,
23 but if you are going to do this and you want your
24 friends and partners to join you, far better than that
25 you should do it inside an alliance, preferably taking

1 the UN route".

2 That, I think, was the single most important message
3 which was delivered to the US administration at that
4 time. David Manning, of course, had his relationship
5 with his opposite number, Condoleezza Rice and he spoke
6 to her on that. Then, a few days later, I was
7 responsible for dropping the second shoe and had
8 Wolfowitz to lunch, to Sunday lunch, and I went through
9 the same script with him, an account of which, highly
10 classified, sent to only about three people in London,
11 in due course appeared in the Sunday Telegraph,
12 a photograph in fact.

13 This was all about trying to sell -- Wolfowitz was
14 viscerally hostile to the United Nations policy. He said
15 this was not the way to go. So I had to come up with
16 a set of arguments, which I thought he might find just
17 about appealing enough not to become a serious obstacle
18 to a policy that would involve the UN.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Reflecting all this, you say in your book
20 that, before the Prime Minister actually went to
21 Crawford in April of 2002:

22 "Blair had already taken the decision to support
23 regime change, though he was discreet about saying so in
24 public."

25 That is to say, Sir David Manning comes to

1 Washington in March. At this point, you effectively
2 know you have a different line to take, as you recorded
3 in your telegram and recorded in your book. You then
4 have lunch with Wolfowitz and you tell him -- you
5 emphasise the Prime Minister's commitment to regime
6 change, but, as you also say, he is having to be
7 discreet about saying so in public.

8 You also in your book referred to tensions between
9 the Foreign Office and Number 10 and you say that
10 sometimes, if Americans asked you whether statements
11 made by Jack Straw or Geoff Hoon were British Government
12 policy, you had to tell them that this was not
13 necessarily so.

14 So were we in the situation in which we had a public
15 policy of advocating containment, UN inspectors and all
16 of that, but a private policy in which you were telling
17 the United States that we were in favour of regime
18 change, so long as -- and we will come back to this --
19 some important conditions were fulfilled, and you were
20 getting one set of instructions from Number 10 and
21 a slightly different line from the Foreign Office, which
22 you said was against regime change partly for legal
23 reasons and yet another line from Number 10.

24 I mean, what was British policy at this time?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think my memory is that

1 containment and sharper sanctions had run its course.
2 It simply wasn't practical to pursue this at the UN.
3 You will get confirmation of that from
4 Jeremy Greenstock.

5 It is not as if the British Government was speaking
6 with a forked tongue, that the Foreign Office was
7 sending out one set of instructions and Number 10
8 another, I think the attitude of Downing Street on this
9 was this: it was a fact that there was a thing such as
10 the Iraq Liberation Act. It was a fact that 9/11 had
11 happened and it was a complete waste of time, therefore,
12 in those circumstances, if we were going to be able to
13 work with the Americans, to come to them and say any
14 longer -- and bang away about regime change and say, "We
15 can't support it", and the way I think the attempt was
16 made to square the circle of supporting something to
17 which the Foreign Office, and maybe other lawyers
18 objected, was actually so to wrap it, so to
19 contextualise it, that regime change, if and when it
20 happened, would be with the benefit of the support of
21 the international community in the framework of UN
22 action, quite possibly through a Security Council
23 Resolution.

24 So in other words, one -- as you will see from the
25 leaked letter recording my conversation with Wolfowitz,

1 I didn't say just, "We're with you on regime change.
2 Now, let's go get the b*****d". We didn't do that.
3 What we said was, "Let's do it cleverly, let's do it
4 with some skill", and that means, apart from anything
5 else, go to the UN and get a Security Council
6 Resolution, because, if you were able to do that, then
7 the objections of the Foreign Office legal advisers
8 would fall away.

9 So how can I put it? You talked the talk of regime
10 change, but you walked the walk, you hoped, of a UN
11 Security Council Resolution permitting the use of force,
12 if that is when it was going to come to.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Those are the "yes, buts" that you have
14 described in your book, and I do want to come back to
15 that, but just before we do, are you effectively saying
16 that the British Government's policy was changed in
17 Washington rather than in London? It was a consequence
18 of Washington that our line had changed, not because we
19 had sat down and decided that this was the correct
20 strategy?

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I wouldn't say that it was as
22 extremely poodle-ish as that. I don't think that's
23 a fair comment. One of the things you have to remember
24 is that Tony Blair was a true believer about the
25 wickedness of Saddam Hussein and his realisation of that

1 pre-dates by a very long time the arrival of George Bush
2 in the White House.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was that a policy of his government or
4 just of himself?

5 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Can I read you something? May I do
6 this? This is a speech which I may have referred to in
7 the book. Just a paragraph. This is a speech
8 Tony Blair made in January 1998, which is, again,
9 context, and I quote -- 1998, which is early, he hadn't
10 even been Prime Minister for a year:

11 "We have a clear responsibility in the interests of
12 long-term peace in the world to stop Saddam Hussein from
13 defying the judgment of the world's community. He must
14 be either persuaded by diplomacy or made by force to
15 yield up his long-cherished ambition to develop nuclear,
16 chemical and biological weapons; weapons which threaten
17 not only his immediate neighbours in the Middle East,
18 but pose a direct and fundamental challenge to world
19 peace.

20 "All our experience of him teaches us that it is
21 sometimes hard to succeed with him via diplomacy, but
22 one thing is for sure: diplomacy stands no chance of
23 success at all unless he knows that if he fails to
24 listen to reason, we have the force to back it up."

25 Now, I never saw any evidence over all the years

1 that I was in Washington that that fundamental view ever
2 changed, and I think you can see things, hear things,
3 said by Tony Blair, years later, that reflect that
4 exactly.

5 So I would just -- I have read that out to try and
6 set the context of the way in which policy was moving in
7 London.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Coming back to the American view,
9 effectively you said that containment by the early part
10 of 2002 was a dead duck. Where did this leave the
11 policy? Did it mean that, as far as the Americans were
12 concerned, it was simply now only a question of when,
13 rather than whether, military action would be taken, or
14 was the United States administration still looking at
15 other options?

16 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: The way I have always tried to
17 approach this -- it may be the impossible question. The
18 way I have always tried to approach this -- and it still
19 gives me reason to think about this even today -- is at
20 what point -- are you asking me at what point was it
21 clear that war was inevitable? Is it the same question?
22 Because that's a damn hard question to answer. What was
23 inevitable, I think, was that the Americans were going
24 to bust a gut to carry out the mandated policy of regime
25 change.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm asking you if they had left
2 themselves with any alternatives.

3 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: To regime change? They couldn't.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: To taking military action to effect
5 regime change.

6 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I remember a conversation with
7 Condoleezza Rice in November 2002, a point between the
8 passage of Resolution 1441 and, on December 7th,
9 Saddam Hussein's declaration of his holding of weapons
10 of mass destruction.

11 I remember having this conversation with
12 Condoleezza Rice, because what I wanted to know was, you
13 know, a bit like the First World War on mobilisation,
14 whatever you want to do, was it possible to turn the
15 trains round or not? She said to me -- and this is --
16 offers an answer to your question. I said, "What are
17 your priorities?" She said, "The best outcome would be
18 if the pressure of coercive diplomacy" -- that's to say
19 what is going on at the UN -- "plus the troop build-up
20 and the knowledge of contingency planning led to
21 Saddam's removal; either he goes off into exile, or he
22 is overthrown by an internal coup".

23 That was always an alternative running in the minds
24 of some in the Administration.

25 The second -- the worst option, she said, was to be

1 constantly jerked around by an eternal process of
2 inspection, and so I said, "So war is somewhere in the
3 middle between those two things", and she said, "Well,
4 fair enough".

5 So there was always the option, there was always the
6 option that all this stuff that was going on, the rumble
7 of war, would create ructions inside Iraq itself which
8 would lead to Saddam's removal. It didn't happen. It
9 might have happened if we had waited a bit longer, but
10 it didn't happen.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's just pursue this angle a little
12 further. When you had your celebrated lunch with
13 Wolfowitz, you said what was needed was a clever plan to
14 wrong-foot Saddam Hussein and you said that this should
15 include putting the UN at the heart of this strategy.
16 We need to wrong-foot him in the eyes the Security
17 Council. One way was to demand the readmission of the
18 UN weapons inspectors into Iraq. If he refused, this
19 would not only put him in the wrong, but also turn the
20 searchlight on to the multiple Security Council
21 Resolutions with which he remained in breach.

22 Now, perhaps partly thanks to your eloquence and the
23 British Government's persuasion and also, I think, to
24 the pressure from Colin Powell by the autumn of 2002,
25 President Bush has gone to the UN, he has endorsed

1 a strategy of going down what was called the UN route,
2 and this leads up to the new Security Council
3 Resolution.

4 Was that just an exercise to wrong-foot
5 Saddam Hussein, as you put it, to Wolfowitz?

6 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, it was more than that, but you
7 have to aim off here for the person I was talking to.
8 I had to put it in those -- how can I put it? -- I had
9 to put it in those possibly cynical terms to persuade
10 him that this wasn't a limp-wristed pitiful European
11 lack of will, pathetic-type thing, of which the
12 Europeans are frequently accused by the Americans, but
13 was actually a cunning plan to get the guy.

14 Had I been talking to somebody else, like you,
15 I would have said, "If we go to war, this thing is going
16 to be incredibly perilous. What we need to do is to
17 refresh the old Security Council Resolutions -- God
18 knows how many there are, 15, 16, 17 -- particularly
19 Resolutions 678 and 687. We can only do that if we can
20 create some kind of consensus within the UN and get
21 a Security Council Resolution that actually provides us
22 with what we need".

23 Then you no longer have to worry about the legality
24 or otherwise of regime change, because you have provided
25 Saddam, through this Security Council Resolution with

1 a set of things that he has to do, which, if he doesn't
2 do, you wrong-foot him and then you can take action.

3 Actually, that is precisely what 1441 did.
4 Unanimously, thanks to the astonishing skill of
5 Jeremy Greenstock in New York, and others, we got
6 a unanimous resolution that put -- even Syria voted for
7 it, for Pete's sake, which puts all the onus on Saddam
8 to prove his innocence.

9 So if I look back on all that now and I look back on
10 that conversation with Wolfowitz, what I was saying --
11 and I'm not claiming any kind of prophetic powers here
12 at all -- that was what I said we had to do and, for
13 a moment, that's what we got on November 5, 2002.

14 It all fell apart for reasons we can discuss in
15 a moment, but that is what we got, and, if we were going
16 to go to war with Iraq, that was the best trajectory to
17 follow.

18 Now, the British, as you mentioned this, I think
19 played some role in influencing George Bush down this
20 path against the wishes of his Vice-President, very
21 vociferously expressed, Tony Blair's pressure,
22 Jack Straw's pressure all played their own part and
23 I think pressure from David Manning and myself. We did
24 play a part.

25 I suspect, though, that the greater part was played

1 by a combination, in this case, of Condoleezza Rice and
2 Colin Powell, who, in a very private supper with the
3 President on 5 August, made the case for taking the
4 international UN route, and the President -- the number
5 of times I heard people say this to me -- who sometimes
6 was ruled by his heart and sometimes was ruled by his
7 head and the two things would come into conflict time
8 and time again -- in his heart he just wanted to get
9 over there and kick Saddam out.

10 In his head -- and he had a very strong sense of
11 realpolitik, he realised he couldn't just do that and he
12 submitted to the recommendations of his national
13 security adviser and Secretary of State with a chorus of
14 Europeans and an Australian, of whom Tony Blair was the
15 most significant, that he would give the UN route
16 a throw.

17 So when we all came back from our summer holidays in
18 early September, he told Tony Blair and others that that
19 was what he was going to do, but, Sir Roderic, that was
20 only the start of a battle of attrition, where one
21 defensive position after another, erected by the
22 Vice-President's office and some in DOD, had to be
23 overcome, at the bayonet almost, to get
24 Resolution 1441 -- and this was, for five minutes or so,
25 a significant achievement.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So at this point, even if it was only
2 lasting for five minutes, in November 2002, British and
3 American policy had come together with support from the
4 other members of the Security Council in favour of
5 putting the inspectors back into Iraq?

6 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Sorry, Saddam had already agreed
7 before 1441 to let the inspectors back in. He had
8 already agreed.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Under pressure --

10 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Under coercive diplomacy --

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- and the resolution launches UNMOVIC.

12 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: -- classic result.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were the British and American Governments
14 aiming for the same target through those inspections?
15 I mean, you talk about this war of attrition in
16 Washington, were the Americans aiming for regime change
17 and the British for the disarmament of Saddam Hussein?

18 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: The Americans acknowledged that, if
19 Saddam Hussein were to have a kind of Damascene
20 conversion and reveal all and agree to all kinds of
21 confidence-building measures, that in effect, even with
22 him still there, you would have had a kind of regime
23 change, and there was an acknowledgment in London, and
24 Tony Blair, I think, had said this publicly once or
25 twice, and it was grudgingly acknowledged inside the US

1 Administration, that it could be possible that in
2 reaction to this concerted pressure of the international
3 community, of which that Resolution 1441 was the high
4 point, that it wouldn't be necessary to go to war.

5 Another way of putting it was that if Saddam had
6 been cleverer, he could have done things which would
7 have made it almost impossible to go to war, but he was
8 not as clever as he was made out to be.

9 So when the inspectors went in, the fervent hope,
10 I think, on the American side, was that they would
11 actually act as a trip-wire for war. They would find
12 something or they would say there was a pattern of
13 non-cooperation; whereas others hoped that the result of
14 the efforts of the inspectors would be such that Saddam
15 was effectively disarmed and there was no further
16 mystery or obfuscation about what he had and what he
17 didn't have.

18 The real problem -- the real problem, the core of
19 the problem, which I did draw several times to the
20 attention of London, was that the contingency military
21 timetable had been decided before the UN inspectors went
22 in under Hans Blix. So you found yourself in
23 a situation in the autumn of 2002 where you couldn't
24 synchronise the military timetable with the inspection
25 timetable, because there was -- the American military

1 had been given instructions to prepare for war.

2 Initially, it was "We want you ready by January".
3 There was a lot of confusion inside the American
4 military establishment about the size of the force and
5 where they should come from. They wanted to bring an
6 army down from Germany and pass it through Turkey and
7 the Turks said no. So January was never realistic, and
8 in the end it went back to March.

9 All that said, when you looked at the timetable for
10 the inspections, it was impossible to see how Blix could
11 bring the inspection process to a conclusion for better
12 or for worse by March.

13 So the result of that -- the result of that was to
14 turn Resolution 1441 on its head, because 1441 had been
15 a challenge to Saddam Hussein, agreed unanimously to
16 prove his innocence, but, because you couldn't
17 synchronise the programmes, somehow or other, the
18 programme of preparation for inspections, you had to
19 short-circuit the inspection process by finding the
20 notorious smoking gun.

21 Suddenly, because of that, the unforgiving nature of
22 the military timetable, we found ourselves scrabbling
23 for the smoking gun, which was another way of saying: it
24 is not that Saddam now has to prove he is innocent, we
25 have now got to try and prove he is guilty.

1 We have never -- we, the Americans, the British --
2 we have never recovered from that because, of course,
3 there was no smoking gun.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the military timetable meant that we
5 simply did not allow enough time for the inspectors to
6 do the job they had been asked to do, and
7 by January 2003, when, once again, the President is
8 giving the State of the Union address, in your
9 estimation, at that point, he has closed down any option
10 of not going to war.

11 Again, if I quote from your book on that speech, and
12 he spent about half of his speech on Iraq in, I think,
13 what you also described as Messianic terms, very, very
14 strong language. You said:

15 "If the President had left himself any space to step
16 back from war, he closed it down early in 2003 with his
17 State of the Union speech on 29 January."

18 Now, that's fully six weeks before the timetable
19 finally ran out and the inspectors were pulled out, but
20 it was still at a very early stage of the inspections
21 process. They had only been at it for a couple of
22 months up to then.

23 So the window they were given to operate in was so
24 small, was it a window at all?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: That's an extremely good question.

1 I warned London, after Bush announced, shortly before
2 Tony Blair's visit to Camp David on 7 September 2002 --
3 I said in a briefing telegram -- again, which I can't
4 find in the archives, which is a pity, I promise you it
5 existed -- I said in a briefing telegram that, in
6 principle, the British and American sides are agreed
7 that we should exhaust the UN processes, which includes
8 getting inspectors in, and my warning was what the
9 Americans understand by exhausting the UN process and
10 what we understand by exhausting the UN process may
11 prove not to be the same, and there is a very great risk
12 that this will lead to a complete fracturing of the
13 Security Council, which I have to say is what happened.

14 On the American side, there was a very brief hope,
15 and, for some, disappointment, that after the passage of
16 1441, that war might be avoided because the pressure now
17 on Saddam was extreme. He was now faced by an
18 apparently united Security Council. Of course, that
19 unity was more apparent than real because it concealed
20 through ambiguity all kinds of differences of national
21 interest, which then exploded later on.

22 Then came Saddam's weapons declaration, the
23 thousands of pages delivered on, I think, December 7.
24 The Americans -- the reaction after that, across the
25 whole American administration, including the

1 State Department, was, "That's it. He's b*****ing
2 us. Unless he is removed by force, unless he's toppled,
3 this is it".

4 So when, a few weeks later, Bush gave his State of
5 the Union speech, for me, it was quite clearly a summons
6 to war. America, the chosen people, all that stuff
7 which is very common in American oratory, which is very
8 alien to Europeans. I thought, "There is no way the
9 President can wind back from this, unless, through some
10 event, Saddam Hussein is removed", which he wasn't.

11 So you are right, it is a very short period, but the
12 Americans were getting more and more impatient with this
13 process of inspection. They got very excited when Blix
14 made his first report to the Security Council
15 on January 29, or it might have been January 27, where
16 he seemed to be pretty negative about the pattern of
17 Iraqi cooperation.

18 That pattern of Iraqi cooperation was for us,
19 the Brits, a very important sign of whether he was in
20 material breach or not and whether this would be
21 a casus belli. The Americans got quite excited about
22 that and, as a result, Colin Powell was sent off to
23 New York on February 5 to deliver his famous speech,
24 with all the evidence, which later turned out to be
25 inadequate and incorrect, of Iraqi malfeasance. This

1 was precisely to convince people that there was no point
2 in going on much longer.

3 Unfortunately, Blix then delivers another report
4 after Colin Powell has done his. I can't remember the
5 date exactly, mid-February or late February, in which he
6 sort of reins back a bit. Of course, in Washington, the
7 hope and expectation was that Blix, having been fairly
8 negative in January, would be even more negative
9 in February. It didn't happen. But by then, all that
10 was too late.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: We are coming up in a moment or two to
12 a break, but, before we do that, I would like to ask my
13 other colleagues if they would like to pick up any
14 points from the session so far.

15 Baroness Prashar?

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

17 Sir Christopher, I want to take you back to the time
18 when John Sawers and Jonathan Powell came and you said
19 the question of regime change was discussed and there
20 were legal objections which were raised, but were they
21 at that time thinking of regime change in terms of
22 military invasion or was it about topping Saddam through
23 the dissidents? I mean, was that ever an option that
24 was considered?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I never heard it, Baroness Prashar.

1 I never heard, except from Paul Wolfowitz -- I talked
2 about this earlier on, and this was in a conversation
3 long before he came into the US Administration -- who
4 liked this idea of occupying southern Iraq and probably
5 argued for it at that meeting in Camp David over the
6 weekend following 9/11.

7 But the context, as I recall it, in that set of
8 meetings with the administration in waiting, the context
9 for violence, if you like, was arming and financing
10 dissident groups, which is provided for explicitly in
11 the Iraq Liberation Act. It actually lists the
12 dissident groups of which the INC is one.

13 That's a long answer, but the short answer to your
14 question is: no, I didn't hear regime change discussed
15 in any of those meetings in terms of invasion.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: By that time, regime change had come
17 to mean military invasion?

18 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, no, no. Sorry, have I been
19 unclear? Regime change -- the official US policy was,
20 in practice and in discussion at that time, sharpening
21 sanctions and try to sort of beef up, stiffen up the
22 resistance groups.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: No, what I'm talking about, by the
24 time John Sawers and Jonathan Powell came to the
25 United States for that meeting, by that time regime

1 change had come to mean military invasion?

2 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, it hadn't come to mean military
3 invasion. In January 2001, even if there were
4 individuals scattered around the administration in
5 waiting, who would have liked to have done that, the
6 framework in which Sawers and Powell and I discussed
7 Iraq with Condoleezza Rice was: (a) she said, "We are
8 going to review Iraq policy", and it never came to any
9 conclusion; (b) "Colin, we will get him to do sharpening
10 sanctions and, by the way, we shouldn't remove the
11 military option from the table and we need to encourage
12 and equip the Iraqi opposition".

13 I didn't hear, in those exchanges with Sawers and
14 Powell, any reference, at all, to a land invasion,
15 because I think that was never seriously on the table
16 until 9/11 and the absolutely traumatic impact that had
17 on the US administration.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I thought you were talking about
19 a meeting that took place between January and
20 March 2002. That's the time I'm referring to.

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: If I have caused confusion with the
22 Committee, then I'm in trouble here, because the
23 Sawers/Powell visit was a visit to the administration in
24 waiting before the inauguration at the end
25 of January 2001. This was an early exchange which

1 foreshadowed the policy that was then pursued between
2 inauguration and, for argument's sake, 9/11.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: By early 2002, regime change had
4 come to mean military invasion?

5 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, effectively, or -- it is still
6 the fomenting of a rebellion, getting another Sunni
7 general of milder disposition coming forward to remove
8 Saddam. That was around, but, at that time, the
9 American armed forces -- Donald Rumsfeld was tasked with
10 making contingency planning about a possible invasion of
11 Iraq. I hope that's clear. I'm sorry if I have been
12 confusing that.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask, again this post-9/11
14 period, one of the lines being pursued quite actively,
15 and particularly by Paul Wolfowitz, was the idea that
16 somehow or other Saddam Hussein might have had some
17 responsibility for 9/11 or some links with Al-Qaeda.
18 There was a book that he had endorsed which suggested
19 the World Trade Centre attack in 1993 had been the work
20 of Iraq.

21 Did you have conversations with him or other members
22 of the Administration on that? Was this a line that you
23 found yourself --

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I had conversations with him in
25 particular. He was quite convinced that there was

1 a connection, strong connection, between Saddam Hussein
2 and Al-Qaeda. There was a constant reference to the
3 fact that Mohammed Atta, one of those responsible for
4 9/11, who was on one of the planes, had met Iraqi
5 intelligence agents in Prague. Apparently, that's not
6 true. Apparently, it is rubbish. But you couldn't dig
7 it out of the bloodstream of certain influential members
8 of the US administration.

9 Then there was another thing which would be cited
10 from time to time, which was somewhere up in northern
11 Iraq -- I think on the border with Iran, or it might be
12 on the border with Turkey, but I think it was on the
13 border with Iran -- there was an Al-Qaeda camp which
14 Saddam was allowing to happen. To do things.
15 Apparently, that's not true either. There was some kind
16 of camp up there of insurgent figures, but they weren't
17 an Al-Qaeda operation.

18 In the end, as you, Sir Lawrence, probably know, the
19 Defense Department became so irritated with the
20 perceived bias of the CIA against the intelligence which
21 they, the Department of Defense, wanted to believe, that
22 they created their own in-house intelligence operation,
23 which ran as a rival to and a replacement of the CIA.
24 This is all part -- the background to all of this -- God
25 knows what was going on in London so far as interagency

1 disputes were taking place, but in Washington there was
2 not simply Colin Powell against Cheney and Rumsfeld, you
3 had the Defense Department who, to a degree, in the
4 Vice-President's office, simply didn't believe what they
5 were being told by the CIA, and the CIA, on these
6 matters, appeared to be very much in the camp of the
7 State Department.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: My next question is about
9 November 2001, which relates to some conversations we
10 had with the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence
11 on Tuesday.

12 Bush had a press conference in late November 2001,
13 where he was asked about Iraq and said that the
14 inspectors should go back, and, if they don't, he will
15 find out what will happen next. There was quite a lot
16 of discussion in American media about this, more
17 interviews with Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz and so on.

18 This didn't seem to have got back to the
19 Foreign Office. Did you report this as perhaps one of
20 the first signs of Iraq coming into view?

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I'm sure we did. I do not have the
22 reporting telegram in front of me, but we were watching
23 this stuff like hawks. I mean, to a degree you had got
24 almost too close to the coalface. I mean, there was no
25 doubting -- I mean, there was no doubting the appetite

1 of Number 10 MoD and Foreign Office for this kind of
2 reporting.

3 Actually, I remember that press conference pretty
4 well. Of course we did. I say that without actually
5 having in front of me -- I cannot believe that I didn't
6 record that. So the Foreign Office I don't think can
7 claim that they were ignorant of the way in which the
8 wind was blowing. We made it extremely plain, extremely
9 plain. In fact, I sent a dispatch -- the kind of thing
10 which ambassadors don't do much nowadays, because
11 I think they have been banned or something like that --
12 on 5 November to Jack Straw, which I couldn't find in
13 the archives, which actually tried to pull all these
14 threads together, laid all this out.

15 So there was -- the embassy staff and I were,
16 I think, maybe even overly assiduous in reporting this
17 stuff.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: I think this is the moment to take a break
19 both on behalf of the witness and, indeed, the
20 Committee. We will come back in ten minutes.

21 Members of the public need to leave the room.
22 That's fine, but do, please, come back within ten
23 minutes, otherwise the doors will be shut and that will
24 be it for the morning. Thank you very much. In ten
25 minutes.

1 (11.21 am)

2 (Short break)

3 (11.35 am)

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Let us resume, if we may, and I'll turn to
5 Sir Roderic Lyne to continue the questions.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir Christopher, we talked earlier about
7 the spats, essentially the conditions that the
8 United Kingdom was attaching to joining the Americans in
9 their policy, heading towards military action.

10 What were these conditions?

11 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I only found out about these
12 conditions -- no, let me start again. There are two
13 separate things here.

14 The conditions were that the violence between Israel
15 and the Palestinians should be wound down in some way.
16 That was something which Tony Blair and the
17 British Government generally repeated very, very
18 frequently as a necessary pre-condition for taking any
19 action against Saddam Hussein: the construction of
20 a coalition and the exhaustion of the UN process and the
21 re-entry of weapons inspectors. But I only saw these
22 three conditions formally listed as a result of the
23 Crawford meeting through a leak, when a Cabinet Office
24 paper -- a Cabinet Office note, I think it was
25 of July 2002 set them out. I mean, they were part of

1 the diplomacy that we were pursuing, the coalition, the
2 UN, do something about the terrible bloodshed between
3 Israel and the Palestinians, but it was never clear to
4 me to what extent these were things that we would like
5 to have or whether they were actual conditions of going
6 further on Iraq, and I think, as time went by, they
7 didn't look much like iron conditions and the "buts"
8 were a bit feeble.

9 In fact, I was told by a senior American official
10 not long after Crawford that our "yes, but" approach, as
11 it were, from Crawford -- and the "yes" was greedily
12 devoured by the American administration, but the "buts"
13 had kind of faded away.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was legality, the British view of what
15 was required to satisfy international law, part of these
16 conditions?

17 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, if you say -- I mean, they
18 weren't formulated. It wasn't formulated like that, but
19 if you were going to go through the UN in the hope of
20 getting an agreed UN position, by definition the issue
21 of legality would fall away.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's what we did?

23 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: When you look at the conditions now,
24 the so-called conditions, we failed miserably on one,
25 which was trying to wind down the Arab/Israel dispute,

1 where, almost, things went into reverse rather than
2 going forward. On --

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just on that --

4 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Do you want me to take each
5 condition one by one?

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, let's take that one first. Didn't
7 the Americans in the end agree to publish the route map?

8 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, but it led to b*****r all at the
9 time, let's be frank about it.

10 The high point of British influence on the
11 Arab/Israel dispute was the American statement of
12 4 April in which at a time when the Israeli defence
13 force was in West Bank towns creating some damage and
14 casualties, the Americans called for Israel's early
15 withdrawal from the West Bank towns. That made life
16 infinitely easier for Tony Blair when he came to
17 Crawford and had to do a joint press conference with
18 President Bush, because, if nothing had happened on
19 that, I think it could have revealed a rather large
20 split between Blair and Bush.

21 I say that was a high point of British influence,
22 because, no sooner had that statement come out demanding
23 the early withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the
24 West Bank, than a major political operation was launched
25 in Washington the following week to reverse the nature

1 of that call.

2 Colin Powell had been sent to the region, as I said
3 before, and when he came back, he was strongly of the
4 view that he had been consistently undermined by his
5 enemies, while he was away, in the Administration, in
6 the US Congress and by someone who is now the Israeli
7 Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, coming to Washington
8 and effectively working against him.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So we got some progress on the
10 Middle East, but not, in your opinion, nearly enough --

11 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, sorry, let me just finish this
12 point.

13 The definitive American statement was then one made
14 in June which rowed back a long way from what they had
15 said on 4 April, and effectively said in a practical
16 sense that, "We will leave the Middle East on a care and
17 maintenance basis and, by the way, we are not going to
18 do anything until the Palestinians democratise
19 themselves", and what that means is getting rid of
20 Yasser Arafat, which he didn't do until he died.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, going through the UN was another
22 condition; going for a Security Council resolution;
23 going for a second Security Council resolution; allowing
24 the inspectors enough time to do their job properly;
25 gearing at least British policy towards disarming

1 Saddam Hussein rather than regime change.

2 Was that the second bundle of conditions?

3 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: We had more success with the second
4 bundle of conditions. The UN thing -- although, as
5 ever, the devil is in the detail.

6 Exhausting UN processes, which included the
7 reintroduction of weapons inspectors into Iraq, it was
8 good as far as it went, but, as I have said earlier this
9 session, the definition of exhausting UN processes was
10 far from clear, and I was concerned, from very early on,
11 that what the Americans thought that meant and what we
12 thought that meant could be very different.

13 You could say that we overcame -- we, the British,
14 overcame a series of major obstacles to get what we
15 wanted in the UN which reached its climax with
16 Resolution 1441.

17 Just to explain what I mean by getting rid of
18 obstacles. First of all, the US Administration had to
19 be persuaded that, in principle, the UN had a role.
20 Then it had to be persuaded that if the UN were to have
21 a role, there needed to be a Security Council resolution
22 to reflect this. There was a massive battle inside the
23 US Administration before President Bush gave his speech
24 to the UN General Assembly on -- I think it was on
25 14 September 2002.

1 We didn't know until the last minute -- by God, we
2 were lobbying hard -- whether he would even refer to the
3 resolution. In the end he referred to "resolutions".
4 To this day, we are not sure whether that was deliberate
5 or whether he meant to say "resolution" in the singular
6 but his -- what's it called?

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: His teleprompter.

8 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Thank you. His teleprompter broke
9 down.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's a sort of area of detail.

11 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, the devil is in the detail
12 here, Sir Roderic, and the detail is important.

13 Then we had a huge battle about what the trigger for
14 war would be. One needs to know these things. That is
15 why 1441 was fatally undermined by the ambiguities
16 necessary to get the consensus.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's turn to the third point you
18 mentioned, being part of a wider coalition. How did we
19 do on that one? The answer is fairly self-evident, it
20 can be rather brief.

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: If you add up all the people who
22 went to Iraq, it actually comes up to quite
23 a respectable number. I think it was 30 or 40 nations
24 were there, I don't know, in some small numbers, but who
25 was absent of course was -- whose absence in the

1 Security Council, both politically and militarily, were,
2 of course, a majority of its members.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So why were we not able to exercise more
4 traction? You say in your book that the
5 United Kingdom -- you realised at a certain point the UK
6 had become American's, the indispensable ally. Now,
7 if we were the indispensable ally, couldn't we have had
8 more traction?

9 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: With the Americans or with our
10 colleagues in the Security Council?

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, no, no, with the Americans to get
12 a better overall result on these conditions, on the
13 "yes, buts".

14 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: My view is -- and I think I said
15 this in the book as early as 2004 -- that, given the
16 nature of the relationship between Britain and America
17 and the closeness between George W Bush and Tony Blair,
18 we could have achieved more by playing a tougher role.

19 For example -- and this is not the first time I have
20 said it -- if we had made it a condition, a condition,
21 of our participation in any military operation that
22 indeed a major effort should have been made with the
23 Arab/Israel dispute and that indeed we should have done
24 detailed planning for what would happen if and when we
25 removed Saddam Hussein, there could have been a very

1 different outcome, but that did not happen.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in the end, we were left with the
3 choice: do we either continue to go along with the
4 United States, which was taking us into some
5 uncomfortable areas, or should we part company with the
6 United States with all the downsides that that would
7 entail.

8 What would have been the consequences for the
9 United Kingdom of parting company with the
10 United States?

11 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It would have depended on when it
12 was done and it wouldn't necessarily have meant parting
13 company. If, for example -- and I'm -- I wasn't there
14 but I'm pretty sure it didn't happen. If, for example,
15 at Crawford Tony Blair had said, "I want to help you,
16 George, on this, but I have to say to you in all honesty
17 that I will not be able to take part in any military
18 operation unless we have palpable progress on the
19 Middle East process and we have absolutely clarity about
20 what happens in Iraq if it comes to removing
21 Saddam Hussein".

22 I think that would have changed the nature -- it
23 wouldn't have led to a rupture, but it would have
24 changed the nature of American planning. I think he
25 could have said that even in the September meeting at

1 Camp David, and that would have had an impact.

2 By the time you get nearer the end of the year, it
3 is probably too late, because too many things have been
4 decided and are in train, and don't forget, Sir Roderic,
5 that in January or February 2003, before the government
6 in London had the crucial debate in the House of
7 Commons, George Bush picked up a phone and said, "If it is
8 going to be politically difficult for you, Tony. You
9 can sit out the war", and Rumsfeld said at some stage in
10 answer to a question to a journalist, "Well, if push
11 comes to shove, we don't need the Brits".

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we had sat out the war, would it have
13 damaged British interests in the United States if that's
14 what they were saying to us?

15 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It is impossible to say, it is
16 impossible to say. We had a very high reputation
17 at the time inside the United States. There was no
18 great popular surge, as far as we could tell, in favour
19 of going to war. Polls weren't particularly encouraging
20 for the administration. I was travelling a lot around
21 the United States at the time. I didn't come across
22 anybody except an oil man in Houston who was keen on
23 invading. I doubt it would have done a lot of damage.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In order to be seen as a good ally and
25 reap whatever benefits that produced, was it necessary

1 for us to go in the strength that we did with a very
2 large land contingent, or could we have made a smaller
3 contribution to the operation?

4 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I'm sure we could have made
5 a smaller contribution to the operation. I don't know,
6 because I wasn't in the heart of military planning along
7 the spectrum of military assistance what made us fix on
8 the very large land force, by our standards anyway, that
9 we sent in.

10 I remember being told by a member of the
11 administration quite early in 2002 that we were
12 apparently planning to send more or less what we did
13 send.

14 I always have to say, "if it came to war", because
15 the operational decision had not been taken then. But
16 I think anything that we contributed, apart from -- in
17 addition to political support, would have been
18 gratefully received and would have done no damage to our
19 reputation either inside the administration or among the
20 American people at large.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Apart from the applause factor that you
22 mentioned earlier, what benefits to British interests
23 did we gain, did we advance, by the role that we took?

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: That's a great question, and it is
25 one that much pre-occupied me.

1 As the months went by in 2002, every now and again
2 I got in touch with Downing Street and the
3 Foreign Office saying -- and I think I said this in my
4 annual review in 2001. I said, "It is great to bathe in
5 all this popularity. It is wonderful stuff being
6 applauded wherever you go and having your lights up on
7 the score board at a big baseball match in New York,
8 'Welcome to the British ambassador'", you know, the
9 crowd cheering. I almost felt that I needed somebody
10 sitting behind me whispering in my ear, "Remember you
11 are mortal".

12 I said to London, "The key thing now, quite apart
13 from Iraq, is to translate this popularity into real
14 achievements which benefit the national interest", and
15 we failed. We failed, and I'll tell you where we
16 failed.

17 We failed on persuading the United States
18 administration to liberalise air services across the
19 Atlantic, a very big British interest, such that British
20 Airways and other British airlines could enter into
21 co-sharing agreements with their airline opposite
22 numbers in the United States. Richard Branson had been
23 trying to fly and carry passengers point to point in the
24 US since the beginning of time. It was a major British
25 interest and I kept on saying, "Let's try and use this

1 capital to get that".

2 The other thing which was profoundly irritating was
3 that almost on the day that 45 Commando arrived in
4 Afghanistan to help with the war, the Americans slapped
5 tariffs on exports from the UK of what they called
6 speciality steel.

7 I remember saying to Karl Rove, "What in Christ's
8 name do you think you are doing on something like
9 this?", and basically the answer was, "Well, the steel
10 industry is in terrible trouble. It is in states that
11 are important to the President's re-election effort
12 in" -- when was it? 2004 -- "and it is just politics.
13 But what we will try to do is we will pass this tariff
14 thing and we will try and mitigate the consequences for
15 you afterwards".

16 This involved the most incredibly painful diplomacy,
17 and my view is that there the British Government could
18 have, and should have, made a bigger effort to get what
19 we wanted on those points in return for the assistance
20 we were giving them.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just to make sure that I have properly
22 understood this. To summarise what you have just said,
23 it wasn't essential for the defence of British interests
24 that we actually played the part that we did choose to
25 play in Iraq. It wasn't essential, for reasons of

1 British/American relations, that we did so. On the one
2 hand, there wouldn't have been necessarily massive
3 damage if we had not done so, and, on the other hand, we
4 failed to secure specific benefits and in some cases
5 areas you have identified, steel and air services, that
6 we should have done, other than to become popular by
7 doing what we did.

8 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, I don't want to sort of chop
9 logic here, but if you accepted -- and I was in favour
10 of moving Saddam Hussein, let me -- can I declare an
11 interest here, Chairman? I thought -- just so you can
12 understand where I'm coming from on this -- that you
13 didn't even need 9/11, you didn't even need weapons of
14 mass destruction as a clear and present danger.

15 There was a very strong argument, there was a very
16 strong UN argument for confronting
17 Saddam Hussein, (a) because he had not lived up to the
18 commitments in Resolution 687, which was the one which
19 enshrined the ceasefire of the 1991 war. He had chucked
20 out the inspectors effectively, UNSCOM, at the end of
21 1998, and we knew, and we still do know, because you
22 have got this from the Iraq Survey Group, that he had
23 the means and the will to concoct weapons of mass
24 destruction at a later date, even if he didn't have them
25 at the time.

1 I think, putting all this together, there is
2 a British interest in confronting him through the UN,
3 and we should have done it in 1999, and we couldn't do
4 it because, apart from anything else, the French and the
5 Russians wouldn't allow the Security Council to do it.
6 So that's where I was coming from.

7 It wouldn't have damaged the British interest if we
8 had gone to Iraq in fewer numbers. It would have
9 damaged our relations in the United States if we had
10 actively opposed what the Americans were planning. No
11 doubt about that, I think, and we could have done more
12 on issues which some in London may have regarded as
13 minor, but were very important to us. I'm not sure if,
14 in saying all that, I have said anything more than
15 I said the first time round.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you very much. I just wanted to
17 make sure I had got it straight. I have one more
18 question that I want to ask you, which is about the
19 aftermath planning, but, before I do so, perhaps I can
20 check whether any of my colleagues want to come in on
21 any of these points.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Could I just come in on this
23 question of whether we had an option to walk away. What
24 would have happened, for instance -- you, I presume, did
25 think of this -- if, in that speech at the

1 United Nations, with or without the help of
2 teleprompter, Bush had not mentioned bringing Iraq back
3 to the United Nations, back to the Security Council?
4 Would we then have been able to take it any further?
5 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think that might have resulted in an
6 impasse. It wasn't only we who were pushing for the UN.
7 Putative allies, like the Spaniards, like the Italians,
8 like the Australians, were all doing it. So the
9 likelihood of actually that ever happening was very,
10 very slim, but it is a hypothesis which is worth
11 considering.

12 I think if Bush had decided to repudiate the UN
13 altogether and simply to plough ahead, say, with
14 a coalition of the willing -- something like the Kosovo
15 operation, I suspect that would have produced a crisis
16 for us, because I'm not at all sure that the
17 Prime Minister would have been able to have got the
18 thing through the House of Commons.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it was an absolutely critical
20 moment in this whole --

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I thought it was a critical moment
22 that Bush should agree to refer to the UN -- to refer to
23 resolutions, and there was a period between the meeting
24 in Camp David on 7 September and Bush's speech at the
25 UN, which was a week later, I think actually on the

1 14th, where the needle swung back and forth inside the
2 administration from one day to the next, from one
3 morning to one afternoon to the next, you didn't know
4 which draft of the speech was going to prevail.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When you were trying to influence
6 where the needle stopped, were you warning that, without
7 a reference to the Security Council, the British role in
8 this enterprise would almost inevitably diminish?

9 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: The way I put it was, if we don't
10 get the UN in this speech, and we don't make a serious
11 effort to go down the UN path, the first instance of
12 regime change will take place in London.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That would be assuming that the
14 Prime Minister continued with the support --

15 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- for the policy. Perhaps he could
17 do that. People often cite the analogy with
18 Harold Wilson and Vietnam. Wilson didn't go to Vietnam
19 in terms of sending British troops, but he took an awful
20 lot of political stick for supporting the Americans in
21 Vietnam.

22 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Forgive me Sir Lawrence, it was
23 a bad period in UK/US relations. Apart from anything
24 else, President Johnson didn't like the fact that
25 Harold Wilson smoked a pipe in the Oval Office, which

1 offended some canon or protocol there. But the thing
2 about the Anglo-American relationship, the so-called
3 special relationship, if you look at it since 1945, it
4 is not characterised by its stability, it is
5 characterised by its volatility, its extraordinary ups
6 and its extraordinary downs over that period.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I wasn't trying to get into the
8 historical --

9 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, that's quite interesting. I'm
10 sorry -- no, no, all right.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is an extremely interesting
12 question. As a historian, I'd love to go into it, but
13 I'm mainly interested in the analogy of a policy of
14 giving support, political support, which in itself can
15 carry a domestic political price, and actually sending
16 forces.

17 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, I understand that but I cannot
18 conceive that Prime Minister Blair, given what he had
19 said about Saddam Hussein back in 1998, given where he
20 was coming from, would have ever done a Harold Wilson,
21 if I can put it like that.

22 I think Sir Roderic's point about, you know, what
23 level of military support might have been an alternative
24 to, what was it, sending a armoured brigade, that
25 I think is more to the point, and I cannot envisage in

1 the circumstances post-9/11 that Tony Blair would have
2 ever, in the way that Harold Wilson did, put distance
3 between himself and the White House.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But can you imagine him pursuing the
5 military option for the United Kingdom without reference
6 to the United Nations, without going through the UN
7 route?

8 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: He had a precedent in Kosovo, which
9 was a successful operation, which did not benefit from a
10 Security Council resolution, but it had the informal
11 support, effectively, of the Security Council and,
12 subject to Sir Roderic's views, the acquiescence of the
13 Russians. Iraq wasn't like that. So I think the short
14 answer to your question is, it might have been mission
15 impossible to send 50,000 British troops to Iraq without
16 benefit of some kind of process in the Security Council.

17 Of course, it all broke down on the question of the
18 second resolution. So in the end we did go to Iraq
19 without benefit of a Security Council Resolution. But
20 there had at least been an effort.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Sir Christopher, was there
23 a perception in the USA that the UK's participation
24 would be inevitable? In other words, was it taken for
25 granted?

1 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, it reached a stage where it
2 was taken -- well, I was told by one -- who was a very
3 regular contact -- it was somebody very senior in the
4 State Department, and also I had echoes of this from the
5 White House -- that is to say, from the National
6 Security Council -- and I warned London about this in
7 the middle of summer, June or July -- that we were,
8 I thought, being taken for granted. Our support was
9 assumed partly because we were engaged in the
10 contingency planning on the military side, partly,
11 I assume, from what Tony Blair had said in private to
12 Bush at Crawford and what he had said in public the day
13 after at College Station in his speech.

14 So there was an assumption that, whatever happens,
15 the Brits are going to be there. So this goes back to
16 the British interest point that Sir Roderic made. So
17 I did say to London that we are being taken for granted,
18 I have been warned by a couple of very good American
19 contacts, and, by the way, what about air services and
20 steel tariffs?

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what you are suggesting is that
22 we did not use any influence that we had as positively
23 as we could have done?

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: If I can put it charitably, we
25 underestimated the leverage at our disposal.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Earlier you said that you were
2 travelling around the country a lot and there wasn't
3 much support for the war.

4 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It wasn't that there was building
5 opposition to the war, it was simply that it was
6 quite -- and I went to four or five, maybe more, cities
7 in six months -- there would usually be one or two
8 a month -- and you didn't get a sort of -- a great sort
9 of patriotic surge of people punching the air and,
10 "Let's go get Saddam." You didn't get that, and people
11 were quite anxious about it, anxious and cautious about
12 it.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was that conveyed to the government
14 here by yourself and others?

15 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, absolutely.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And what was the reaction?

17 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: There was no reaction. I am afraid
18 it is in the nature of the bureaucracy that telegrams
19 and reports sent back to headquarters do not always
20 elicit a response.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I understand that but what I meant
22 by "reaction" was, did anything change in practice?

23 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Not that I could see, no.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir Christopher, I want to go briefly
2 into the aftermath. It is an important subject. But
3 I know that Sir Martin has got a couple more questions
4 that he wants to ask you before we finish.

5 Talking of the period in the autumn of 2002, you
6 said in your book that post-war Iraq was a blind spot in
7 Washington:

8 "The White House appeared to have bought fully into
9 the neo-con idea that, with the overthrow of Saddam, all
10 would be sweetness and light in Iraq with automatic
11 benefits elsewhere in the Middle East."

12 Did that continue to be their view as we moved
13 closer to the conflict? Was participation in planning
14 for the aftermath and having a coherent plan and
15 assessing what was likely to happen in the aftermath one
16 of the conditions that we were trying to set -- perhaps
17 it would be better to call them one of our desiderata --
18 and what actually happened in the period up to the time
19 you left Washington?

20 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Right. A repeated theme of
21 Washington Embassy reporting throughout 2002 was indeed,
22 not just at my level but other members of the staff in
23 the embassy, telling London variously that, after
24 Saddam, planning was a blind spot, black hole, whatever you
25 like to say, and even in January/February 2003 it was

1 possible for a member of the US administration, quite
2 a senior guy, to say to me, "We don't even yet agree on
3 the concepts for the aftermath," and the most
4 authoritative thing I can tell you is -- and it is in
5 the book -- that I found myself at a dinner in
6 Washington sitting next to Vice-President Cheney, and we
7 hadn't yet had the crucial vote in the House of Commons,
8 and he asked me what all this meant and I said, "The
9 Prime Minister has significant political difficulties in
10 London and it is going to be difficult to get over
11 them," and his reaction was quite dismissive, "Well,
12 once you get by your political problem and we get to
13 Baghdad, then we will be greeted with cheers and flowers
14 or whatever by the population and all this will be
15 history, it will be past history, and you and the
16 President will get the credit which you deserve."

17 There was a significant chunk of the administration
18 that was not particularly concerned about the aftermath
19 because they thought it would come out all right on the
20 night. Condoleeza Rice said to me once, when we were
21 having a conversation about the difficulties that might
22 emerge after the toppling of Saddam, that the trouble
23 with the Europeans, that we were too sniffy, too --
24 what's the word? -- condescending about the Iraqi
25 people, who were perfectly capable of running

1 a democratic system and we should allow them to do so,
2 as if, you know, you remove Saddam Hussein and the
3 Ba'ath Party and, you know, a thousand Burkes, as it
4 were, emerge. I was going to say something else -- but,
5 basically, to answer your question, nothing really
6 changed on that score.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So they remained very optimistic --

8 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Sorry, can I just --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- and we didn't get into a lot of
10 planning with them?

11 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, we tried.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I know we tried but did we succeed?

13 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: No, we didn't succeed because they
14 hadn't got their house in order. We would send teams
15 over --

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So it never really happened?

17 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Hang on, let me finish this point.
18 It sort of happened but it wasn't enough. In the autumn
19 and winter of 2002 teams came over from London,
20 interagency teams, to engage the Americans on
21 afterwards, and what they found was a fragmented
22 American interagency reaction. We knew the
23 State Department had been working on post-Saddam for
24 ages. They had all kinds of terrific plans and some
25 good people, who in the end Rumsfeld wouldn't accept on

1 his team. Then, of course, if you went to the
2 Department of Defence, you got a different story.

3 The problem about engaging with the Americans on
4 aftermath was that they themselves didn't create their
5 ORHA -- Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian
6 Assistance? -- thank you -- until February 2003.

7 So it wasn't for lack of trying by British
8 officials. I wasn't present in the meeting between
9 Tony Blair and George Bush, which was a very
10 tightly-held one in Washington on January 31 2003, when
11 we know from a leaked record of that meeting, which
12 I believe to be authentic, that the British team did say
13 to the President, "What about the aftermath?" to which
14 the response was, "Oh, it's all in hand," and that was
15 it; that was the full nature of the exchange. I'm not
16 sort of giving any scoops here because this has been out
17 in the public domain for at least a couple of years.

18 So officials did try to engage but the heart of the
19 matter was, at the political level we didn't insist
20 enough and on the American side they didn't get their
21 act together until very late in the day and it then
22 turned out the act wasn't good enough anyway, as
23 John Sawers and Jeremy Greenstock will, I think,
24 confirm.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Roderic. Sir Martin?

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have one last question.

2 To go back to the question of British influence on
3 the administration, do you feel that, because of
4 whatever commitment may have been made at Crawford or in
5 the summer after Crawford, that Britain's ability, say
6 through the Foreign Secretary, to influence the
7 United States policy was fatally undermined or would you
8 say that Bush's commitment to the UN route in his
9 Security Council speech was in fact the maximum and
10 essential acceptance of the conditions which we had laid
11 down?

12 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I thought the Bush speech was a very
13 good result for us, the United Kingdom, as far as it
14 went. It was extraordinarily emollient about the UN as
15 a whole. It announced, incredibly enough -- this really
16 blindsided me -- re-entry of the United States into
17 UNESCO, which I thought was staggering.

18 It was a very, very good result -- and I'm in danger
19 of repeating myself now but -- and it was the result of
20 a lot of influences playing on the White House,
21 including Jack Straw with Colin Powell -- though
22 Colin Powell needed no convincing -- and a number of
23 others.

24 So it was a kind of high tide, and we managed to
25 keep the tide pretty high until the resolution itself

1 emerged two months after the President's speech. It
2 must be said that Resolution 1441 was a significant
3 diplomatic achievement, but it had the seeds of its own
4 destruction in its ambiguity, and its ambiguity was on
5 the crucial point of what would be the trigger for war.
6 The Americans interpreted it one way and everybody else
7 interpreted it the other way and we were kind of stuck
8 in the middle.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But our input, including that of
10 Downing Street, on the speech of the Security Council
11 was really our position being accepted and --

12 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It was our position being accepted
13 but I would not say that our lobbying was decisive.
14 I think the meeting -- the August 5 meeting which Powell
15 and Rice had with the President, that was decisive, and
16 in fairness I must say that one of the arguments that
17 Colin Powell used was, "Our indispensable allies need
18 this." It was part of the baggage of arguments that he
19 presented to the President. As far as I could see, from
20 what I have heard, he didn't need a lot of convincing.

21 THE CHAIRMAN: Anything else? No? Lawrence?

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just carrying on a little bit with
23 this question of influence, you have set out the
24 conditions that were sort of made at Crawford, but they
25 were never, sort of, red lines, in the sense that they

1 were announced to Parliament as such. So these were
2 rather informal conditions. Is that fair?

3 Were these the best conditions that we could have
4 set under the circumstances? I think it would have been
5 rather difficult to lay down as a condition support for
6 Virgin Airlines. That was something that --

7 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Richard Branson would have liked.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm sure he would. So just really
9 within the ambit of policy on Iraq, was there a way that
10 we might have formulated the policy then so that, in
11 a sense, by putting ourselves in a corner, it would have
12 been understood that it was harder for the
13 Prime Minister to move away from these conditions?

14 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think a key condition that should
15 have been a red line but wasn't was that the military
16 processes and decision-taking should be subordinate to
17 a coherent political and diplomatic strategy.

18 Part of the difficulties that emerged was that, as
19 I have said earlier on, a provisional timetable,
20 a contingency timetable, for possible military action
21 was set for early 2003, which was, in reality, if you
22 were going to go through the UN, to set the cart before
23 the horse.

24 So, with the benefit of hindsight -- and hindsight
25 plays quite a big role in all of this -- I think what we

1 should have said was, "Let's try it through the UN, let
2 us exhaust the UN processes, including the
3 reintroduction of inspectors, and then, depending on
4 what Saddam Hussein does, decide what, if anything, we
5 are going to do militarily."

6 Now, of course, you can't just do it neatly like
7 that, you have got to have some contingency planning,
8 but I think -- and I go back to what I wrote at the
9 time -- that it wouldn't necessarily have been
10 a panacea, it wouldn't necessarily have solved all the
11 contradictions and problems that arose. But if you
12 actually planned for military action in the cool
13 autumnal season of 2003, rather than the cool spring
14 season of 2003, a lot of things might have been able to
15 to have been unwound. But the key problem was to let
16 the military strategy wag the political and diplomatic
17 strategy; it should have been the other way round.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When did you become aware that the
19 military strategy -- the timetable was so firmly in
20 place, because it did move a bit during the course of
21 2002?

22 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, what you've got, what you
23 started to hear quite soon was, "All our contingency
24 planning is premised on doing Iraq in -- " The
25 month January kept popping up. Then, after the summer

1 break of 2002 -- and I stress this was contingency.
2 I am not somebody who believes that an operational
3 decision was taken in April 2002 or September of 2002.
4 And then I began to hear in October of 2002, suitably at
5 the Trafalgar Night dinner in the embassy, when masses
6 of American military turn up -- I began to hear
7 that January doesn't work because we are not ready and
8 we've got this problem with the Turks. So the thing
9 started to go back -- February -- and in the end it
10 turned out to be March.

11 So it was a sliding scale but it was on a sliding
12 scale within a very narrow bracket actually.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And how much understanding was there
14 between Britain and the United States that this was an
15 effective deadline? Were the British able to say, "It
16 would help if you could push it back at least until
17 late April?" Was there any discussions of that sort?

18 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: One of the most signal discussions,
19 I think, was when Tony Blair came to Washington
20 on January 31 2003, and he was seeking delay because
21 I think we weren't militarily ready, and he wanted his
22 time for a second Security Council Resolution, which at
23 that time didn't look unachievable, and I remember
24 sending a telegram the night before, saying, "On these
25 two points you haven't won the argument yet. You are

1 going to have to say to the President, 'I need a delay
2 and I need a second Security Council Resolution.'

3 And to be fair, he got the Americans to make an
4 attempt at a second Security Council Resolution but
5 again the Americans were being pressed by Aznar, the
6 Spanish Prime Minister, by Berlusconi, by John Howard
7 down in Australia, and there was a delay, until March
8 20th, but the delay was not because we argued for it, it
9 was because the American military said, "Hell, we can't
10 do this thing actually until March 20."

11 But, strategically speaking, it didn't matter
12 whether it was in January or in March. If you believe,
13 as I do, that it should have been wrapped into
14 a coherent political and diplomatic strategy, he would
15 have gone for the autumn.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to conclude this, in a way
17 maybe he got the worst of both worlds: he got a return
18 to the Security Council but without the time to work it
19 all through, under this constant pressure and an
20 awareness that the military build-up was taking place.

21 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think that is what happened and it
22 goes back to what I said earlier, that it turned
23 Resolution 1441 on its head and we found ourselves --
24 instead of trying to get Saddam Hussein to prove his
25 innocence, we found ourselves in the intolerable

1 position of having to try to prove his guilt by finding
2 weapons of mass destruction before the military
3 deadline, which proved impossible.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: My very final point: at this meeting
5 in January 31 -- you have mentioned already that the
6 aftermath issue came up there. We have had a lot of
7 discussion of the worst case on the weapons of mass
8 destruction, which turned out to be completely wrong.
9 You've also now indicated a best case on what would
10 happen after the war.

11 Was there any sense, any concept at all, of just how
12 awful it could be, or do you think this was just
13 outside of everybody's --

14 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Sorry, how awful what --

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just how awful the aftermath could
16 be in the discussions in Washington or around at the
17 time?

18 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I think the worry at the time was
19 that there would be some kind of humanitarian disaster,
20 and the initial work of the ORHA under General
21 Jay Garner was very much focused on that: refugees and
22 stuff like that. No, this argument about were there or
23 weren't there weapons of mass destruction will go
24 backwards and forwards, I suspect, until the end of
25 time, but American and British troops wouldn't have been

1 equipped with anti-chemical weapons defences if there
2 hadn't been a very strong fear, however ill-founded,
3 that Saddam could respond with these weapons.

4 What just disappeared from the calculations was the
5 understanding that, after Saddam was toppled, you were
6 going to have to maintain law and order and guarantee
7 the continuity of the central services; otherwise, you
8 would lose the Iraqi population very rapidly, and that
9 was discussed. But when it happened, when the invasion
10 happened, when Baghdad was captured, the division, the
11 US army division that was there, didn't do that because
12 it didn't have any orders to do that, and, you know,
13 there are other witnesses who will be coming before you
14 who are much better informed on this than I am. I only
15 know what I have read about that because I retired at
16 the end of February.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks very much.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: I have just got a few wrap-up points,
19 Sir Christopher, rather all over the space that we have
20 been occupying this morning. But the first one comes
21 from what has just been discussed, and that's whether,
22 looking at the timing decision by the United States to
23 go in early 2003, whether it is January or March or
24 whatever, military momentum is clearly a major component
25 of that broad timing decision, and we will hear a lot

1 more from other witnesses about that.

2 There are, however, some signs, aren't there, that
3 the American military or people within the American
4 military at a responsible level believed they could
5 fight a summer war, if indeed it wasn't held over until
6 the autumn. It wasn't an absolutely no-no that you had
7 to go at the end of March or not go. But is that your
8 understanding?

9 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It is my understanding, and the
10 reason why I have said autumn is because in the
11 following year, in 2004, there would be a presidential
12 election campaign.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: You have brought me exactly to the question
14 I was going to put.

15 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: And I thought, hang on, if one is
16 trying to buy time in all of this, how much time can you
17 buy. So I went to the great guru, a chap known as the
18 president's brain, Karl Rove, and I said, "How far can
19 this be put back?" And he said, "End of 2003, latest."
20 He might have said January 2004. "Otherwise," he said,
21 "We will get embroiled in the presidential election
22 campaign and the President will be accused of using the
23 war to win an election."

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. But the decision on early 2003 is not
25 driven by the domestic US political timetable.

1 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I don't think so. Actually I don't
2 know where it came from, to be perfectly frank with you.

3 It may have been a purely military planning operation.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Or just the inertia of military preparation.

5 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, it could be, I don't know.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: Right, okay.

7 Two other points, one partly connected with the
8 post-war planning. But you said that in effect the
9 British Prime Minister had more leverage than the
10 British Government exerted in effect, both before and
11 indeed in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, and
12 Sir Lawrence raised this enticing question as to
13 whether, had the British Prime Minister been more
14 explicit about his conditions, would that, as it were,
15 have made it easier to enforce them or to exact a price?

16 The other, though, is timing, and I think I took
17 from what you were saying that really the persuasive,
18 the influential, effect in 2002 came in too late, if you
19 are looking at, for example, much more careful and
20 detailed aftermath planning, that the British influence
21 on it would have had to be exerted by the summer of 2002
22 at the latest to get something really serious up and
23 running. Is that right?

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes. I can't give a categorical
25 answer to that. I don't believe that it would have been

1 impossible if we started this in the autumn. But I had
2 an interlocutor who got their act together -- I think if
3 the Americans had their act together in
4 September/October and we did likewise, then you could
5 have done it. I'm not trying to make a party political
6 point here whatsoever but quite often, when I think
7 about this, I think: what would Margaret Thatcher have
8 done? She would have insisted on a clear -- I take her
9 name in vain, for Pete's sake, I may be hit with
10 a thunderbolt, but I think she would have insisted on
11 a clear, coherent political/diplomatic strategy and
12 I think she would have demanded the greatest clarity
13 about what the heck happened if and when we removed
14 Saddam Hussein.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: On the aftermath planning, looking into the
16 content or the substance of it, is it right to suppose
17 that the de-ba'athification element of it, which had
18 itself, arguably, catastrophic consequences, was really
19 a reaction in April by Bremer to the breakdown in
20 security rather than the precipitating cause. Can you
21 comment on that at all?

22 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It is slightly beyond my time.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: If it is outside, then --

24 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: It is outside my -- I have a view
25 but I left the service on February 28th. That's my

1 problem.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, but you were there in the run-up. So if
3 you have a view, let us know.

4 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: A number of parallels were thrown
5 into the discussion. One was MacArthur in Japan, the
6 other was what we did in Germany after 1945. People
7 were looking for parallels, and I remember somebody from
8 the NSC saying to me in January, "Clearly, we are going
9 to have to get rid of the top people, Saddam's henchmen,
10 but we can't de-ba'athify completely, otherwise there
11 will be no administration in Iraq and no school teachers
12 and no nothing and we are going to need some of these
13 people."

14 THE CHAIRMAN: That's important to hear, thank you, because
15 there was awareness then, at least in some parts --

16 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes, but the argument was lost.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, okay.

18 Moving back to something quite different, you said
19 earlier this morning that in your view the declared
20 formal United Kingdom policy on a containment was in
21 effect over by spring/summer of 2002. We have had other
22 witness testimony to argue that it was and remained the
23 policy, at least until late in 2002. Looking back at
24 it, where do you think that line should be drawn?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I can't do that. The trouble is,

1 I can't -- I think this in itself is a comment on the
2 importance, the salience, of that issue: I can't really
3 remember ever in 2002 going in to see somebody senior in
4 the administration and still arguing about containment.
5 I think its death twitches may have lasted quite a long
6 time but I don't remember ever doing this.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: But basically it is not a time point, it is
8 just an evolution?

9 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Yes. Nowhere in the briefing that
10 I remember sending to Tony Blair before the Crawford
11 meeting.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: Right. A quite different point, but you gave
13 us evidence earlier about the relationship between
14 interlocutors on either side of the Atlantic. There is
15 an asymmetry, of course, in the situation, but as
16 I understand it, the Number 10 foreign affairs adviser
17 relationship with the head of the National Security
18 Council had worked through different personalities and
19 times.

20 In the Bush administration the great influence of
21 Vice-President Cheney did not lend itself to a natural
22 bilateral relationship with either the Foreign Secretary
23 or the Prime Minister. So how was that going to be
24 managed? How was it managed?

25 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Well, the answer is -- I say this in

1 all due modesty: the answer is me really, not -- sorry,
2 let me back up a bit. You are absolutely right,
3 institutionally, if you have got a very powerful
4 Vice-President --

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Which is hugely unusual.

6 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: -- which is unusual. I remember
7 saying to London quite early on in the administration,
8 "This may be the most powerful Vice-President ever."
9 I mean, his institutional opposite number was the Deputy
10 Prime Minister. This -- how can I put it? -- was an
11 unbalanced relationship and probably didn't reap the
12 dividends that institutionally we might have hoped and
13 expected.

14 What we did instead -- Jack Straw used to see
15 Cheney.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: You mentioned --

17 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Whenever he came to Washington, he
18 saw Cheney. The Prime Minister saw Cheney on the first
19 visit in February 2001, and Cheney, most importantly,
20 was at the Camp David meeting on 7 September 2002.

21 For the rest, in between I would see the
22 Vice-President from time to time. But a very good
23 contact was his Chief of Staff, Scooter Libby, and my
24 staff in the embassy had very close contacts with the
25 next layer down, particularly a chap called John Hannah,

1 and Eric Edelman, who were strong neo-con hawks. That's
2 the way we put our fix into the Vice-President's office
3 and took stuff out.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That's helpful. So there was
5 a conduit of communication?

6 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Oh, absolutely.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Right.

8 I have got a couple of final remarks after we close
9 the evidence, but just before I do that, are there any
10 particular points that you had wanted to put in evidence
11 this morning that there has not been an opportunity to
12 do?

13 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I don't think so. My mind is
14 slightly mushy at the moment.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: It has been a long morning.

16 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: I just think I would like to go back
17 to something which I asked if I could say, which is to
18 remind people that on the matter of Iraq, on the whole
19 question of unilateralism versus multilateralism, which
20 is the sort of philosophical discussion one has about
21 the British/American relationship sometimes or the
22 Americans' role in the world, there is more of
23 a continuum here with previous administrations before
24 George W than maybe the Democratic Party and the
25 Republican Party would be willing to admit.

1 There was a lot of continuity with some of the stuff
2 that Clinton did. Clinton and Bush, very, very
3 different, but I just think that it would be wrong to
4 see the Bush administration simply as an unusual and
5 atypical aberration that suddenly appeared on the scene.
6 It is not like that.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

8 That brings this session to a close.
9 Sir Christopher referred to a number of telegrams or
10 other communications not made available to him from the
11 FCO archive. Just to say, we shall, of course, be
12 pursuing that, to ensure that, assuming that there is
13 a documentary survival, we shall have those in the vast
14 amount of information we have already got and to which
15 is still being added.

16 That concludes the first of our sessions on the
17 Anglo/US dimension, and tomorrow we pursue the same
18 theme with Sir Jeremy Greenstock as our witness in the
19 morning, both, of course, on the United States and the
20 interlocking, interrelated United Nations aspect.

21 With that, I thank everybody who has spent time here
22 this morning and our witness. Thank you.

23 SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER: Thank you very much.

24 (12.33 pm)

25 (The Inquiry adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)

I N D E X

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER 2

