

TONY BLAIR'S STATEMENT TO THE IRAQ INQUIRY

14 January 2011

1. Containment

As I indicated in my Statement to the House of Commons following the attack of September 11th 2001, the calculus of risk on global security had radically and fundamentally changed. In this context, the issue of Saddam Hussein and his long-standing defiance of the UN resolutions was bound to be a concern.

Up to then our policy had been one described as "containment". It had originally been based on sanctions, inspections and sometimes as in December 1998, military action. Nobody thought it satisfactory as a policy. The sanctions were eroding. Their effect on the Iraqi people was devastating as a result of how Saddam manipulated them. The child mortality rate in 2002 was 130 per 1000, as bad as the worst and poorest African nations. There was leakage under the oil for food programme and through smuggling. This latter route to acquiring funds had risen dramatically in the years up to 2002, up from roughly over \$300m to over \$2bn; possibly more. Most of it came through neighbouring countries anxious and in some cases dependent on the trade and the oil.

The inspectors had withdrawn in 1998 as a result of non-co-operation. The No Fly Zones were coming under increasing strain (see 2001 correspondence from Robin Cook).

So before 11 September 2001, there were already moves afoot to change the blanket sanctions and go for "smart sanctions" i.e. focused on WMD programmes specifically. This change of tack started under the Clinton administration and continued under the Bush administration.

Subsequent to 9/11 and also again prior to my meeting with President Bush in April 2002, I asked for briefing on Iraq and also specifically on the issue of containment. David Manning passed to me an excellent and expert paper from SIS. This covered the general position of Saddam in the region and the prospects of him being toppled by internal opposition. The whole context of

the paper was that the international community was at an impasse on how to deal with Saddam. The March 2002 paper set out, together with the key JIC assessment, why containment even with “smart sanctions” was unlikely to be effective in halting his continued development of WMD, even if the sanctions were properly enforced.

In addition, in terms of negotiations, the UNSC route for “smart sanctions” had hit a familiar road block. Essentially Russia, with some support from France, was insistent on watering down the “smart sanctions” regime. Critically, they refused to accept the strictures in the original proposal on neighbouring states. The final resolution passed in May 2002 omitted the provisions on neighbouring states. Yet without these states being specifically urged and required to co-operate, it was hard to see how any “smart sanctions” framework was going to work.

The danger of a failed new sanctions policy was very clear. If the comprehensive sanctions were dropped, then Saddam would have access to a large amount of oil revenue. Without cutting off smuggling routes it would leave him with more money than ever to acquire dual use WMD material. It is clear from the Iraq Survey Group that, indeed, he did continue to import such material in breach of the UN resolution.

We had persistently and over a long time attempted to persuade neighbouring states to shut off any such routes. The US, in particular, was constantly raising this with Syria, Jordan and Turkey. I raised it, privately, but briefly, at the very end of my Syria visit, in October 2001, but, from recollection, the President point blank denied it was happening and criticised the policy. As the Greenstock letter of 29 October 2001 to David Manning indicates, there was immense frustration on this issue. When the “smart sanctions” Resolution 1409 was eventually passed in a watered down form, Syria abstained from the vote and strongly criticised the whole idea.

As far as I am aware, the issue of the enforcement of sanctions was constantly raised both by ourselves and the Americans at Foreign Service level. It had not worked. The whole basis for the shift to a new sanctions framework was because the old framework was crumbling. Even after 9/11 Russia remained adamantly in a different place from us and whilst that was so, the necessary

co-operation to get any new framework functioning was likely to be very limited.

The upshot of all of this is that at the very least, it would be impossible to say back in early 2002, that smart sanctions would work. Their failure was not a risk I thought we could run.

A comprehensive account of the erosion of sanctions can be found in Kenneth Pollack's book "The Threatening Storm" in 2002.

2. April – September 2002

Though the Crawford meeting provides a convenient breakpoint for the purposes of the narrative, I want to stress: it did not result in an alteration of policy. The policy had been clear since 9/11: we wanted to take a tougher line altogether on terrorism and WMD globally, and sought to bring Saddam into compliance with UN authority. So the Crawford meeting was of course important. It was not about a shift in policy; it was rather a chance to explain how best to implement it. We had a full Cabinet discussion about it on 11 April 2002 following the visit, where we set out our objectives. Prior to the visit I had studied the Cabinet office Options Paper, together with recent JIC reports. I had also had the Chequers meeting with CDS and read-outs of the military interaction with Washington.

The objectives of our policy at this time were not secret. They were set out in numerous speeches and statements by myself and other ministers. There was also a huge drumbeat of speculation once the Afghanistan campaign had removed the Taliban from power.

The objective never changed between April and September 2002. It remained the same: to bring Saddam back to full and unconditional compliance with UN Resolutions in respect of which he had been in breach for over a decade. It was absolutely clear that we were going to be with the U.S in implementing this objective. There can have been no-one who was in any doubt about my determination on that score. I expressed it publicly. I made it clear also to President Bush that I would be with him in tackling it. My statements of support on dealing with Saddam to President Bush, and to Secretary Rumsfeld

at our meeting in June 2002 were meant and were taken in this way. I could not and did not offer some kind of “blank cheque” in how we accomplished our shared objective. Indeed my insistence that we went down the UN route showed exactly the opposite. Also I would never engage in any military campaign our military thought unwise or unachievable. What I was signalling was that there would be no withdrawal of support for something we thought right and do-able, simply for reasons of political pressure, i.e. I was going to be steadfast as an ally as I had promised, even though I knew it would also be tough politically. I sent this signal both because I believed in the substance and because that meant we would be right alongside U.S. thinking from the outset.

My public pronouncements – especially at Crawford and in Texas in the speech the next day, could have left no-one in any doubt as to my position.

The issue was also regularly debated in Cabinet. I was answering questions on it, giving press interviews. It was a dominant news issue. I was constantly interacting on it, therefore, with colleagues, MPs and media, and in the most plain terms.

3. WMD Statements

The basis for the statements I made on the issue of Saddam and WMD were based, of course, on the JIC assessments and on the whole history of Saddam and WMD going back over many years, including his use of chemical weapons, the findings of previous UN inspectors, his well documented attempts at concealment.

So, for example, for my press conference in Sedgefield on 3rd September 2002, I requested and received a special briefing from the FCO. I would probably also have re-read the JIC report of 15 March 2002 and the list of unaccounted for items from the UNSCOM reports. I draw attention to the first part of the briefing of 2nd September 2002, in particular to the reference that “we believe that Iraq has recently accelerated its weapons programme”; “increased nuclear procurement”; and to the fact that UN Inspectors in 1998 “were unable to account for thousands of tonnes of so called precursor chemicals”.

In respect of my statement of 24th September 2002 to the House of Commons, I would have relied principally on the dossier and JIC assessments and written and oral intelligence briefing, some of which came in just before the statement, in particular the September JIC assessment which referred to mobile facilities.

I have gone back, in the course of compiling this statement, to the vast number of different documents that refer to Saddam and WMD. I simply make the point that the assumptions in all of them was that Saddam was committed in both the intent and the action in developing WMD. Of course, the Iraq Survey Group shows that the intent indeed remained and there were multiple breaches of UN resolutions.

4. The UN Route and UNSCR 1441

The U.S. had since President Clinton's time – set out in 1998 in a statement agreed by Congress – a policy of regime change in Iraq, precisely because of Saddam's long defiance of WMD resolutions and his threat to regional stability.

So the U.S. administration had no need of a further UN resolution to act. However in a note at the end of July 2002 I set out to President Bush the strong reason why, politically, I thought a UN resolution was necessary, primarily to build a broad coalition against Saddam and to show we were prepared to disarm him peacefully. In addition, Peter Goldsmith had advised such a fresh resolution was obligatory for reasons of international law and the earlier paper prepared by the Cabinet Office had reached the same conclusion. The military action in 1998 relied on a revival of Resolutions 678 and 687. But it was felt with the passage of time we should have another.

The objectives for both President Bush and myself in trying to secure a fresh resolution were clear: to give Saddam one final chance to comply; and make it clear if he didn't, then we would act, if necessary by force. In other words: change of heart or change of regime. Because he had so frequently broken his word, disregarded UN resolutions and refused to comply with the inspectors, we knew the wording of the new resolution had to be unequivocal: he had to co-operate fully and unconditionally. The stress on co-operation was

deliberate. His concealment activity was again very clear and had been further demonstrated by his treatment of his son-in-law who had revealed his intentions, been lured back to Iraq and executed.

So we had to insert language in the resolution that made this plain; and in particular resist language that meant that the words “final opportunity” were diluted by requiring another UNSC decision. So we also sought to ensure that in the resolution itself, we specifically had a provision that a failure to comply would be itself a material breach.

I was kept closely in touch with the negotiation, as was Jack Straw. We were very satisfied with the outcome. It achieved our objectives. We resisted attempts by France to insert language that would have required an additional decision. We never had a problem with another discussion in the UNSC. What we could not tolerate was a situation where Saddam continued to refuse to comply fully and unconditionally and yet we were powerless to act.

The negotiating history is helpfully set out by Stephen Pattison who was head of the UN Department in the FCO, coordinating formal instructions to Sir Jeremy Greenstock in New York.

I was, of course aware and concerned that at that time, Peter Goldsmith, the Attorney-General, did not feel that 1441 went far enough. But I also was aware, in a way he was not, of the negotiating history and the clear position of the U.S. throughout; which was to say to all the other members of the UNSC that on this basis, the U.S. did not consider a further resolution necessary. They were in no doubt about this.

Then, but even more so in retrospect, UNSCR 1441 was a pivotal moment. If Saddam at that point had genuinely changed; had he welcomed inspectors and fully co-operated, action would have been avoided. I made this clear to President Bush and he agreed. I also think at the time those more sympathetic to Saddam on the UNSC thought he would. The fact is he did not and the Iraq Survey Group reports show why he did not.

5. Inspections

It is fair to say that I did not think that Saddam would change his behaviour. His record was clear. On the other hand, he might have. The comparison with Libya is instructive. There, there was a genuine change of heart, a strategic decision to alter Libya's position in the world and full co-operation given, including full transparency of experts and their work. Part of this meant that, for example, Libya condemned 9/11 and actively co-operated in pursuing Al Qaeda. Saddam said the U.S. brought the 9/11 attack on itself and continued by action and behaviour e.g. paying money to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, to show he had a completely different attitude. So I thought inspections necessary but I knew they would only be successful with genuine co-operation. The key to successful inspections was the ability to interview and analyse the work of the technical experts. The JIC reports of 11 Oct 2002 and then following the December 2002 declaration, of 18 December 2002 gave me no grounds for believing inspections would be properly complied with.

6. Second Resolution

The Iraq Declaration in December 2002 and the Blix reports to the UNSC were as unsatisfactory as we anticipated. It was clear Saddam was not fully complying, i.e. he was in breach of 1441, but as the prospect of military action advanced, so he was inclined to co-operate more. This is what JIC papers had said he would do. The political debate then crystallised in late 2002/early 2003 around calls for a second resolution. We discussed this at various Cabinet meetings, the first of which was from recollection, that of 16th January 2003. It was then debated again at 30th January, 6th February, 13th February, 27th February and 6th March Cabinet meetings. In addition, of course it was informally hotly debated everywhere. In this instance there was no disagreement: everyone thought it politically beneficial.

There was no doubt this was the easiest thing politically, both domestically for the Government and internationally, to build the broader coalition. So in January 2003 we began discreetly to canvas support. When asked, we said we

were open to one but did not need one. I also knew that Robin Cook was likely to resign in the absence of one.

We certainly believed at the outset that if we could push the U.S. to go for it, we had a real chance of getting it, though it would be very difficult. Germany's leader had apparently told President Bush that it would not support but would not oppose. There were reasonable discussions with France, though by early February, France had hardened again. The U.S. were working hard on the Russians.

We knew we would not ever get a resolution explicitly authorising force. But we thought it possible that the resolution might state what we all knew to be the case: that Saddam was not fully and unconditionally co-operating. The Blix reports were clear that any co-operation fell short. In particular, Blix lacked the ability to conduct interviews without restrictions, a key issue for the inspections. So a 'final' final ultimatum resolution might be agreed.

I was also aware of course of the Attorney-General's legal concerns though, as I say, I believed that he would, once he was abreast of the British but most of all the U.S. negotiating history, conclude that 1441 meant what it said: Saddam had a final opportunity to comply; failure to do so was a material breach; and that revived the earlier resolutions authorising force.

We continued to pursue the prospects for a second resolution in February and through to early March; indeed in one form or another up to the point of action.

The problem was very simple: the position of France and then Russia hardened to the point where they made it clear that they would agree no resolution that explicitly or implicitly authorised force if breached.

So they were prepared, by now, only to have a resolution that was clearly meaningless and accepted by the U.S. as such. This was of course a different position from 1441. There was no point in having a further resolution unless the resolution took the position on from 1441 and in particular unless it said that continued failure by Saddam to comply, meant force.

By the second week of March we had got to a more modest ambition: to get at least a majority vote in the UNSC. This we would do if Chile and Mexico came

with this. This would still mean a veto but politically have given us a victory. At one point it looked as if we could succeed. I despatched David Manning to see the Presidents of both countries. We and the Americans spoke to all the non-aligned members of the UNSC. We debated possible amendments to the resolution. I made several late night calls to President Lagos of Chile who was the unofficial bellweather on the issue. On 9th March President Bush said he thought we had 9 votes which was enough. On 10th March, I thought we might do it. But the strength of the French statements of opposition and his internal politics made President Lagos say, reasonably enough, that he could not support what was going to be not only a resolution doomed to a veto, but one strongly attacked by certain P5 members.

I was not given specific formal advice on the consequences of failing to get a second resolution. I did not need it and in any event Jack and others had spoken to me about it. It was obviously going to complicate our coalition and cause major domestic problems though in the end over 40 countries were in the coalition and we got a majority of EU states, including Spain, Italy and Poland. Australia, Japan and South Korea, all traditional American allies, were also strongly supportive.

7. Legal Advice

Let me first of all explain the debate about the so-called Kosovo option. I never believed that action in Iraq could be on the same legal basis as Kosovo. The justification in that case was “overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe”. So I never raised Kosovo as a direct precedent. However, in Kosovo we had had to accept we could not get a UN resolution even though we wanted one because Russia had made it clear it would wield a political veto. So we, not the UNSC, made the judgment that the humanitarian catastrophe was overwhelming. This was highly contentious at the time. So my point was simply this: if it were clear and accepted by a UNSC member that there was a breach of 1441, but nonetheless they still vetoed, surely that must have some relevance as to whether a breach had occurred, and thus to revival of Resolution 678 authorising force. In other words, I was not suggesting that we, subjectively and without more could say: this is unreasonable, but that a veto

in circumstances where breach was accepted, surely could not override the consequences of such a breach set out in 1441 i.e. they could not make a bad faith assessment. In any event, after Peter Goldsmith's advice, I did not pursue it. But the description of the position in Peter Rickett's memo did not actually deal with the point I was making (understandably since we had never discussed it).

I was aware of course of Peter Goldsmith's advice on 14 January in his note; but, as I say earlier, I was also aware that he had not yet had the opportunity to speak to Sir Jeremy Greenstock or to the U.S. counterparty. I had not yet got to the stage of a formal request for advice and neither had he got to the point of formally giving it. So I was continuing to hold to the position that another resolution was not necessary. I knew that the language of 1441 had represented a political compromise. But I also knew it had to have a meaning and that meaning, in circumstances where lack of clarity was the outcome of a political negotiation, must depend on what was understood by the parties to the negotiation. I knew that the U.S. had been crystal clear and explicit throughout. This was the cardinal importance of not just including the phrase "final opportunity" which to me meant "last chance"; but also the designation in advance of a failure to comply fully and unconditionally, as a "material breach" words with a plain and legally defined meaning. Peter's view at that time was, because of the word "assessment" in Op4 of 1441 there should be a further decision. But I was aware that this is what had been precisely and openly rejected by the U.S. and UK when negotiating the text. That is why his provisional advice was always going to be influenced by what was said and meant during the course of the negotiation of 1441. So I asked that he speak to Sir Jeremy Greenstock and later to the U.S.

When I received the advice on 30th January – which again was provisional – I did not understand how he could reach the conclusion that a further decision was required, when expressly we had refused such language in 1441.

In speaking to President Bush on 31st January 2003 I was not going to go into this continuing legal debate, internal to the UK Government. I repeated my strong commitment, given publicly and privately to do what it took to disarm Saddam.

However, let me make it clear. Had Peter Goldsmith not finally been of the view when he came to give his formal advice that 1441 did authorise force, then the UK could not and would not have participated in the decision to remove Saddam. We would probably have come into the aftermath since by mid 2003, with the passing of the UN resolution 1483, any legal issue would have fallen away. But we would have had to have withdrawn from the coalition taking action. This would have been, in my judgement very damaging to the strategic interests of the country. But there would have been no alternative. Since there has also been speculation about pressure on Peter Goldsmith, let me also say something else: anyone who knows him, knows such pressure would be wholly pointless. He is a British barrister through and through.

I did see him briefly, I think, on 11 March 2003 before the meeting with the other Cabinet members. I cannot recall the specific content of the discussion but most likely it would have been about his coming to Cabinet to explain his decision.

I would make one final point on this aspect of the matter. In all four major military actions I had taken part in up to then – Iraq 1998, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan – there had been legal issues. In Iraq 1998 and Kosovo, the legal bases were highly disputed. In my experience the more disputed the politics, the more disputed the law. That is why international law continues to be the subject of fierce debate and development.

8. Military Timetable

It was clear from continuing discussion with the U.S. in late 2002/early 2003 that March was the likely date for military action. That firmed up as it became plain that there was no significant shift in the attitude of Saddam. The December declaration by the Iraqi Government was incomplete, as Blix noted. That itself was a breach of 1441. His first report was to the effect there was not full compliance essentially around interviews. There were various possible alternatives to military action surfacing including proposals for Saddam peacefully to give up power.

The only serious alternative was the one I persuaded President Bush to agree to, at the 11th hour. That was the idea of benchmarks, agreed by Blix, for Saddam to meet, with action to follow any refusal to do so. In the event, France rejected them and so did Saddam.

By March 2003, inspections had been continuing and two full reports made by Blix. There was, of course, a case for more time. But, in the end, the issue was less time than attitude on the part of Saddam. Had he really wanted to co-operate, he would have acted differently. The Iraq Survey Group makes clear, the reason he did not, indeed the reason that he was instructing his experts and technical people not to co-operate (see the intelligence still valid), was because he had had no change of heart. Once sanctions were gone, he intended to re-start his WMD programme.

So, naturally, the imminence of American action was the focal point; and they were worried, as were our Armed Forces about delaying too long and this delay opening our forces up to attack as we waited. But the real problem was that Saddam had not changed.

9. Military Planning

The 19th March 2003 advice on troop drawdown after a successful conflict, followed the 6th March note from MoD to David Manning making clear that we would need to reduce substantially our military commitment by September/October. But it was natural that there would be a reduction after action; and there was never any suggestion that UK troop levels might be inadequate to fulfil our obligation as an occupying power. Indeed no request for additional troops was made, apart from isolated increases for specific purposes during the period of the aftermath. The UK forces were of course supplemented by those from many other nations following the assumption by the UK of responsibility for the South of Iraq. There is a chart showing how, following the conflict, there was a steady build up of other nations' forces to supplement our own.

10. Planning for Post Saddam Iraq

The analysis of post-war planning is all now understandably viewed through the prism of what we actually found in Iraq once the conflict began. Back in 2002, there were key assumptions that we made – and not just us but the US, the UN and even those opposed to the conflict.

- a) We thought there was a functioning and effective Iraqi civil service; in fact Saddam had largely degraded it.
- b) The over-riding concern was the humanitarian fall-out from conflict, together with the potential damage, from firing oil wells to the environment and WMD attacks.

So the post-war planning proceeded on the basis of a), to meet the concerns set out in b).

Essentially we broke down planning into three parts: humanitarian – the priority for DFID; Military – with the MOD; and political with the FCO.

Though the Iraq Planning Unit was formally established in February 2003, some planning was already underway and coordinated by the ad hoc officials group from October 2002, as Dominick Chilcott has said. There were a number of meetings of officials from September 2002 chaired by Desmond Bowen, the Deputy in the Cabinet Office to David Manning, but above all planning was underway within departments. For example, DFID did a draft paper on the humanitarian consequences and action to mitigate them in October 2002, which Clare Short followed up with letters to me. The MOD had several workstreams in place including extensively in PJHQ. The FCO was, of course, constantly active in pursuing the political dimensions. So the individual Secretaries of State were responsible for each separate stream. The Cabinet was debating the issue and there was a constant process of exchange at official level passed up to me and the ministers. As we came to recognise – hence the reason for setting up the Stabilisation Unit in 2004 – it would have been better to have had more integrated planning at an earlier time; and certainly there is a lesson to be learnt there.

Of course, as with everything else, the bulk of planning would be done in the U.S. who were going to provide over 95% of the assets for the operation. There was interaction at every level between the UK and the U.S. system. Some of that, as evidence to the Inquiry makes clear, was unsatisfactory, due mainly to inter-agency issues in the U.S. It is correct also that the shift from the State Department to the Department of Defence in January 2003 made a difference. The shortcomings of the U.S. planning have been well documented and accepted. Our own planning was complicated both by the difficulties of being fully inserted into the U.S. system and the fact that the planning was taking place against the backdrop of fast-changing political and military plans.

However, one absolutely fundamental point emerges from all the planning on both sides of the Atlantic, including that done in much depth, by the State Department: what we anticipated, was not what we found. There are therefore perfectly sensible debates about whether a Committee structure bringing all Ministries together with one Minister in charge, would have been better. I have an open mind about that. But we would have only had a different focus on risks that did not materialise. So, for example, the JIC report of 19 February 2003, specifically on the South of Iraq, says the risks were refugees, environmental damage and the impact of CBW strikes. The International Development Committee of the House of Commons published its report shortly before the military action. It makes 23 main recommendations and conclusions on the basis of what we expected to find. None identified what came to be the problem.

Also, with hindsight, we now see that the military campaign to defeat Saddam was relatively easy; it was the aftermath that was hard. At the time, of course, we could not know that and a prime focus throughout was the military campaign itself.

I did ask as I said to President Bush in July 2002 whether it might be feasible to install a military leader then move to democracy in Iraq. I cannot recall specifically calling for formal advice, but the subject of what sort of Iraq we wanted to create was part of a perpetual discussion, interaction with various Iraqi Opposition groups and the analysis of the country set out in the various FCO papers. Everyone knew the basic challenge: how to reconcile the different religious groupings; and in particular how to ensure the majority of the

population – Shia – hitherto deprived of any power – could participate without alienating the minority Sunni; and keeping the Kurds on board. Much thought was given to this which was reflected in the composition of the Iraqi Governing Council after the conflict. But the strong feedback was that any new Government should be representative and democratic, from the outset.

Our experience with Afghan participation in elections also held out hope.

When I asked for advice on 3rd April on various issues to do with Iraq, this was of course not the first time I had considered these issues or been advised on them; but it was the first time since the conflict. In other words, now we would have real-time knowledge of what was going on in Iraq and be in a far better position to judge. Also the military action had exceeded our expectations so naturally the focus was shifting more to handling the aftermath.

We took the decision to take on responsibility for the south sector, following Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon's joint note to me of 19 March. This was the inevitable outcome of the decision that our military contribution should be through the south. I was also keen that this be our area of operation because it seemed clear that the South would be more manageable. The South – Shia and heavily anti Saddam – was likely to be relatively supportive. And to begin with, this was indeed the case. It was agreed that we should do it, without demur, as I recall. It is correct that as a joint occupying power we would share legal responsibility for the whole of Iraq with the U.S. But that had the advantage of giving us a locus in Baghdad which was important, whilst in effect the responsibility for practical implementation would be with the U.S.

As for HMT, the Chancellor had throughout made it clear resources would not be an obstacle. The Treasury had made certain calculations of the cost both of the initial action and the aftermath. The Chancellor was present at Cabinet meetings in the run-up to the conflict. Throughout he made it clear resource was not a constraint. Subsequently he was part of the War Cabinet. Of course the Treasury queried and questioned costings. They always did. But at no point did anyone say to me: the Treasury are stopping us doing what need. So I see in evidence to the Inquiry that resource issues were being raised with some frustration by officials. I can only say that had such frustrations been

raised with me, I would have acted on them and I believe the Chancellor would have been fully supportive. Indeed where I was made aware of them I did act, as in the supplementary DFID requirement for \$30m in mid 2003.

11. The Decision to Take Military Action

It was clear following 1441 that if Saddam did not comply fully and unconditionally, military action was likely. No-one tried to persuade me not to take this course, other than those who publicly and openly declared themselves, like Robin Cook and certain ministers, who later resigned over the absence of a 2nd Resolution. It is correct that Jack, shortly before we were due to go in, warned me of the political perils of doing so. I was well aware of them. But for me the issue was straightforward: we had got the U.S. to go down the UN route and give Saddam a final chance; he had not taken it; such co-operation as there was, was under the duress of military action; if we backed away now, it would have disastrous consequences for a tough stance on WMD and its proliferation; and for our strategic relationship with the U.S., our key ally.

I was aware of the JIC assessment of 10 February 2003 that the Al Qaida threat to the UK would increase. But I took the view then and take the same view now that to have backed down because of threats of terrorism would be completely wrong. In any event, following 9/11 and Afghanistan we were a terrorist target and as recent events in Europe and the U.S show, irrespective of Iraq, there are ample justifications such terrorists will use as excuses for terrorism.

12. Immediate Aftermath

As I have said, the challenge prior to conflict was: would it be a successful military operation? There is also, necessarily, a limit to effective planning without the effective knowledge that only real, on the ground experience gives you.

It is correct that we sought a formal MOU with the U.S. about ORHA. It was quickly superseded by arrangements we agreed at the meeting in April 2003 at Hillsborough with President Bush and in discussion at various levels between the UK and the US Governments. The Iraq Policy Unit sent me a paper setting out the basic ideas we should get agreed with the U.S. These included proper assurances on consultation and on making sure we got a new UNSCR giving the UN a core role. It has to be emphasised that although we together with the U.S. were to constitute the occupying powers under the new UN resolution, the U.S. was providing the overwhelming amount of manpower and resources.

Throughout April and May 2003 there were extensive negotiations and consultations with the U.S. These concerned ORHA, the transition to the CPA under Ambassador Bremer, and the ability for the UK to be in at the top level of U.S decision-making and of course the notion of a vital role for the UN. General Cross' recommendations were accepted and as the FCO letter of 9 May 2003 indicates, implemented. Bringing in the UN was agreed. As I have said before, the idea of the UN in charge was never possible nor was it requested by the UN. Instead they were to play a 'vital role' and did so up until the killing of UN staff including the UN Special Representative in August 2003.

Given the extraordinary pace of events and their complexity, we had a great deal of effective interaction with the US system. De-Ba'athification, for example, was a policy we altered and were consulted about, as the evidence of John Sawers makes clear.

The shift from ORHA to the CPA was not controversial, neither was the appointment of Ambassador Bremer. I do not recall exactly when both were decided. It was widely accepted that ORHA, at the beginning, was not geared up to the task. Bremer was, in my view, a very effective operator and given the scale of the task, the CPA made considerable strides forward (cf the Rand Corporation report).

I do not accept there were differing assumptions between the U.S. and the UK about the three stage plan for the aftermath: military government; transition to civilian led administration; and then to a proper Iraqi Government. There was a difference over the UN role that was debated and decided. Inevitably, it was impossible to pin down the precise details of how and more important

when, each stage of transition would occur, until we were in and could judge according to the reality. But the basic principles of transition were agreed and actually, in the event, implemented.

We always recognised that we would be there for some significant time. This is reflected in all the Phase IV military planning.

In the months of April, May, June and July, there was a huge amount of activity inside the UK system, between the UK and U.S systems and between myself and President Bush, not to say our closest officials, to get things onto a proper footing. It had become apparent that contrary to expectation, the military campaign had been very swift and successful; there was no functioning Iraqi civil service; and the problem, especially in and around Baghdad, was going to be very simple: chaos and instability.

13. UNSCR 1483

We decided to become one of the two joint occupying powers by a process covered by the Ad Hoc Committee chaired by Jack Straw specifically to look at “the rehabilitation, reform and development of Iraq”. Peter Goldsmith, as law officer, was present at it. There were detailed discussions about the terms of 1483, including on the legal issues. Agreement to 1483 was obtained and reported and discussed by Cabinet prior to the Resolution passing on 22nd May 2003. I was fully aware of the responsibility that came with this and so were my colleagues. I believed it was right for a number of reasons. We were the main military ally of the U.S. in removing the Government of Iraq. We should be there to assist in the aftermath. It meant we would be in a position of authority in the South. This was desirable since our forces and personnel would be there. We wanted to be in a position of maximum influence. There was no suggestion that this was beyond our capabilities provided of course we got others to come in alongside us; which they did.

Most of all, we had been urging Resolution 1483, a vital role for the UN and a coalition approach to the aftermath. We weren't going to be able to secure this without a commitment that we would be part of that aftermath.

I was aware that senior Iraqis advised against the term “occupying power” but, as we pointed out to them at the time, it is a legal term. Frankly whatever we had been called, the issue would have been the same.

14. CPA Accountability

In so far as we could reasonably expect it, and with exceptions which we raised fast, I found the CPA receptive and in particular allowed us to get on with things in Basra. There was a constant running issue around resources coming down from Baghdad but despite this, we were making progress. My own meeting with Bremer in late May 2003 in Basra indicated the scale of our challenge; but it was a common challenge of delivery, not one of a fundamental disagreement on policy. The only areas where there was the prospect of such disagreement was on de-Ba’athification and the disbanding of the military. But as John Sawers explains and many within the US Administration at the time would agree, these decisions were far more finely balanced than they may now appear in retrospect and with hindsight.

The U.S., it is true, were far less enthusiastic about UN involvement. However the UN Special Representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello, was respected by them and he was highly influential in the composition of the interim Iraqi Governing Council which was, at the time, the most that could reasonably be expected, and also in matters to do with oil revenues. I had no doubt that as time progressed, if the situation stabilised the UN could take over more and more of the responsibility. But the stability was shattered by the attack on the UN HQ on 19 August.

The reason I wrote in early June 2003 that we should go back to “almost a war footing”, was precisely because after my visit to Iraq on 29 May and my meeting with Ambassador Bremer I was alarmed that the situation we faced was radically different from that anticipated. So I convened a meeting on 3rd June, commissioned papers, organised workstreams, put Ministers in charge of delivery, and personally tracked and followed developments. Was this successful? It would have been but for security. What happened was that both in the centre and eventually in Basra – though at a far lower level – a wrecking campaign began to sabotage improvement and target infrastructure.

So the situation was this: the campaign to remove Saddam's Government had been fantastically successful; what we found was a totally collapsed and degraded state apparatus; we then rapidly had to alter our plans to build capacity, repair and re-start infrastructure, and move in extra personnel. Had security not deteriorated as a result of deliberate acts of extremism and terrorism, we could have succeeded. In other words, the problems were not insurmountable if all that was required – as in Kosovo – was ramping up our effort. What made it uniquely difficult was the disintegration of security in the centre.

In Basra we did make progress. The telegrams from officials in 2003 are realistic but not downbeat. Sir Hilary Synott's valedictory telegram in January 2004 is on balance optimistic not pessimistic. There was talk in October 2003 in Basra of the security situation "easing". Any shortcomings of planning or bureaucracy could have been mitigated but for security. Even that issue was manageable until external influences combined with internal disruption.

As for the handover from the CPA to the IIG in June 2004, announced in November 2003, I have to say I was not aware at the time that this handover was strongly disputed. The reasons for it were clear. Of course at one level it was preferable the CPA remained. It was in fact delivering. But the politics of Iraq – and we were rightly sensitive to that – made it hard, a year after the conflict, for Iraqis not to insist on taking control.

It is possible that the transfer interrupted the flow of construction, but had it not happened, the political fallout might have been even greater in its consequences. Furthermore, I urge the strongest caution in linking problems in the reconstruction programme with the descent into violence. The one did not provoke the other. The violence in its most intractable and barbaric fashion, was for a reason utterly unconnected with progress on Iraqi services. It was, in fact, precisely aimed at undermining such progress, often by killing those trying to improve things and blowing up infrastructure.

15. The Descent into Violence

The challenge in defeating any terror campaign is multiplied immeasurably if those forces trying to defeat it are not of the community or country where it is located. So we began in 2003, and then accelerated sharply with the arrival of General Petraeus in 2004, a programme for “Iraqisation” of the security forces i.e. building up the Iraqi police and army. Naturally, however, this is a difficult and arduous process. My aim throughout 2003 was to drive it as fast as possible and with urgency. But I was under no illusion as to the task. So when I met with John Sawers and Sir Jeremy Greenstock in September 2003 I was making a plea for urgency, not setting some arbitrary or unrealistic deadline. We did, in fact, make considerable progress in 2003 in building police and security capability.

Prior to Iraqi capacity being adequate, we were, together with our allies, responsible for security; and had the problems been of ordinary law and order, we and the nascent police force could have coped. I visited an Iraqi police training centre at the end of 2003 and found them in good heart. But we started from a low base, and over time, they were infiltrated and some corrupted. And, of course, most of all our troops were subject to attack, over time, especially from IEDs.

I always asked what more we could do to provide security. Apart from some specific requests, e.g. our temporary deployment to North Babil, the view of our military was not that more troops were required. On the contrary, it was expressed on several occasions that they would have been resented locally by the Iraqis with whom we were interacting in the south. In this respect the centre was throughout different from the south. Indeed overall from 2003-2009 the south accounted for less than 2% of the violence (cf. 80% within 30 miles of Baghdad). The attacks on Basra came over time to be on our troops rather than on Iraqis. This again was quite different from the centre and north.

Afghanistan did not affect decisions on drawing down troop levels. Had it been said to me at any time in early 2003 that we could not fulfil our task because of shortages of troops, I would not have committed us. We increased our provision for Afghanistan in mid 2005 in the midst of the worst of the Iraqi violence. There was explicit confirmation from the military that our proposed

increased deployment in Afghanistan was not dependent on sticking to a scheduled drawdown.

I was constantly aware our forces were stretched: but not that we had undertaken commitments we couldn't fulfil.

16. The Role of AQ and Iran

This, in my view, merits a special section. This was the game-changer, the dimension not foreseen, that almost tipped Iraq into the abyss. There is no analysis of what happened after May 2003 that is anywhere near the mark, without consideration of how and why Al Qaida and Iran played the roles they did. The truth is: without their interventions, the situation would have been manageable. It was AQ that staged the bombing "spectaculars" that killed thousands of innocent people, drove the international community and development organisations and UN out of Iraq, committed the outrage on the Golden Mosque in Samarra in February 2006 to trigger sectarian violence and created a climate of fear in the country and a sense of a slide into chaos abroad. It was Iran that financed and armed militia groups who created the worsening security situation in the south, contributed to the problems in Baghdad, and through EFPs and IEDs killed coalition and in particular UK soldiers.

The pre-war intelligence made mention of AQ. Various JIC assessments alluded to them and to the possibility of AQ in the north attacking coalition forces. But the bulk of the assessments were focussed on the risks of greater AQ attacks on coalition interests elsewhere in the world, in the Gulf, in Britain etc. There was no sense that AQ would mount a full-scale operation in Iraq after the removal of Saddam. In retrospect as I said in my evidence, the intelligence that al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian AQ leader, had been in Baghdad in May 2002 should perhaps have been given more weight. But actually most of the British authorities were at pains to separate Saddam from AQ in 2002 not to link them.

As far as Iran's involvement, that was specifically assessed as unlikely given the hostility to Saddam. If anything, it was thought that whilst Iran would have a keen interest, naturally, in what happened in Iraq it would be more interested in promoting stability than instability.

What is remarkable, re-reading the intelligence is how fast that picture changed.

There were numerous JIC assessments. I cannot be sure I saw them all but certainly I would have been aware of their purport. The first references to Iran involving itself destructively were on 25th March 2003; then on 2nd April; 7th April, linking Hizbollah with it; then on 11th June 2003. Then a report of April 2004 suggested Iran may not be behind the attacks on the coalition. But in September 2004 this was strongly altered and it was accepted Iran was behind such attacks. On 23rd September 2004 a further report stated that the Sunni extremist presence in Iran was “substantial”. This was emphasised in December 2004. A number of Defence Intelligence Staff and in-theatre reports from 2005-2007 also detailed malign Iranian activity in Iraq.

I will not have seen all these reports at the time. But they show beyond doubt what Iran was up to.

Throughout 2003-2007 I would be chairing meetings, receiving updates, getting weekly reports on the situation all of which reflected this changing security picture. In any event, the roles of AQ and Iran became increasingly obvious and open.

AQ was claiming responsibility for the terrorist attacks and the U.S. and our special forces were focussed on going after them. The type and nature of the EFP and IEDs made Iranian involvement clear. This was backed up by the intelligence. Muqtada Al Sadr, whose JAM militia was our main opponent at the time, fled to Iran.

All of this was supplemented by the briefings I received on visits to Baghdad.

I am not saying that without the activities of AQ and Iran, there would not have still been significant problems. I do say they would have been profoundly more manageable. In any conflict in which this type of Islamist extremist activity is a feature (as with Afghanistan today) the task of any coalition is going to be very much harder.

17. Strategy 2003-2007

In 2004 and 2005 I was constantly agitating about the pace of Iraqiisation, about security, about the politics. This is reflected in a stream of minutes, notes and Committee meetings. In mid 2006, after the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, it became clear the coalition had to try a different approach, in particular to divide off the Sunni insurgents and frustrated or disaffected Iraqis from the AQ terrorists. At the same time it was clear we needed a different approach to the sectarian violence in Basra.

I had meetings, particularly in June 2006, in which I set in train a set of policy adjustments. I talked extensively to President Bush. It should be recalled that I had a weekly sitrep given to me on Iraq. So I was never short of information or advice. Out of these discussions a number of things happened. We linked into the Sunni outreach through General Lamb, operating under General Petraeus. This was highly successful. We mounted several campaigns in Basra to take back control from the militias. This was to culminate in a major offensive at the end of 2006.

However PM Maliki decided he wanted to wait for Iraqi forces to do it. I understood this. There were those who thought Basra could not be cleansed of militia. I always took the view it could be. But since in the case of Basra, unlike Baghdad, Iraqi forces were strong enough to act, it made sense for PM Maliki to take this view.

In the centre of Iraq, President Bush decided on the surge. He consulted me several times on it. It was a brave decision. I supported it. There was no other way forward for Baghdad and the surrounding area. I do not accept this meant our policy diverged; we were adapting our strategies to the circumstances. It is true that some in the U.S. system were by then worried that we were going too softly in Basra. On the other hand, if Iraqi forces could (as they eventually did in the Charge of the Knights) do the job, it was better they did.

18. Process and Personal Notes

The Inquiry Committee has all my notes both to President Bush and my staff.

The notes to President Bush were very private. They were written when I wished to get a change or adjustment to policy. They had to be confidential. The personal relationship was a vital part of the country's strategic relationship. Following 9/11 these were uniquely difficult times. That I had a strong relationship with President Bush and was backing him strongly was not exactly a secret.

The notes were not circulated to Cabinet colleagues but the content of them was essentially in line with my expressed views. So for example: on going down the UN route; getting the Israel-Palestine Roadmap published; pushing for a second resolution; getting the UN back into Iraq after the conflict; putting Iraqisation at the top of the agenda. In all these areas – and this is only in respect of Iraq - the ability to communicate privately and frankly was very important.

As for my team, there is a whole folder of the notes which deal with Iraq, though often inter alia. Again these were, I think pretty consistent with the tenor and content of what was a continuous process of discussions, especially from March 2002 to June 2003.

I would like to conclude with this point. The business of Government involves Cabinet meetings and Committee meetings. These are listed and most were minuted - and where they were not, it was not because I was telling people not to. Indeed I do not think there was a single suggestion as to process or bureaucratic machinery put to me that I did not agree to. I cannot be certain after this length of time but that is my recollection.

However, Iraq was not one amongst many issues at the time. It was the issue of the time. There were therefore a myriad of conversations, iterations alongside the formal procedures which the Civil Service system generated. On the basic issue there was no doubt as to where I stood and why. By the time of the conflict no Minister or Member of Parliament who wanted to, had been unable to discuss it personally with me. If people were anxious about the intelligence, I got them briefed. I let Parliament have the final say on the decision to go to war. I made statements, answered questions, took part in debates.

But in the end there was a decision that had to be made: on the basis of the information available, to decide whether to join the U.S. coalition and remove Saddam; or to stay out. I decided we should be in. The job of the Prime Minister is to make such decisions based on what he believes is in the interests of the country.

Let me add that I know in certain respects, I have answered questions in a way expressed as a comprehensive narrative, rather than point by point. But I have followed the structure set out by the Committee; and I would add that I will be very happy to amplify or elaborate on any points of detail when I appear before the Committee in person. I shall also add at that time a short summary of the lessons I think it would be valuable for a future Prime Minister to know.