

Wednesday, 7 July 2010

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2 (10.00 am)

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SIR RICHARD DALTON

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SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS

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THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome to everyone and to

6

our witnesses. This morning we are hearing from

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Sir Richard Dalton and Sir Geoffrey Adams, who were

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successively Britain's Ambassadors in Iran between late

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2002 and 2009.

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I say on each occasion that we recognise that

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witnesses are giving evidence based on their

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recollection of events and we, of course, check what we

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hear against the papers to which we have access and

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which are we are still receiving.

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I remind each witness on each occasion that they

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will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence

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to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair

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and accurate.

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With those preliminaries, I wonder if I could ask

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each of you to give us a thumbnail sketch, if you like,

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of the make-up of Iran's government and power structures

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knowing that they are complex, but it would be helpful

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to us to learn a bit about them.

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Sir Richard, do you want to start?

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SIR RICHARD DALTON: I think it is easiest to think about

1 the power structure in Iran as a series of concentric  
2 circles. In the middle you have the hard core, the  
3 source of authority, which is the Supreme Leader, and he  
4 derives his authority from the theory that somebody has  
5 to stand in for the hidden Imam of the Shi'ites. His  
6 word, therefore, has a degree of divine sanction that is  
7 equivalent to the words of the prophet Mohammed and  
8 other Imams. He has an extensive network which supports  
9 him, both in the regions and in all major institutions  
10 of Iran, and he is also in contact with the senior  
11 Ayatollahs, the religious authorities of the country,  
12 who don't always have the same view, but they cluster  
13 round.

14 Then there is a tier around that circle of the  
15 public institutions of the government, and they aren't  
16 on the same level of authority but they do interpret the  
17 core to the outside world and they deal with the outside  
18 world. So an Ambassador, for example, talks to the  
19 Ministry of Foreign Affairs that sits in that circle.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Could you slow down just a little, please?

21 Thank you.

22 SIR RICHARD DALTON: An Ambassador talks to the Ministry of  
23 Foreign Affairs that sits -- the first part of the  
24 government -- within that second circle.

25 Then, beyond that, but also with close links to the

1 previous two circles are the institutions of the  
2 country, non-governmental organisations, the Parliament,  
3 the business organisations, all to some degree sharing  
4 in the authority that the system administers and  
5 channelling information through to the middle and  
6 executing the instructions that come from the middle.

7 On day-to-day Iraq matters, the prime  
8 decision-making body was the Supreme National  
9 Security Council, and you may hear quite a lot about  
10 that in the rest of this session. Their job was to  
11 represent the main ministries executing policy and also  
12 to hear instructions from the Supreme Leader who had  
13 a representative in this body.

14 So it is a kind of Cabinet Committee. It didn't  
15 publish its deliberations. It is hard for outsiders,  
16 like Ambassadors, to interpret, but occasionally we did  
17 get a glimpse of the nature of debates within that body.

18 However, there were other lines of authority that  
19 affected Iranian actions in Iraq and among them were the  
20 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the IRGC which answers  
21 directly to the Supreme Leader. It is represented in  
22 the Supreme National Security Council but didn't always  
23 obey the consensus and the decisions of the Chairman of  
24 that body, which was the President<sup>1</sup>.

25 So it was possible to get some confusion and some

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<sup>1</sup> Witness's note: The President of Iran, in my day President Khatami.

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1 different policies being enacted on the ground by  
2 different organs of the Iranian state.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Sir Geoffrey?

4 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Thanks very much. I don't have a great  
5 deal to add to that account. I think the concept of  
6 concentric circles is a helpful one in trying to  
7 decipher this complicated system, a system which was  
8 deliberately complicated. I think the Iranian  
9 revolutionary constitutional arrangements were  
10 deliberately designed to make power diffuse and,  
11 therefore, to make overthrowing it that much more  
12 difficult.

13 An alternative to the concentric circles image is  
14 perhaps a Venn diagram of interlocking circles of  
15 different power centres. I think that Sir Richard has  
16 mentioned absolutely the right ones, as I recall them  
17 from my own time. I just simply draw attention to the  
18 three ones he mentioned, which I agree were absolutely  
19 central, particularly in the context which we are  
20 talking about of policy towards Iraq: namely, the  
21 Supreme Leader and his office.

22 The Supreme Leader has quite a large office with, as  
23 Sir Richard says, tentacles extending across the  
24 country. Secondly, the Revolutionary Guards, the IRGC  
25 as they are often referred to, the general assumption we

1           operated under was that it was the IRGC that was  
2           primarily responsible for Iranian policy in Iraq and  
3           specifically the so-called Qods Force of the IRGC, which  
4           is the external action arm of the IRGC.

5   THE CHAIRMAN:   External to Iran?

6   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS:   External to Iran, exactly.

7           That policy towards Iraq was co-ordinated in the  
8           machinery of the Supreme National Security Council,  
9           which did operate as a kind of Cabinet Secretariat, but  
10          not as we would know it.

11   THE CHAIRMAN:   Thank you very much.   That was most helpful.

12          I think we need now to turn to the events and I'll ask  
13          Baroness Prashar to start.

14   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   Thank you very much, Chairman.

15          There are two areas I want to cover with you: one is  
16          the threat posed by Iraq in comparison to Iran and Libya  
17          and the other area, which we will come to later, is to  
18          establish how Iran contributed to international  
19          negotiations on Iraq in early 2003.

20          So can you first turn to the question of the threat  
21          posed by Iraq in relation to Iran and Libya, of course,  
22          which you are also very familiar with?

23   SIR RICHARD DALTON:   Yes, there is no single answer to the  
24          question of the degree of threat posed by Iran.   First,  
25          as I see it, a military threat is a combination of

1 capability with intent and, at the time we begin the  
2 story, I didn't consider either Iraq or Iran a direct  
3 threat in that sense to UK security. In the region, of  
4 course, Iraq was a threat, owing to the likelihood of it  
5 having weapons of mass destruction, as we saw it, and it  
6 was more of a threat in that respect in 2002/2003 than  
7 Iran was, given Iraq's history of aggression and the  
8 propensities of the regime.

9 Iran, moreover, didn't seek new territory, it didn't  
10 seek to dominate its neighbours, and its military  
11 dispositions were primarily defensive.

12 Moreover, there was a balance in the region,  
13 inherited from the unsatisfactory end of the Iran/Iraq  
14 war and, of course, that balance was removed by the  
15 invasion of Iraq to the benefit of Iran.

16 Clearly, there was a long-range risk from Iran in  
17 the nature of the covert weapons programme that it might  
18 have, which was starting to be laid bare after the  
19 revelations about its secret enrichment work in 2002 and  
20 that, of course, might have born fruit in the future.

21 Its extensive nuclear R&D was clearly  
22 a potential threat, but it wasn't a threat in 2003 that  
23 was any way close in time. On the Middle East peace  
24 process and terrorism, where Iranian activity was  
25 malign, clearly there was a significant threat to Israel

1 and, probably, in the sense of actual disturbance of the  
2 peace, more from Iran than from Iraq, owing to its  
3 policy of having a forward defence against the  
4 possibility that Israel and the United States might seek  
5 to attack it and hence its support for resistance, as it  
6 called it, in Palestine, and its involvement in Lebanon.

7 In the case of Libya, their programmes to develop an  
8 enrichment capability were advanced, as revealed in  
9 2003/2004, more than we had thought, but they weren't at  
10 a stage where they were a potential, direct military  
11 threat to the United Kingdom or to Europe.

12 It might possibly have evolved in that direction,  
13 although Libya's programmes were subject to many, many  
14 delays and technical difficulties and, in the question  
15 of conventional capabilities, there was no comparison  
16 between Libya and either Iran and Iraq. In the  
17 matter of support for terrorism, there was no  
18 comparison between Libya and Iran because Libya had  
19 eschewed that former trend of its activity in the  
20 mid-1990s.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: A number of witnesses have said to  
22 us that they would have put Iran and Iraq ahead of Iraq  
23 (sic). Would that be your view at that time in  
24 2002/2003?

25 SIR RICHARD DALTON: No, certainly not, for the reasons

1 I have given, that it was primarily defensive in its  
2 dispositions. It wasn't a country which was as close  
3 as we thought, mistakenly, Iraq was in 2002/2003 to  
4 having weapons of mass destruction.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How far do you think that is a risk,  
6 that Iran might pass nuclear weapons to terrorists? Was  
7 there a real danger?

8 SIR RICHARD DALTON: That Iran might pass weapons to  
9 terrorists? Nuclear weapons or other weapons?

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Nuclear weapons.

11 SIR RICHARD DALTON: No, I have never regarded that as  
12 a serious danger. On general geostrategic grounds,  
13 where states have possessed these weapons, but taken the  
14 greatest care not to pass them on, for fear of blow-back  
15 on their own territories and being unable to control the  
16 geostrategic consequences of being caught -- indeed, not  
17 just of being caught but of those weapons being used  
18 by others.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Would that apply not only to fission weapons  
20 but also radiological devices? Dirty bombs, if you like.

21 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes, I think the history of the  
22 possession of nuclear weapons and of the potential for  
23 radiological devices by other states supports the  
24 contention that it would be extraordinarily unlikely for  
25 Iran to pass on weapons. The other main reason for

1 saying that is because of sheer prudence on the part of  
2 a state like Iran, which has always been prudent in the  
3 way it uses force and projects force, to protect the  
4 strategic interests of the regime which are primarily  
5 the security of their territory and the security of  
6 their regime.

7 The risk to them from being suspected of or of  
8 actually passing such dreadful weapons to a third party  
9 would be the kind of international denunciation,  
10 isolation and, potentially, attack, which they would not  
11 want to risk.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on now to the second  
13 area? How far was Iran involved in international  
14 negotiations during January and February 2003, which was  
15 leading up to the potential second Security Council  
16 Resolution?

17 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Of course, it wasn't a member of the  
18 United Nations Security Council. It was a close  
19 neighbour and with legitimate interests.

20 Its declared aims at that period were that there  
21 should be no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq -- and  
22 they were convinced that Iraq had weapons of mass  
23 destruction. They did not want an invasion of Iraq,  
24 they wanted the UN process to succeed and the main  
25 reason for not wanting an invasion is that they were

1 fearful of a US presence in Iraq and they had some  
2 concern that, as you were saying, some people regarded  
3 Iran as the greater threat and that, therefore, having  
4 arrived in massive strength in the region, the  
5 United States might proceed further eastwards. If I may  
6 add just one further thought on the question of  
7 whether Iran was the greater threat: looking back at my  
8 instructions on going off to Iran in 2002, there was no  
9 suggestion from ministers or from officials who briefed  
10 me that that was a prime concern of Her Majesty's  
11 Government, that Iran was in any sense a threat on the  
12 same level or at a higher level than Iraq.

13 But turning back to those negotiations, they were  
14 also very concerned about the day-after issues,  
15 particularly, would Iraqi territorial integrity be  
16 retained? They thought that Turkey might be tempted to  
17 move into Kurdistan to make sure that there was no  
18 independent, autonomous Kurdish authority arising out of  
19 the ruins of Iraq that might be a threat to Turkish  
20 stability.

21 They were very concerned about spillover to Iran of  
22 both fighting, use of chemical weapons, and refugees  
23 from Iraq, and they wanted, on the day after, to see the  
24 majority community in Iraq, the Shia community, on top.

25 So that was broadly where they came from.

1 I think the first stage of their involvement in  
2 the discussions was the Secretary of State's visit  
3 in October 2002, when his main objective, I believe --  
4 I was there, although I hadn't actually been posted to  
5 Tehran formally at that point -- his objective was to  
6 ensure that Iran did not misinterpret or overreact to  
7 the military build-up. The position of the Iranians was  
8 that Saddam should go, but that should be the result of  
9 action by the Iraqis, not of action of foreigners.  
10 In the run-up to the first Resolution the Iranians were  
11 welcoming our resort to the UN Security Council.  
12 They were realistic enough to  
13 acquiesce in the threat of multilateral military action.

14 There was a further round of consultations, on  
15 18/19 December, when a deputy foreign minister  
16 responsible for Europe, Mr Ahani, went to London for, as  
17 it were, closer discussion on the detail of  
18 contingencies . Then Foreign Minister Kharrazi saw the  
19 Prime Minister and Jack Straw in early February.

20 Throughout this period, it was more a matter of  
21 close consultation than of seeking an Iranian view on  
22 what to do next with a view to building that into our  
23 approach.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Consultation with a view to keeping  
25 them informed?

1 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Keeping them informed, taking their  
2 point of view into account, but not getting ourselves  
3 into a position where we were going to be tied down. We  
4 didn't anticipate an active role for Iran in any  
5 military action and, as I said, they weren't a direct  
6 actor in New York.

7 So I think Iranian policy was that Iraqi weapons of  
8 mass destruction must be dealt with. There should be no  
9 threat to Iran from the United States, and how they  
10 described their own policy was "active neutrality".  
11 There was some criticism at the time from some circles  
12 in Iran that this wasn't going to be enough to protect  
13 Iran's interests and that they should move off their  
14 neutral position, but, on the  
15 whole, the Iranians stuck to it. They assured us that  
16 they wouldn't be crossing the borders.

17 We made clear that our policy was one of no  
18 surprises for the Iranians; in other words, we weren't  
19 going to have a situation in which they woke up one  
20 morning to find that there were UK military neighbours  
21 within miles of their border. We were broadly  
22 successful at each stage, starting with that preliminary  
23 visit in October, in keeping Iran in the picture in that  
24 way and averting surprises.

25 As pressure mounted in January and February, they

1 stressed the importance of the UN route. Their position  
2 was closer to the French position than the UK position;  
3 in other words, that the inspectors should be given  
4 sufficient time, that peaceful means should be fully  
5 exhausted, that military action would be acceptable if  
6 under the UN, and only in those circumstances.

7 At the same time they had a wary eye out for what  
8 they called US adventurism, and one of the points they  
9 were registering with us was that the United States  
10 might have oil interests at heart, seeking to build up  
11 a position which would help dominate the oil markets  
12 through occupying Iraq. All things which they were  
13 nervous about.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What was their reaction after the  
15 second resolution failed and, you know, it was an  
16 invasion by Britain and the UK -- I mean, the USA?

17 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Denunciation, the key moment was  
18 a speech on 11 April by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader,  
19 at Friday prayers, in which he gave a lengthy analysis  
20 drawing on historical analogies that this was sheer  
21 colonialism, and he decreed that this action was against  
22 the interests of Muslims. So he staked out a position,  
23 which he developed frequently thereafter, that Iran was  
24 the vanguard of opposition to this kind of an adventure  
25 in the Middle East by imperialists.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think it would have made any  
2 difference if the United States had gone on its own and  
3 we had stayed behind? What would have been Iran's  
4 reaction then?

5 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Much the same. They always saw us as  
6 very much a junior partner.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So it wouldn't have made  
8 a difference to their attitude?

9 SIR RICHARD DALTON: No. They regarded the US and the UK  
10 and Israel as a kind of trilogy of enemies. Sometimes  
11 they regarded the UK as a driving force in that  
12 partnership and sometimes they emphasised a Zionist  
13 role, sometimes they talked about the United States as  
14 the country which led this charge against the interests  
15 of Iran and of Islam.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But you would have been warning  
17 London about the potential effects of the invasion.  
18 What reaction were you getting from London? What were  
19 you reporting back to London, in the build-up?

20 SIR RICHARD DALTON: In the build-up? I have mentioned some  
21 of Iran's concerns that we were reporting. Others --  
22 there is a rather a lengthy list and I might as well  
23 read it out, because this is the kind of work which we  
24 were doing as an embassy throughout the period that you  
25 are looking at.

1           We were trying to get some form of link on military  
2 channels, which we hadn't had before with Iran, given  
3 the troubled history of UK/Iran relations. We were  
4 putting in place communication -- we called it  
5 "deconfliction", so that the proximity of coalition and  
6 Iranian forces wouldn't cause unnecessary clashes and  
7 unnecessary political or military difficulties.

8           We were preparing for the return of Iranian -- I beg  
9 your pardon, Iraqi refugees from Iran. We were working  
10 closely with international agencies based in Tehran and  
11 seeking agreement on procedures to be co-ordinated with  
12 the coalition military authorities.

13           Part of that job was to co-ordinate the return of  
14 Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim, the very senior Iraqi  
15 exiled politician, the head of the Supreme Council for  
16 the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. That took place in  
17 early May.

18           Throughout this period -- and this, I think, is  
19 a more significant concern than the ones I have  
20 mentioned so far, for Iran, we were reporting and taking  
21 action on Iranian fears that the dissolution of Iraq and  
22 the United States support for action against Iran would  
23 lead to the reactivation as an active terrorist threat  
24 to Iran of the Mujaheddin-e Khalq, sometimes known as  
25 the PMOI or the MKO, but MEK is the more familiar

1 abbreviation in Iran.

2 There was acute Iranian sensitivity to all measures  
3 taken by the coalition in respect of them, and that  
4 concern we were reporting from early 2003.

5 Crossing points, agreements to be reached on places  
6 and procedures, given the absence of a coalition  
7 permanent presence on the border and the absence of an  
8 Iraqi border authority, often a point of difficulty.

9 Humanitarian supplies to Iraq from Iran, given the  
10 expectation of refugee difficulties and subsequently.

11 Frequent cross-border incidents, which arose at  
12 varying degrees of severity, but very early on after the  
13 invasion started, a rocket fell on the Abadan refinery  
14 and it was a question whether this was a British/Iraqi,  
15 misplaced Iranian exercise and we were involved, as an  
16 embassy, in trying to defuse that.

17 The return of Iran/Iraq war bodies from Iraq,  
18 a matter of great emotional concern to Iranians together  
19 with the issue of surviving Iranian prisoners of war in  
20 Iraq, whom the Iranians wanted back.

21 Later on, in 2003, the question arose of reviving  
22 the practice of large-scale pilgrimage visits to Iraqi  
23 holy places by Iranians and discussion of Iranian aid.  
24 That was a big topic later on, together with arms  
25 trafficking. So a very busy agenda between us, with

1           those subjects appearing at different phases with  
2           greater or lesser degrees of intensity.

3   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   So you were giving a pretty  
4           comprehensive picture, in terms of the likely  
5           consequences and what issues are going to be.   So London  
6           was aware of those issues?

7   SIR RICHARD DALTON:   Yes, and London took care to send its  
8           own representatives to beef up the dialogue which the  
9           embassy was able to maintain.   So the visit of the  
10          Foreign Office Minister, Mr O'Brien.   I think it was  
11          13 April -- was a crucial step in establishing  
12          a high-level dialogue.

13                 Also, at that stage, as a new British Ambassador,  
14                 I was an object of mild interest and I was able to get  
15                 access to Iranian ministers in a way that was not  
16                 possible before or since.   We were part of a coalition  
17                 invading the next-door country, so this gave me the  
18                 opportunity to meet the Iranian Minister of Defence, the  
19                 speaker of the Iranian Majlis, their Parliament, and  
20                 various other senior people.   It was something of  
21                 a golden age for access, which we didn't enjoy later on,  
22                 as the atmosphere deteriorated.

23   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   That is something my colleagues will  
24           pick up.

25   THE CHAIRMAN:   Thanks.   Lawrence, over to you.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was the time of  
2 President Khatami and you gave us the concentric circles  
3 earlier. Was your primary access to the government,  
4 rather than the Supreme Leader?

5 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I had no access to the Supreme Leader  
6 and no access to his office or his network of  
7 representatives. All our access was regulated and  
8 controlled through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and,  
9 indeed, most of our access was with the Iranian Ministry  
10 of Foreign Affairs.

11 When I got instructions to make high-level  
12 representations on particularly important issues, like  
13 Iranian support for some violence in Iraq, then I could  
14 go and see the head of the Supreme National Security  
15 Council Secretariat, Hassan Rouhani, who was a key  
16 figure.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What I'm trying to get at is: did  
18 you feel that you were getting one section of the  
19 Iranian power structures' view, but there were other  
20 views to which it was much harder for you to get access  
21 about and which possibly you couldn't be sure?

22 SIR RICHARD DALTON: One got glimpses of those other centres  
23 of powers' views from the people we were talking to in  
24 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supreme National  
25 Security Council, because they wanted us to know that

1 the kinds of issues we were pressing on the Iranians  
2 were difficult to achieve internally because of the need  
3 to mediate, to negotiate internally between people with  
4 a potentially different point of view.

5 The other thing is that, following the lead of the  
6 Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, we knew what hardliners were  
7 thinking because of the outpourings in the media and  
8 from statements by senior figures, who represented  
9 a more hardline view than that of President Khatami and  
10 his government.

11 So we were not short of information on the kinds of  
12 attitudes that were being adopted beyond circles where  
13 we had direct access.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was a time of considerable  
15 tension within Iran between moderates and hardliners.  
16 Were you given any arguments to the effect that: this  
17 sort of thing will strengthen the hardliners and make it  
18 more difficult for a more moderate Iran to develop and  
19 emerge?

20 SIR RICHARD DALTON: No, we were often given arguments that,  
21 unless we took on board an Iranian point of view, it  
22 would make it harder for Iranian moderates to win an  
23 argument entirely about Iraq, but we didn't get the  
24 argument that invading Iraq and all that flowed from it  
25 was somehow an obstacle to reform in Iran or the

1 evolution of Iranian domestic politics.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, part of the attitude in the  
3 rest of the region was that, actually, the United States  
4 and Britain was about to do Iran's job for them. What  
5 Iran had failed to achieve during the 1980s, the  
6 United States was about to achieve in 2003 by getting  
7 rid of a regime that they hated and, moreover, creating  
8 the conditions for a Shia majority rule.

9 Did you get any sense that they did see this as  
10 a great opportunity looming, aside from what you  
11 mentioned before about saying it really ought to be done  
12 by the Iraqi people themselves? Clearly, the Iraqi  
13 people hadn't been able to do that. So behind these  
14 arguments, was there a sense of a great opportunity  
15 developing for Iran?

16 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Absolutely, and that point arose from  
17 both sides. We would point it out, as a prelude  
18 to seeking cooperation with the steps that the  
19 coalition was taking to try to hand over authority later  
20 on in 2003. We said that cooperation by Iran was in  
21 Iran's interests, to consolidate what had already been  
22 achieved strategically for Iran by the action which had  
23 been taken.

24 I mean, there was a considerable overlap of aims and  
25 objectives and there were times when even the members of

1 the IRGC, I believe, were prepared to admit that. We  
2 got some signals to that effect.

3 First, that it should be a united Iraq, it would be  
4 a good neighbour. Second, that there should be no  
5 prolonged foreign presence and that we should avoid  
6 clashes with Iran. We sought to minimise overspill on  
7 to Iranian territory, we were concerned to end the MEK  
8 threat. We were working on the humanitarian issues,  
9 which concerned them. We did a lot to protect holy  
10 sites, which was a major concern of the Iranians, and so  
11 on and on forth. So there were many occasions when the  
12 Iranians would admit this overlap.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were there ways in which they could  
14 encourage certain aspects of the coalition activity, for  
15 example, as the -- as we move through 2003 and looking  
16 forward in terms of what the new Iraqi Government itself  
17 might have applied, where they could start to agree that  
18 perhaps this was a move in a direction that would suit  
19 their objectives?

20 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I think that they started to have  
21 doubts in May 2003 as to whether it was going to evolve  
22 in a way that benefited them. I mean, right from the  
23 start they were preparing for evolution of the situation  
24 in a way that would potentially harm Iran. I mean, they  
25 were sending a limited number of intelligence officers

1           into Iraq. They were also sending in some IRGC, both to  
2           probe what was going on around the MEK, but also to  
3           establish links and connections with different political  
4           actors.

5           So against the background of the rhetorical  
6           condemnation of what we were doing in Iraq, there was  
7           some political encouragement for elements, such as the  
8           IRGC, to build up a position from which they could take  
9           action if Iranian interests required it.

10          So there was, right from the start, a certain  
11          duality in the Iranian approach and they were pressing  
12          us during Mr O'Brien's visit, for example, on the  
13          duration of the stay of foreign troops and Mr O'Brien  
14          said that they would be out in a couple of years.

15          I think what happened, as 2003 evolved, was that the  
16          Iranians were shaken by the setting up of the Coalition  
17          Provisional Administration and the non-appearance of an  
18          Iraqi authority at that stage. So those who were  
19          arguing within Iran that Iran needed to build up  
20          a position from which it could exert pressure on the  
21          coalition to go got some encouragement at that stage.

22          So they were telling us, for example, that the  
23          coalition was not filling the political gap, that the  
24          Iraqi interim administration should be developed much  
25          more rapidly than we were anticipating under Bremer.

1           They were building up contacts with emerging Iraqi  
2           leaders, favouring the Shia but basically dealing with  
3           everyone. But in those very early months, I don't think  
4           they were a significant influence on developments in  
5           Iraq.

6   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to in a moment -- we  
7           will come on to the particularities of that involvement.

8           Just in terms of just the development of what you  
9           call this duality of policies, which has, I think,  
10          puzzled many people who don't know Iran so well, on the  
11          one hand, there are opportunities; on the other hand,  
12          they start to get involved in, as you said, developing  
13          the position and allow for maybe the destabilisation of  
14          Iraq.

15          At what point did you suspect that there was this  
16          chance that -- or there was evidence that Iran might  
17          seek to undermine the CPA directly or generally start to  
18          get much more involved in Iraqi affairs?

19   SIR RICHARD DALTON: They became a player in that sense,  
20          once they perceived that the United States was settling  
21          down for a long stay and once order had seriously broken  
22          down. In putting oneself in their shoes for a second,  
23          they didn't know what the outcome would be, whether we  
24          would succeed in our aims. They didn't know who would  
25          come out on top, if order continued to deteriorate and

1 different factions were fighting each other. Thirdly,  
2 they wanted to bolster the position of the Shia, but the  
3 Shia were fighting amongst themselves.

4 So I think what developed fairly soon was not  
5 a policy to destabilise Iraq, but a policy of  
6 reinsurance in case Iraq went seriously bad and, once  
7 disorder had begun, a policy of involvement to  
8 strengthen favoured parties while not losing touch with  
9 others who, if events went in a different way, might  
10 after all emerge on top.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Their strategic objective throughout would be  
12 to prevent the fragmentation of Iraq, for reasons you  
13 have already given.

14 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Absolutely, and to get the  
15 United States out and for Iraq to be a good neighbour  
16 under a stable government with the Kurds in  
17 a subordinate position rather than a dominant position.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So they are hedging their bets?

19 SIR RICHARD DALTON: They are hedging their bets.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's turn to another issue from  
21 around this time. One of the arguments that was being  
22 put to us is that, for a while at least, the evidence of  
23 what was happening to Iraq, because of its weapons of  
24 mass destruction, the negotiations with Libya, which was  
25 later on, encouraged the Iranians to play down, even to

1 hold back on, their own nuclear programme, and you will  
2 obviously be aware of this famous US intelligence  
3 estimate (NIE) that suggested that, in 2003, they decided  
4 against weaponising their programme.

5 Did you see any evidence of that at the time?

6 SIR RICHARD DALTON: No, and I don't think the evidence is  
7 necessarily compelling, looking back on it. One  
8 interpretation of the NIE on the nuclear matter, is to  
9 say that they had moved to a certain point on  
10 weaponisation studies<sup>2</sup>, but that they had no fissile  
11 material. There was no point in taking weaponisation  
12 studies much further forward.

13 Certainly, they didn't want to aggravate their  
14 relations with the United States at a time when they  
15 didn't feel confident the United States wouldn't attack  
16 them at some point. So it is possible that they held  
17 back at that stage.

18 But holding back at that stage, either because there  
19 was no immediate need to do more on weaponisation,  
20 whereas the emphasis at that stage should be on the  
21 development of fissile material through enrichment, or  
22 because of a political motive about not wanting to  
23 exacerbate relations with the United States, would be  
24 consistent with the idea that their nuclear programme  
25 was primarily defensive anyway and that it is a long

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<sup>2</sup>Witness's note: Before 2003.

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1 matter digesting the technologies and evolving weapons  
2 systems, and they didn't perceive any particular urgency  
3 about building up that defensive capacity at the time.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there are also reports that --  
5 and indeed they have been half confirmed -- that around  
6 that time there was an effort by the Iranians to develop  
7 some sort of new relationship with the United States,  
8 proposals through the Swiss and so on, that suggested  
9 that, on a broad range of issues, this might be a good  
10 time to start talking.

11 Did you again see any evidence of that? Would it  
12 surprise you if that had been the case?

13 SIR RICHARD DALTON: The view I took at the time was that  
14 this was a trial balloon that had been authorised  
15 by the Supreme Leader who was related to one of the  
16 senior reformist officials who was pressing this line:  
17 once the President had endorsed the  
18 idea of putting out feelers of this kind to the  
19 United States, the Supreme Leader was prepared to  
20 acquiesce in it.

21 But looking at what the Supreme Leader was saying  
22 about the United States on 11 April, that same speech,  
23 looking at the consistent signals to the United Kingdom  
24 Government through our quite close consultations with  
25 the Iranians, I saw no evidence of a system-wide

1 determination in Iran, including all the power centres  
2 that would have to be consulted, to improve relations  
3 with the United States.

4 So I think what happened was that this very  
5 interesting proposal was formulated by a ginger group  
6 within the Iranian foreign policy establishment and the  
7 Leader said, "Fine, let's see what the reaction  
8 is". He didn't say, "Yes, this is my policy. The  
9 Iranian state is going to go for this policy."

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: As you know, the Americans totally  
11 ignored it. If they had come back and said, "This is  
12 really quite interesting," which some think they should  
13 have done, what do you think would have been then the  
14 reaction in Iran? Would this have been a source of  
15 confusion or a source of enthusiasm?

16 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I think they should have done,  
17 certainly. The United States mishandled it and if they  
18 had set up some secret channel to explore it, I think it  
19 would quite soon have broken down into a series of  
20 discrete discussions rather like the European Union was  
21 having.

22 Throughout this period we were pressing on the  
23 Middle East peace process, weapons of mass destruction,  
24 terrorism and human rights. The Iranians also put into  
25 their suggestions for talks with the United States issues  
26 like Lebanon and Palestine.

1           So I think what would have happened is that a secret  
2           channel would have started looking sequentially at these  
3           questions and trying to see whether it was possible to  
4           bridge the gaps.

5           There was a precedent for this, in that the Iranians  
6           and the United States had set up channels to deal with  
7           the issues arising from 9/11 and the invasion of  
8           Afghanistan, and cooperation was quite close and quite  
9           successful, and meetings in Geneva contributed to  
10          co-ordinating Iranian with coalition policies.

11          So it would not have been impossible for the  
12          United States and would have been practicable and  
13          a reasonable thing for the Iranians to do to take it to  
14          the next stage.

15          I suspect that what would have happened at such  
16          a discussion is that there would have been an uneven  
17          pattern of progress. It might have been possible to  
18          move forward on some issues but, on others, they would  
19          have got completely stuck in the same way as the  
20          European Union got stuck in its dialogue on parallel  
21          subjects.

22   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it should have been taken. It  
23          might have led to some insight, possibly coordination on  
24          some areas, but it would have been hard to get  
25          a complete transformation?

1 SIR RICHARD DALTON: It would have been very hard to get  
2 a complete transformation, given the hardness of  
3 positions in Iran and the hardness of positions in the  
4 United States. I mean, the United States' view right  
5 the way through to the end of the Bush presidency was  
6 that Iran knew what it had to do to bring its conduct  
7 into conformity with international laws and with  
8 United States' interests and that they should get on and  
9 do it and it wasn't a matter of negotiation. There  
10 wasn't going to be give in the United States' position  
11 in order to get the improvements which they sought in  
12 Iranian positions.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The final question for the moment:  
14 were you ever given messages that the Iraqis (sic)  
15 wished to get through to the United States?

16 SIR RICHARD DALTON: That the Iranians wished to get through  
17 to the United States?

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

19 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes, on some discrete subjects that I'm  
20 not at liberty to talk about at the moment. The UK was  
21 keen in that run-in not to get involved as a mediator.  
22 There were signs that the United States might be seeking  
23 contacts with Iran through back channels. I don't think  
24 these got anywhere significant.

25 But the Iranians knew that the value of dealing

1           closely with the UK was that we were a gateway to  
2           a number of countries and groups of countries which they  
3           wished to influence, the United States being first  
4           amongst them.

5           So we were in a privileged position, given the  
6           closeness of our alliance with the United States, to  
7           interpret what the United States was up to to Iran and  
8           vice versa. But I was careful, the British Government  
9           was careful, not to speak beyond its own brief.

10   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks very much.

11   THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic, over to you.

12   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir Richard, you have put a lot of  
13           emphasis on what you describe as the primarily defensive  
14           approach of Iran and the defensive motivation of its  
15           nuclear programme. Perhaps I can ask both of you -- and  
16           perhaps give you a break, ask Sir Geoffrey to answer  
17           this one first -- how that squares both with Iran's very  
18           aggressive approach towards Israel and the threats by  
19           President Ahmadinejad to wipe Israel off the map<sup>3</sup> and,  
20           more broadly, with Iran's ambitions to be a regional  
21           power. I mean neither of those comes across as  
22           primarily defensive. Would you like to comment first?

23   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Yes. Thank you. I, myself, would be  
24           a bit cautious about characterising Iranian -- the  
25           Iranian nuclear programme as defensive, partly because,

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<sup>3</sup> Secretariat note: This quotation, from a speech attributed to President Ahmadinejad on 26 October 2005, is disputed.

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1 of course, the Iranians themselves deny they have  
2 a nuclear weapons programme. So it is a bit hard to  
3 talk about that.

4 I'm also cautious about the way we interpret Iranian  
5 statements, including the numerous statements that you  
6 refer to by President Ahmadinejad and other Iranian  
7 leaders in respect of Israel. Certainly there are  
8 threats. I would just be very cautious about including  
9 whether or not they intend to act on those threats.

10 I think what I would say is that the overall Iranian  
11 strategic posture is probably defensive. I have heard  
12 Iranian leaders talk about it. In other words, I don't  
13 think myself that Iran is looking to attack other  
14 countries. I don't think Iran -- I'm talking about in  
15 the post-revolutionary period -- I don't think Iran is  
16 looking to take the territory of other countries. But  
17 we know that Iran would like to subvert other countries.  
18 So I just myself am cautious before I use the word  
19 "defensive".

20 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I don't think any nuclear weapons  
21 state, or aspirant nuclear weapons state, thinks about  
22 its weapons programme as anything other than defensive.  
23 I think Iran would be exactly the same. But certainly  
24 they wished to achieve a position of great influence  
25 within their region. They want to constrain their

1 neighbours and other countries of significance to them  
2 into taking decisions which are consistent with Iran's  
3 interests and, for that, they want national power and  
4 they also want an aura of political respect, which they  
5 feel they don't have by being excluded from the councils  
6 of those who determine the fate of the region.

7 So, yes, a civil nuclear development programme and  
8 its potential extension into the military domain is part  
9 of Iran's sense of projecting strength for primarily  
10 political purposes.

11 But I agree with Geoffrey that the "wipe Israel from  
12 the pages of time" remark was not a remark that intended  
13 aggressive intent or signalled a desire to use nuclear  
14 weapons or to launch any conventional attack on Israel.

15 I believe them when they say -- and they are quite  
16 open about this -- that their dispositions in Lebanon  
17 and in support of Palestinian groups are for ideological  
18 reasons, that resistance is the right of peoples  
19 oppressed by Israel. I think that is a major motive for  
20 them.

21 Second, that it enables them to have a kind of  
22 forward defence, a deterrent capability, in other words,  
23 as they don't have a significant conventional capability  
24 in relation to their potential enemies.

25 Their operations in Palestine and in Lebanon give

1           them the opportunity to inflict harm on those who might  
2           be tempted to attack them.

3   SIR RODERIC LYNE:  There are those who have argued -- indeed  
4           continue to argue -- from the perspective of London or  
5           Washington or western Europe that, in the round, Iran's  
6           approach to the region, not just its nuclear ambitions,  
7           though that's one part of it, but its support, for  
8           example, for terrorist activities against Israel, its  
9           perception -- or the way that it is perceived by Arab  
10          neighbours, particularly in the Gulf, as a threat and an  
11          opponent -- means that, at least in regional terms, Iran  
12          is not just seen as defensive but has potentially  
13          ambitious, expansionist regional ambitions, wishes to  
14          have, as you yourself just said, a more dominant voice  
15          in the area.  But this is not in the strategic interests  
16          of the west that, until 2003, Iraq, whatever the defects  
17          of Iraq, acted as something of a bulwark against this,  
18          which has since been removed.

19                 Is that an accurate characterisation of the way that  
20          London -- at the beginning and indeed during this  
21          operation -- was viewing Iran's aspirations?

22   SIR RICHARD DALTON:  Yes, except that I would take out the  
23          word "expansionary" as Geoffrey pointed out.  I don't  
24          think they are after territorial expansion and, from  
25          what I observed, their operations in Gulf territories

1 were more religious and cultural than they were  
2 political.

3 They were often interpreted as building a platform  
4 which could become political in terms of subversion, but  
5 they weren't caught, during my period in Iran, actually  
6 seeking to subvert their Gulf neighbours by building up  
7 a platform for terrorist or political subversion.

8 But, yes, I think that is, broadly speaking, how  
9 Iran was viewed. I think we were also self-aware enough  
10 to know that the arrival of such a huge body of western  
11 forces in Iraq, completing to a degree the encirclement  
12 of Iran by western forces, which they have been fearful  
13 of for a long period of their history, that that was  
14 going to elicit some form of reaction and some form of  
15 pressure to ensure we didn't take certain policy  
16 decisions which were open to us at that point and which  
17 indeed were being actively called for by some more  
18 extreme but minority political circles in the  
19 United States.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In very simple terms, the action that we  
21 took upset the previous strategic balance. Would that  
22 be fair to say?

23 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes.

24 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Yes.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had we thought about that fully enough

1 before we took it, do you think?

2 SIR RICHARD DALTON: No, I don't think we did, because  
3 I think we overestimated the degree to which we could  
4 replace the former Iraq with a new Iraq which would also  
5 have that kind of a role in the region. I think we  
6 overestimated in the UK the capabilities of the  
7 United States superpower to lead and complete this kind  
8 of effort.

9 We certainly did not give considerable forethought  
10 to the effect on Iran.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Turning now more specifically to the role  
12 that Iran played in Iraq throughout the period, 2003 to  
13 2009 -- and you changed over in the middle of this in  
14 the embassy in Tehran -- we have heard a lot of evidence  
15 from earlier witnesses about the active support that was  
16 coming to Iranian Shi'ite militias from Iran, obtaining  
17 equipment, and so on, and the suggestion that Iran,  
18 during this period, came into a posture of very actively  
19 promoting the sectarian conflict within Iraq. Now, we  
20 discussed earlier in this session the extent to which  
21 that might be characterised as destabilisation. Let's  
22 leave that on one side.

23 The evidence we have had was very substantial  
24 interference, meddling, very actively, inside the  
25 turbulence of Iraq.

1           Now, was this a constant throughout the period --  
2           I mean, Sir Richard just said that fairly soon after the  
3           invasion, you did see that their activities began to  
4           change -- or was there a step change in Iranian activity  
5           in Iraq at some point and why?

6           I think that spans both of you. Perhaps we could  
7           start with Sir Richard and then move on to Sir Geoffrey.

8   SIR RICHARD DALTON: It is very hard to chart. The first  
9           thing to say is that, yes, I think that characterisation  
10          you gave is broadly accurate, if you are looking at the  
11          south. I don't think it was quite as substantial as  
12          that throughout the territory and for a prolonged  
13          period. But you would have to analyse the incidents in  
14          greater detail.

15   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would you take the south up as far as  
16          Baghdad and the Shi'ites in Baghdad?

17   SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes, I would. I think, as I said  
18          earlier, the Iranian perception that it wasn't going to  
19          be a quick in and out and that disorder had broken out  
20          in the second half of the summer of 2003 gave a boost to  
21          those in Iran who considered that they had to be more  
22          active in building a platform to protect their friends,  
23          counteract their potential enemies and make sure that  
24          the coalition felt some pain and didn't, therefore, dig  
25          in for a long stay.

1           Certainly I perceived that later in 2003, as far as  
2           UK relations with Iran were concerned, once we had got  
3           through a very bad passage over the desire of the  
4           Argentines to extradite from the UK a senior Iranian  
5           diplomat who was studying in the UK, Hadi Soleimanpour.  
6           This caused a major crisis in relations between Britain  
7           and Iran and I was very nearly expelled over it and there  
8           was a temptation, which we actively warned Iran against  
9           but possibly they did fall for, to use an Iraq card  
10          against us in the context of that dispute.

11           Now, I have no way of knowing whether that was  
12          indeed the case, but they did have a motive for  
13          particular hostility to us.

14           I think they also felt round about that time of the  
15          Soleimanpour crisis that there were a number of  
16          occasions when the coalition had simply not taken into  
17          account sufficiently Iranian bilateral and- legitimate -  
18          concerns in what was going on in Iraq, and that it was  
19          time to put pressure on us. There were IRGC officers  
20          held without due process by the United States between  
21          April and the autumn. There was --

22          SIR RODERIC LYNE: Of --

23          SIR RICHARD DALTON: 2003.

24          SIR RODERIC LYNE: What were they doing? Should they have  
25          been there in the first place?

1 SIR RICHARD DALTON: They shouldn't have been there. It  
2 later emerged --

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So they weren't the innocent parties?

4 SIR RICHARD DALTON: -- when these people were extracted  
5 from the prisoner of war system, which was pretty  
6 overwhelmed at that period, it became apparent that they  
7 were IRGC officers and NCOs engaged in a probing mission  
8 against the MEK and picked up 25 kilometres or  
9 thereabouts inside Iran. So they shouldn't have been  
10 there.

11 Their excuse was the one I have been mentioning,  
12 which was severe doubt that the Americans were going to  
13 proceed against the MEK with any degree of resolution.  
14 Indeed, they might wish to preserve the MEK as  
15 a potential tool against them. Therefore, it was  
16 incumbent on those tasked with protecting Iranian  
17 security to take their own measures, that was the  
18 Iranian justification. They simply didn't believe us  
19 that we were going to be resolute in supervising and  
20 dismantling the MEK. One of their particular grievances  
21 at this period in late summer 2003 was the persistence  
22 of propaganda broadcasting by the MEK from Camp Ashraf,  
23 despite the fact that the coalition was maintaining that  
24 it had everything tightly under control and was not  
25 going to let the MEK do anything hostile to Iran.

1           So I think the people who thought that there was  
2           good reason to put military pressure on the coalition by  
3           supporting subversion got a little boost but, both then  
4           and later, Iranian activity was one strand only in the  
5           disorder and, to jump further forward -- but it does  
6           stick in my mind, a particular United States assessment  
7           that, of the different strands in the disorder -- simple  
8           crime and thuggery, sectarian squabbling amongst  
9           themselves, the post-Ba'athist insurgency, people trying  
10          to get back at the coalition in the name of the former  
11          regime and Iranian-inspired activity -- the Iranian  
12          strand was not the worst.

13       SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, but they were throwing fuel on the  
14          fire.

15       SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes.

16       SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we carry the story forward a bit  
17          towards the time that you changed over, in 2004/2005 it  
18          became increasingly obvious that they were providing  
19          very active support for groups. Is that correct?

20       SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes. But again, one has to keep it in  
21          proportion. It wasn't mission critical, whereas the  
22          Ba'athist insurgency was. That's how I perceived it  
23          from the information available to me. So it shouldn't  
24          have been taking place. There was a moment in 2005 when  
25          we had to announce that Iranian provision of IED

1           technology was probably responsible for the deaths of  
2           eight UK soldiers. So we were finally goaded to the  
3           point where we had to come out into the open about this,  
4           but in the preceding period, we were not alleging that  
5           the Iranian strand was the dominant one or was mission  
6           critical.

7   SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is not a question of whether it was  
8           dominant, it is a question of the extent to which it  
9           existed, the extent to which they were behaving  
10          aggressively and exploiting this situation.

11                 Now, Sir Geoffrey, we have heard from  
12          Dominic Asquith, who I suppose was Ambassador in Baghdad  
13          when you were in Tehran.

14   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Just at the beginning.

15   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just at the beginning. He described the  
16          summer of 2006 as effectively the battle for the soul of  
17          Iraq and within that context he talked of the Iranian  
18          influence with the Sadrists, particularly with the  
19          Sadrist brigades, as being extensive. We also heard  
20          from Frank Baker that a high point in his view of  
21          Iranian influence was probably in 2006/2007, after which  
22          he thought that the Iranians had suffered some fairly  
23          big strategic setbacks in Iraq. How did you see it from  
24          Tehran?

25   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Very much in line with that process

1           that you have described. When I arrived in Tehran in  
2           the spring of 2006, all the phenomena that you have  
3           described were very much in place.

4           To me, the most interesting thing that happened over  
5           the course of my three years, so through 2007/2008 --  
6           was the beginning of a sense of Iraqi push-back against  
7           what some Iraqis regarded as excessive Iranian influence  
8           and action in Iraqi --

9   SIR RODERIC LYNE: By Iraqis, you include Shi'ites in this?

10   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Indeed I do.

11   SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's the significant thing; Sunni  
12           push-back is not surprising.

13   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: The main, obviously, development in  
14           Iraq was the development of a legitimate,  
15           democratically-elected, eventually, Iraqi Government and  
16           the gradual extension of the authority of that  
17           government and what was interesting to us, observing  
18           it from over the border, was the beginnings of  
19           a feeling, as you say, amongst some politicians, not  
20           excluding Shia politicians in Iraq, that Iranian  
21           influence had -- was excessive and needed to be  
22           resisted.

23   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was it in particular the IRGC's  
24           Qods Force that was leading this charge?

25   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: We believed that.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You had evidence?

2 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: The job of Qods Force was to operate  
3 externally. Their job was to maintain the IRGC's --  
4 therefore, the Iranian revolution's -- links with their  
5 partners overseas.

6 So, for example, they were responsible for the  
7 Iranians' relationship with Lebanese Hezbollah, one  
8 of -- from the Iranian perspective, one of the most  
9 important subsidiaries of the Iranian revolution in the  
10 Middle East.

11 So they were, I suppose we would call it the kind of  
12 relationship managers for the Iranian relationship with  
13 some of the key groups in Iraq. That's what we  
14 believed, yes.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: "Relationship" sounds rather polite and  
16 diplomatic, the substance of that relationship was  
17 training people to send IEDs against our troops --

18 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: That was part of it. It was a broader  
19 political and, yes, military -- but political and  
20 military aspects to it.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

22 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: "Relationship", I'm using that term in  
23 a neutral sense.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir Richard has already described one  
25 part of the Iranian motivation, the MEK. To what extent

1 did either of you feel that the Iranians were seeking,  
2 by assisting attacks on the Multi-National Forces, to  
3 tie down the Americans, to exercise pressure on the  
4 Americans, to show the Americans that they could help to  
5 cause them pain, at a time when the Americans were  
6 trying to put pressure on Iran as they had been doing  
7 for many years?

8 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: This goes to, I think, a really key  
9 aspect of this, which was the duality that Sir Richard  
10 has referred to. Maybe it is more than that. By the  
11 time I was in Tehran and talking to the Iranians as best  
12 I could about these things, I had the impression that  
13 although some in the Iranian system recognised and  
14 understood that their true national interest was in an  
15 Iraq that was actually stable, but nevertheless the  
16 presence of westerners, as they would describe them, in  
17 forces in Iraq, presented Iran with an opportunity, an  
18 opportunity to put some pressure on the west in the kind  
19 of forward defensive posture that Sir Richard has  
20 described quite accurately, I think.

21 So during my time my interlocutors, even in places  
22 like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, used to make  
23 pretty clear threats about the potential that Iranian  
24 allies in Iraq had to cause the west discomfort and  
25 I thought it was one of the objectives of Iranian policy

1           that the coalition in general, and the US in particular,  
2           should not be allowed to leave Iraq with their heads  
3           held high or having been able legitimately to claim  
4           that their mission had been a success.

5   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   Sir Richard, do you want to comment on  
6           that?

7   SIR RICHARD DALTON:   No, I agree with that and that fits  
8           very much with the Supreme Leader's keynote speech of  
9           11 April 2003, as to the nature of Iran's duty in face  
10          of this kind of claim.

11                 But they -- their objective was never to destabilise  
12           Iraq to the point at which the whole  
13           enterprise would fail. They feared anarchy and I also  
14           believe they feared that, if the handover to Iraq or  
15           Iraqi ministers, politicians, was to fail completely,  
16           that would be the worst possible situation for Iran,  
17           because that would allow the Americans an excuse to stay  
18           very much longer.

19                 So they were seeking to hurt the coalition without  
20           preventing the takeover of Iraq by an Iraqi regime, that  
21           would be a successful and a good neighbour in the long  
22           run.

23   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   When you said, as you have said several  
24           times, that they wanted Iraq as a good neighbour and  
25           when Sir Geoffrey says they basically want Iraq to be

1           stable -- indeed, you both said this; they didn't want  
2           it to collapse -- underneath those headlines, "stable"  
3           and "good neighbour", would it be right to say that they  
4           wanted Iraq to be weak rather than strong, to be run by  
5           Shi'ites over whom they felt they had a degree of  
6           control? They wanted essentially a stable Iraq, a good  
7           neighbour, meaning "good" on their terms. Was that  
8           really their prime objective?

9   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I had a few conversations with Iranians  
10           during my time, which very much reflected that, yes.  
11           They never went as far as to say "We want Iraq to be  
12           weak" but when they said "good neighbour", they meant  
13           not a threat --

14   SIR RODERIC LYNE: They wouldn't say that in public anyway.

15   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: They very often said: "In the days of  
16           Saddam Hussein, Iraq represented a threat to us. That  
17           must never happen again". There was also an economic  
18           aspect of this, which we haven't mentioned, which was  
19           important, that, from the Iranian perspective, Iraq  
20           represented an important trading partner, a sort of  
21           smuggling partner, which was important, if I can use  
22           that expression.

23           There was also a perception, if I might add, of Iraq  
24           as a potential for violence, terrorism, illegal arms,  
25           weapons, coming into Iran and contributing to

1           instability within Iran which went wider than the  
2           anxieties about the MEK organisation to which  
3           Sir Richard has referred.

4   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   Final question --

5   SIR RICHARD DALTON:   Can I add to that?

6   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   Yes, please do.

7   SIR RICHARD DALTON:   I think they wanted a strong  
8           government.  They didn't want a weak government, but  
9           they wanted the power of the Iraqi state to project  
10          power in the region and externally to be weak.  Because,  
11          in order to maximise their benefits and minimise the  
12          risks from a resurgent Iraq, they had to have an  
13          effective government that would be able to control its  
14          territory, would be able to strike deals that stuck,  
15          would adhere to OPEC quotas, all these ways in which  
16          they felt that their interests in Iraq interlocked with  
17          their own.

18   SIR RODERIC LYNE:   I think we are going to take a coffee  
19          break in a minute.  Can I just round off this subject by  
20          going back to the consultations that we made at the  
21          outset?

22                 Sir Richard, you described the consultations that we  
23                 had with the Iranians before the conflict began and our  
24                 attempts to assure them that there would be no  
25                 surprises, Iranians assuring us that they wouldn't be

1 crossing the borders, an assurance that clearly wasn't  
2 kept. They didn't send armed formations across the  
3 borders, but they did cross the borders. "Active  
4 neutrality" was the phrase you used -- were our  
5 assumptions about Iran in 2003, pre-campaign, too  
6 complacent, in the light of what we knew at the time?  
7 Let's not apply too much hindsight to this. We had the  
8 former Prime Minister saying to us, describing that the  
9 view of Iran was:

10 "It might have its interests but it wasn't going to  
11 be provocative."

12 Should we, in fact, have been surprised, given  
13 everything one knew about Iran and the history of the  
14 previous 10, 20, 30, 50 years -- should we have been  
15 surprised that Iran actually sought to exploit the  
16 situation created by the invasion and the campaign and  
17 the toppling of Saddam, or should that Iranian  
18 aspiration have reasonably been part of the calculations  
19 that have been made before we took the decision to go  
20 in?

21 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I don't think we were surprised at the  
22 turn Iranian behaviour took and I think we did whatever  
23 we could to counter it, but we weren't in a strong  
24 position to exert leverage upon Iran.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have had a number of witnesses telling

1 us that they were surprised that we had not expected  
2 that Iran would become so active in support of fighting  
3 groups within Iraq, but you weren't surprised at that?

4 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Well, let's take it in stages because  
5 we are trying to summarise many years and there are  
6 different kinds of activity. I was not surprised that  
7 they should seek to send intelligence officers and when  
8 we made our first substantial protests about this during  
9 John Sawers' visit in July, bringing back his  
10 impressions from Bremer's camp, we were talking about  
11 scores, that didn't seem to me a source of any surprise  
12 at all.

13 Moving on, the early signs of support for  
14 Moqtadr al-Sadr in 2003, didn't seem to me to be a source  
15 of any surprise. Jumping forward, when we got to the  
16 major support for Moqtadr al-Sadr in April 2004, when  
17 Moqtadr al-Sadr responded to the arrest of his aide,  
18 Ali Yaghoubi and launched attacks on the coalition  
19 around Najaf and got very close, in so doing, to  
20 endangering the holy places, that did surprise me that  
21 Iran was caught to such a degree in bed with  
22 Moqtadr al-Sadr, because I couldn't see that that was in  
23 Iran's interests.

24 Then again, with substantial support for Moqtadr  
25 al-Sadr later on, it was never quite clear to me

1           why this was going to be in their interests because of  
2           the risk that it would create such internecine conflict  
3           within Shia communities, let alone by provoking the  
4           Sunnis, that Iran's overall aims in Iraq would be  
5           defeated.

6   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I put a very crude question to you?  
7           If you had been advising the Prime Minister in,  
8           say, February 2003, would you have said to him, among  
9           other things, "Do be aware that Iran will have a very  
10          strong interest in meddling rather extensively in the  
11          situation in Iraq after you have toppled  
12          Saddam Hussein"?

13                 Would that have been something that you warned we  
14                 should have been watching out for?

15   SIR RICHARD DALTON: I would have to go back to exactly what  
16           I said. I can't give you an answer off-the-cuff about  
17           that. None of us anticipated the degree of breakdown of  
18           order. I think this is an important point. Although  
19           the prior planning was inadequate, the different stages  
20           by which disorder broke down came to me as a much  
21           greater shock than any sense that Iran was seeking to  
22           exploit that breakdown in order.

23                 For example, in March, ten or so days after the  
24           invasion, in my contacts with the head of the Supreme  
25           Council for the Islamic revolution in Iraq, Ayatollah

1           Mohammad Bakr al-Hakim, I was asked directly what our  
2           plans were for policing, how would the vacuum in Iraq's  
3           cities, with the disappearance of Saddam's forces, be  
4           filled? I had no answer from the hugely voluminous  
5           briefing material which I was being sent from London at  
6           the time. I referred for instructions and got no answer  
7           and when I pressed the point, it was clear that at  
8           this stage in early April 2003 the question of policing  
9           was simply in the "too difficult" tray and we were not  
10          prepared to look, for example, at the offers of SCIRI to  
11          put its militia at the service of the coalition in  
12          trying to ensure that the breakdown of order was  
13          contained in Iraqi cities where SCIRI was in a strong  
14          position.

15                 That came to me as a much larger shock, this  
16                 incapacity of the coalition.

17   SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. Sir Geoffrey, I don't know if  
18                 you want to comment on this last point, it is a bit  
19                 before your period, but do feel free.

20   SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I don't think very helpfully. By the  
21                 time I came on the scene, as you say, we had had three  
22                 years of Iranian activity, shall we say, inside Iraq, so  
23                 no one was surprised at all. The question was what to  
24                 do about it.

25   THE CHAIRMAN: Let's pick that up after a break. We will

1 break for about ten minutes.

2 (11.18 am)

3 (Short break)

4 (11.29 am)

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Let's resume and I'll ask Sir Martin Gilbert  
6 to pick up the questions.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned, Sir Richard, the  
8 Iranians favouring the Shia, but basically dealing with  
9 everyone and my question relates to the Sunni, the  
10 involvement with the Sunni, and essentially to what  
11 extent did Iran try to influence the Sunni groups and  
12 how successful were they?

13 SIR RICHARD DALTON: They would have nothing to do with the  
14 remnants of the Ba'athists. One of the reasons for  
15 their ramping up pressures on us in mid-June 2003 was  
16 that they felt that we were dragging our heels in handing  
17 over Iraq. In 2004, one of the reasons was that they  
18 thought the new government, headed by Allawi, was too  
19 close to the Ba'athists. We got direct accusations that  
20 we were bringing back the Ba'athists. They flirted with  
21 two sorts of Sunni extremist. They were assisting some  
22 fighters from Pakistan to get across Iranian territory  
23 or at least turning a blind eye. I think what they were  
24 doing was trying to enforce a no-go area for Sunni  
25 Salafi, Jihadi attacks in Iran by saying, "Well, if you

1 are heading for Iraq to hurt our enemies, the  
2 United States, the UK and the coalition, then that's  
3 okay but you mustn't try anything en route against your  
4 enemy, the Shia regime in Iran".

5 They also flirted with Ansar al-Islam. At some  
6 point this Kurdish Sunni extremist group was attacked by  
7 the coalition, many hundreds driven over to Iran and  
8 then, from there, they regrouped and went back in. I  
9 think, again, a blind eye was turned to them going back  
10 into Iraq.

11 So I think those are the main patterns of  
12 activity.

13 So far as forming a government was concerned, they  
14 were consistent in pressing for it to be inclusive, in  
15 the sense that the Shia groups, preferably united, would  
16 be in the driving seat, but that it should include some  
17 Sunni representatives.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In his evidence to us, Tony Blair said  
19 that what nobody foresaw was that Iran would actually  
20 end up supporting AQ.

21 Were you aware of any evidence that Iran had  
22 actively supported Al-Qaeda in Iraq and what evidence is  
23 there that he might have made this statement?

24 SIR RICHARD DALTON: From what I saw of his evidence,  
25 I thought he very much exaggerated this factor. Not

1           only was Al-Qaeda but one of the strands of disruption  
2           inside Iraq, but that I think Iranian help to them was  
3           limited, in the way I have described, to permitting the  
4           transit of some foreign fighters from one of the sources  
5           of foreign fighters, which was Pakistan/Afghanistan, the  
6           other principal source being elsewhere in the world via  
7           Syria, of course. I don't think their flirtation  
8           with Ansar al-Islam was a crucial factor in seriously  
9           upsetting coalition calculations, however.

10   SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Do you think there was anything that  
11           the United Kingdom could have done to reduce Iranian  
12           support for sectarian violence in Iraq?

13   SIR RICHARD DALTON: Well, a factor we haven't discussed is  
14           whether the coalition played Iran's -- played a game  
15           with Iran successfully. On many occasions, we  
16           didn't. There was a kind of spiral that we got into in  
17           2003, and never really escaped from. At the start --  
18           there were intense suspicions and distrust  
19           between the United States, the UK and Iran, fuelled in  
20           particular, as far as the United States was concerned,  
21           by the monstrous error of the United States in  
22           classifying Iran as part of an Axis of Evil, after Iran  
23           had helped over Afghanistan.

24           What took place in 2003 was that the Iranians would  
25           present what they regarded as a legitimate

1 concern. It often was. We were messing in their  
2 neighbourhood. A concern arose about their relations  
3 with Iraq, could we deal with it?

4 Now, the UK very often didn't have the power. We  
5 were a junior partner in the coalition. We had to  
6 mediate an Iranian legitimate concern through the  
7 United States and quite often we failed. So in 2003,  
8 against this background of suspicion of the  
9 United States, the Iranians came to think that their  
10 interests were not being adequately taken into account.

11 So it was difficult for us, as the UK, to get  
12 attention to these concerns because of the  
13 United States' suspicions of Iran and, when Iran got no  
14 reply, it took counter-action which increased the  
15 United States' suspicions of Iran. Hence my description  
16 of it as a spiral.

17 But, for example, when John Sawers came  
18 in July 2003 -- and it was a very helpful visit in  
19 explaining what the coalition was up to -- I tried to  
20 manoeuvre us into a situation where, at the end of that  
21 visit, there could be a number of points, including  
22 agreement to the opening of limited, diplomat-only  
23 Iranian consular missions in Iran and that there could  
24 be, as it were, a series of positive moves from Iranian  
25 angles that might have then increased our leverage with

1 Iran on matters where they were not acting helpfully to  
2 us. I was unable to secure this kind of a package  
3 because of the limitations in the UK ability to get  
4 leverage on the United States' decisions with respect to  
5 Iranian behaviour.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was there any attempt to get a shared  
7 assessment with the United States on this?

8 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes, and at many levels. I mean,  
9 obviously, Joint Intelligence Committee assessments were  
10 shared and the assessments of 2003, as I recall them,  
11 very much endorsed the view of Iranian involvement in  
12 Iraq that I have tried to present to you.

13 The high-level diplomatic and political contacts  
14 between the United States and the United Kingdom, on the  
15 other hand, tended to foster a more extreme view of what  
16 Iran's role was and I found myself sometimes having to  
17 try to put this in context.

18 For example, there was a moment when Condi Rice  
19 believed that the drift of religious figures from Iran  
20 back to Iraq might somehow deal a blow to the Iranian  
21 system. I argued that there were always ups and downs  
22 in those relationships, sometimes Najaf was up,  
23 sometimes Qom was up and that this wasn't a particularly  
24 significant moment for the Iranian regime, as a number  
25 of religious figures went back to Iraq.

1           Similarly, there was a view at very high levels  
2           in the UK and the US -- that as we wanted  
3           a democratic outcome for Iraq and as Iran's democracy  
4           was very limited to say the least, there would be an  
5           inevitable attempt by Iran to prevent the success of the  
6           coalition mission.

7           I regarded that then and now as a very over-simple  
8           view of Iranian policies. I was hoping to explain; they  
9           wanted to hurt us but not prevent the overall success of  
10          the handover to a new Iraqi Government in Baghdad.

11       SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That's helpful. Sir Geoffrey, do you  
12          have some comments on this?

13       SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Things were a bit different in my time,  
14          in the sense that, while I was in Tehran, I found that  
15          the US understanding of the Iranian role in Iraq was  
16          actually very soundly based and sensible.

17          In my time, General Petraeus was the US Commanding  
18          General in Baghdad, Ryan Crocker was the US Ambassador,  
19          and my understanding through my colleagues in Baghdad of  
20          their approach was actually that they had a very  
21          sophisticated and balanced assessment of the Iranian  
22          role, reflecting many of the things actually we have  
23          been talking about this morning, and I think, going back  
24          to what I was saying earlier, for them, as for us, the  
25          key variable, the key factor, was the extent to which

1 Iraqi leaders, Iraqi politicians would themselves begin  
2 to draw the parameters of what was acceptable Iranian  
3 activity in Iraq and what was not acceptable.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: We would like to pick up two or three  
6 specific points now and then, at the end, I'll ask both  
7 of you, if I may, to offer any reflections or lessons  
8 that you want to derive from the Iranian perspective.  
9 First, can I turn to Sir Roderic?

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I just want to come back to the broad  
11 strategic overview. Clearly, one of the main drivers of  
12 the action against Iraq was to eliminate any latent  
13 threat or threat of an Iraqi nuclear -- military nuclear  
14 programme and this was in the context of four countries:  
15 Libya, Iran, North Korea, as well as Iraq.

16 The argument has been made that we went for Iraq  
17 because we had reason to go for Iraq, breach of  
18 UN Resolutions and so on, but this would then have  
19 a deterrent effect, if we were successful -- and we were  
20 successful in removing any latent threat of nuclear  
21 programmes from Iraq -- this would have a deterrent  
22 effect on Iran and other countries. They would see --  
23 they would not wish to suffer the fate that had befallen  
24 Saddam Hussein's regime.

25 Did it have that effect upon Iran and Iran's nuclear

1 ambitions or did it have exactly the opposite effect?

2 Sir Geoffrey, would you like to comment first on that?

3 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I don't know whether I can comment very  
4 authoritatively. I think the general impression that  
5 people had in my time -- I don't know whether this is  
6 soundly based or not -- was that the invasion of Iraq  
7 and the decisive action to remove Saddam Hussein, had  
8 had a kind of salutary effect on Iran, but that that had  
9 been balanced in their minds, in the Iranian minds, by  
10 the benefit to them of his removal.

11 Going back to something you were saying earlier, it  
12 was a big part of the Iranian discourse in my time, the  
13 irony, as they saw it, that the traditional enemies of  
14 the Iranian revolution -- namely, the UK and the US --  
15 had actually removed the two greatest threats from the  
16 borders of Iran, namely, the Taliban in Afghanistan  
17 first and then Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.

18 So there was a kind of balanced picture, as I saw  
19 it.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But what consequences did they draw with  
21 respect to their own military nuclear programme, that  
22 they needed to develop a nuclear weapon so that  
23 they couldn't be invaded, or that they should stop  
24 developing a nuclear weapon because this could lead to  
25 trouble? Which way have they come out?

1 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I would be really cautious about  
2 attributing views to them that I never heard and  
3 which -- to which we were never privy. But what we can  
4 say is that they have continued with a nuclear programme  
5 and that, to this day, that remains a major challenge to  
6 the international system.

7 We are engaged to this day in seeking to deal with  
8 that challenge.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir Richard?

10 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I think it has been a long-term  
11 strategic intent of Iran, across different governments  
12 and regimes, to build up its national power and to do  
13 that, inter alia, by developing an extensive domestic  
14 nuclear industry, and to master the technology to the  
15 point where it would have the option of having a nuclear  
16 weapon, if the threat to it was sufficient.

17 I think what happened in 2003 was that they felt an  
18 enhanced perception of threat to them. But I don't  
19 think this significantly changed their strategy in  
20 connection with developing the option of a nuclear  
21 weapon.

22 In 2003, if the US National Intelligence Estimate is  
23 to be believed, they took a decision to put on ice  
24 certain research and development, and they did that  
25 because of the international pressures on them across

1 the board, which they didn't want to exacerbate. One of  
2 the pressures they had in mind may have been the  
3 possibility that the United States might still decide to  
4 go after Iran militarily.

5 But there is another factor, too, which sticks in my  
6 mind, which is the ideological and religious objection  
7 of many in Iran, including, I believe,  
8 President Khatami, to research and development designed  
9 to achieve a nuclear weapon, and it is possible, if a  
10 decision was taken at that moment in 2003, that it owed  
11 as much to that as it did to Iran's sense of pressure  
12 but, as Geoffrey says, these decisions are not  
13 transparent and we will never know.

14 But in the broad sweep of history, to return to  
15 where we are now, I think that  
16 the perception of threat has been broadly constant.  
17 There were many occasions when I was in Iran when the  
18 Revolutionary Guard and others were saying that warfare  
19 with the United States was inevitable at some point and  
20 Iran had to be ready for it.

21 So whether or not the invasion of Iraq significantly  
22 changed that longstanding sense that Iran had to be  
23 ready for eventualities, I don't know.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: I think Sir Lawrence has got a couple of

1 questions.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. Can I just follow up on that?  
3 You stressed continuity. There was also a mention of  
4 a particular view Khatami may have taken.

5 What difference did it make when Ahmadinejad became  
6 president? He is assumed to be closer to the  
7 Revolutionary Guards and so on. Did that make  
8 a difference in this story or are we talking about  
9 a regime that does have a broad continuity of view?

10 SIR RICHARD DALTON: We are talking about a regime that has  
11 a broad continuity of view. The arrival of  
12 Ahmadinejad -- in respect of the way he  
13 handled the nuclear issue -- was part of a broader  
14 spectrum of which he was the servant rather than the  
15 initiator. The Supreme Leader decided, in May 2005,  
16 that the negotiations begun by the E3 were going nowhere  
17 from Iran's point of view. Indeed, going back to the  
18 Paris agreement in late autumn 2004, that was followed  
19 quite rapidly by statements by senior Iranian spokesmen  
20 that any negotiations flowing from that were only going  
21 to last three or six months anyway. That reflected  
22 the Supreme Leader's view.

23 They knew, when the preparatory committees for the  
24 eventual proposal of the E3 July 2005 had met, that  
25 there was not going to be what they wanted in the E3

1 proposal. What they wanted was continued Iranian  
2 enrichment activity without let or hindrance,  
3 acknowledgment of Iran's right to enrich. We were not  
4 going to give that.

5 So a pre-disposition to bring the negotiations to  
6 a halt was confirmed quite early on by the Supreme  
7 Leader -- and by "early on", I mean May -- and then it  
8 was worked out and eventually the rejection of our  
9 proposals and of the whole approach, which is still  
10 broadly being adopted to this day, began before  
11 Ahmadinejad came to power.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What about Iraq? Was there a change  
13 between the two, Sir Geoffrey?

14 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I don't think so, no, I think as  
15 Sir Richard says, the elements of continuity were more  
16 important than the elements of change.

17 We saw, at the time, the election of  
18 President Ahmadinejad as a symptom of a general shift or  
19 a general evolution in the centre of gravity of the  
20 Iranian system generally toward a harder line, a more  
21 militaristic type of regime, and there were  
22 manifestations of that whether on the nuclear policy or  
23 on Iraq policy as well.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A much more specific question now,  
25 which was Iranian views of the multi national naval

1 presence in the Gulf. Three questions. First, general  
2 concerns about the activities of the naval presence;  
3 secondly, it would be interesting to hear your views,  
4 Sir Geoffrey, about the action against HMS Cornwall  
5 in March 2007, when some of our sailors were taken into  
6 Iranian custody and your general perspective on that  
7 episode.

8 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Shall I start with a few words on that?

9 Yes, that was a very hard episode for all of us at the  
10 time. We never reached a definitive conclusion as to  
11 why it happened. Our best assessment afterwards was  
12 that it had been an instance of a kind of adventurism by  
13 the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, specifically the naval  
14 forces, who probably calculated over a period of time  
15 that the activities of coalition naval forces right at  
16 the head of the Gulf in checking for smuggling and  
17 generally policing the waterways there, in Iraqi waters,  
18 offered them an opportunity to create an incident.

19 What we never really got to the bottom of and never  
20 really were able to, was to establish at what stage in  
21 the command chain this event had been orchestrated; in  
22 other words, was it a local commander hoping to gain  
23 some credit by showing how tough and dynamic he was in  
24 grabbing some western service personnel, or whether, as  
25 some believe, it would be authorised much higher up the

1 chain, whether in the IRGC hierarchy or even at the  
2 level of Supreme Leader or his office itself. I don't  
3 think we reached a definitive view on that.

4 But I think as to the motivation -- I have been  
5 pretty clear. It was an act of adventurism, we would  
6 probably call it; in other words, to see whether some  
7 political advantage could be derived from  
8 a demonstration of toughness and aggressiveness by the  
9 Iranian military against us.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of handling it, how  
11 satisfied were you with the way that we were able to  
12 deal with this? Again, presumably, you would have got  
13 some insight into the attitudes in Tehran from your  
14 efforts to secure the release of these people.

15 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Yes, indeed, I was involved on a daily  
16 basis in the contacts with the Iranian authorities. One  
17 of the FCO ministers was doing the same here with the  
18 Iranian Ambassador, and those were the only channels  
19 with the Iranian authorities during the 14 days that the  
20 personnel were detained.

21 Yes, we did an extensive lessons learned exercise  
22 afterwards in terms of the diplomatic response to the  
23 crisis, which reached broadly reassuring, from my  
24 perspective, conclusions; in other words, what we sought  
25 to do was quite rapidly to escalate diplomatic and

1 political pressure on the Iranian authorities, to stop  
2 this, what we considered unwarranted adventure, before  
3 it escalated into -- and had broader consequences,  
4 negative consequences for them.

5 But at the same time to ensure that they had, if  
6 they wished to use it, a ladder to climb down, which  
7 didn't involve us making any concession of any kind as  
8 to the facts of the matter, but sent them the clear  
9 message that we, the UK, in this crisis, were not  
10 looking ourselves to escalate it or to score points  
11 of a broader kind; we just wanted the detainees to be  
12 released and the incident closed.

13 So it was that balance of firm, resolute  
14 international pressure internationally with the extended  
15 hand, if you can call it that -- to use a slightly  
16 different metaphor -- that had ultimately a successful  
17 conclusion.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What did this tell you about, this  
19 general question of the attitudes to the naval presence  
20 in the area? We have had some discussion about the  
21 continuing role of UK forces with the Iraqi Navy, about  
22 concerns about the vulnerability of Iraq's oil outlets,  
23 so -- and that presumably is potentially geared to an  
24 Iranian threat. So was that part of the background to  
25 this?

1 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Yes. I mean, I think we had no  
2 illusions that the Iranian attitude towards the forces  
3 that you describe was one of hostility. Clearly there  
4 was a dreadful miscalculation and that's what led to the  
5 Iranians taking these people.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Is there anything you would want to  
7 add?

8 SIR RICHARD DALTON: We had a very similar episode in 2004  
9 which we handled in very much the same way. We also  
10 spent a good deal of time on deconfliction in the  
11 Shatt al Arab and making Iran aware that some of the  
12 tactics which their border guards were using risked  
13 clashes with coalition forces.

14 There were several occasions when small, fast boats  
15 went far too close to coalition vessels. The Iranian  
16 response was always that they had no hostile intent but  
17 that we would not be able to dictate to them as to how  
18 they carried out their duty to protect their own  
19 territory and their own waters.

20 So my thoughts, similar to Geoffrey's, were that  
21 individual commanders sometimes felt the need to show  
22 bravery, audacity, courage, resolution in confronting  
23 these imperialists whom they regarded as their enemies,  
24 who were operating so close to them.

25 But there is also a wider context, which is that,

1 ever since the mid-80s, we have had a virtually  
2 continuous naval presence in the area, the Armilla  
3 Patrol and onwards. So contacts of various kinds and  
4 naval communication with the Iranians has been pretty  
5 continuous for more than 20 years and has passed with  
6 remarkably few clashes or even risky incidents. The  
7 ones which took place stand out in our minds, but are  
8 only a small proportion of the opportunities that might  
9 have arisen for serious difficulties, had there been  
10 a general hostile intent on the Iranian part or less  
11 punctiliousness on the part of both navies in observing  
12 the susceptibilities and the communication niceties of  
13 the other.

14 So actually, the naval operations story is one of  
15 success in operating in waters where there could be  
16 clashes, punctuated by occasional difficulties in these  
17 two disasters when our people were captured.

18 In the case of the 2004 capture, I think one motive  
19 was publicised humiliation of this unit in order to show  
20 that, not only were Iran's forces resolute, but the  
21 great enemy of Iran, the meddler in Iran's internal  
22 affairs, a country who was blamed for so many supposed  
23 conspiracies damaging to Iran, actually wasn't quite so  
24 tough and awful and powerful as some might think or as  
25 the United Kingdom itself might like to think.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The phrase used to be "paper tiger"  
2 didn't it?

3 Can I just ask a final question to you, Sir Richard?  
4 After we had Tony Blair giving evidence here, you were  
5 quoted in the Daily Telegraph to the effect that he had  
6 been misreading Iran. Now, part of this was, looking  
7 back at it, about action that might be taken in the  
8 future against Iran because of its nuclear programme.  
9 But I would just like your view as to whether you felt  
10 he was misreading Iran in terms of the role that Iran  
11 played in the development of instability within Iraq, and  
12 whether this is retrospective or whether you were  
13 concerned at the time that he was misreading the role of  
14 Iran.

15 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I think I have already answered that  
16 question at different points in my evidence so far, to  
17 recall what I think I said, I did believe at the time,  
18 particularly in 2003, that there was a misreading of  
19 Iran as inevitably hostile to the success of the  
20 coalition mission to replace Saddam with an Iraqi regime  
21 that would be democratic.

22 Secondly, I felt at the time that  
23 legitimate and justified criticism of Iran was  
24 sometimes used with too broad a brush; in other words,  
25 much more of the coalition difficulties were attributed

1 to Iran than was the case, and I pointed out, for  
2 example, in some of my reporting that  
3 it would be very helpful if we could have more chapter  
4 and verse. If we were so sure of our case, then why  
5 weren't we showing captured Iranians or more evidence of  
6 Iranian material or more intercepts of Iranian funds,  
7 given the sources at our disposal to counter subversion  
8 generally?

9 There were several occasions on which we did present  
10 evidence of shoulder-launched missiles or IED technology  
11 that we felt originated in Iran and sought explanations,  
12 but those opportunities that we took weren't, I thought  
13 at the time, commensurate with the scale of our outrage  
14 at what Iran was doing.

15 I also felt, at the time of Mr Blair's testimony to  
16 you, that he was seeking to cast a retrospectively  
17 benign light on a series of very bad decisions taken  
18 about the legality of the attack on Iraq by saying it  
19 was not only right to do it, but that we might have to  
20 do it again -- we, the UK, might have to do it again --  
21 and I felt strongly then, and I do now, that a military  
22 adventure against Iran pre-emptively, supposedly against  
23 its nuclear programmes would be illegal in the absence  
24 of an imminent and real threat to any country from Iran  
25 and that no such nuclear threat exists at the present,

1 and that it was not a sufficient answer to the doubts  
2 about the way in which the decisions in 2003 had been  
3 taken to simply say that it is a dangerous world, other  
4 countries are dangerous and an action might be  
5 conceivable in future against those countries.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So your concern was in all three of  
7 the areas that I mentioned?

8 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Yes.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: We touched rather briefly earlier in the  
11 session on the oil dimension and I wonder if either/or  
12 both you would like to just say a word about the Iranian  
13 perspective on post-Saddam Iraq as an oil producer?  
14 A competitor? Complementary? A worryingly price-  
15 destabilising factor?

16 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: Shall I start on that?

17 SIR RICHARD DALTON: Please.

18 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I think to me that would be a subset of  
19 the broader economic point which I made earlier, which  
20 is that I think many Iranians to whom I spoke saw  
21 a newly prosperous Iraq as an attractive market for  
22 Iranian goods and services, and that I have never heard  
23 the calculation made that, you know, much increased  
24 Iraqi oil exports might reduce the price of oil, that  
25 kind of thing. So, no, on the whole, the impression

1 I got was that a revival of the Iraqi oil industry would  
2 be regarded as a good thing, net, for Iran.

3 SIR RICHARD DALTON: I would agree. There was a period when  
4 Iran was concerned that the United States might try to  
5 take Iraq out of OPEC, hugely ramp up Iraq's oil  
6 production and thereby put very serious pressure on  
7 income of oil producers, including Iran, to the  
8 detriment of their political systems in the case of  
9 Iran. This was a fear in 2003. But it rapidly  
10 dispersed, given the acute problems of the Iraqi oil  
11 industry, the instability and the very, very slow growth  
12 in Iraqi oil production.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are there any final reflections  
14 or lessons to be learned that either of you would like  
15 to mention now before we close? Sir Richard, first.

16 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I haven't anything to add.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Geoffrey?

18 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS: I think we have covered everything.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: This has been a very interesting session and  
20 I'm grateful to both of you, thank you. We shall not be  
21 here this afternoon, the Inquiry's next public hearing  
22 will be on Friday, 10 July at 10.00 when we will be  
23 hearing from Sir Jonathan Cunliffe, who was managing  
24 director for financial regulation and industry and then  
25 managing director for macroeconomic policy and

1 international finance, both in the Treasury. Later that  
2 morning, we will be hearing from Mark Etherington, who  
3 was head of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Iraq  
4 in 2006/2007. With that, I'll close the session.

5 (12.05 pm)

6 (The Inquiry adjourned until Friday 9 July 2010 at 10.00 am)

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8 SIR RICHARD DALTON .....1  
9 SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS .....1

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