

Thursday, 21 January 2010

(2.00 pm)

RT HON JACK STRAW

THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon.

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to our witness.

The objectives of this session are to take evidence from the Rt Hon Jack Straw MP. You were Foreign Secretary from mid-2001 to mid-2006. This is in order to understand his role in the formulation of government policy on Iraq, his leadership of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the period running up to the start of military action in 2003 and in the post-conflict period.

This is the first time we shall be taking evidence from Mr Straw, but we will have a further opportunity to hear from him towards the end of this phase of our hearings.

He has given the Inquiry an extensive written memorandum of evidence, for which we are grateful and which is now up on our website. Now, this session will focus on events up to the summer of 2004, remaining matters and issues surrounding legal advice will be covered at the later session in a couple of weeks' time.

Now, with that, just two regular statements. We recognise that all witnesses are giving evidence based

1 in part on their recollection of events, and we are, of
2 course, cross-checking what we hear against the paper
3 record.

4 I remind every witness that he will later be asked
5 to sign a transcript of evidence to the effect that the
6 evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

7 With that, I'll ask Sir Roderic Lyne to open the
8 questions.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Good afternoon. Thank you for your very
10 helpful memorandum. I think this means that we are not
11 going to have to go into all of the issues that we have
12 already discussed quite thoroughly in a lot of detail.
13 I slightly wonder if we shouldn't just ask the questions
14 by numbers and let you reply to them, but what I would
15 like to cover first is the evolution of our strategy
16 over Iraq, the way that the policy developed in 2002,
17 the question of regime change and then our negotiations
18 in 2002 with the American administration, including
19 about the Middle East peace process.

20 I think, after me, my colleagues will want to go in
21 more detail into questions of the presentation of policy
22 in the autumn of 2002, the run-up to the conflict, the
23 diplomatic end-game and so on, just to sort of set the
24 scene.

25 If I start with the way that the strategy evolved in

1 2001 and up to the middle of 2002, the government's
2 official policy at that time, at least up to the
3 adoption of Security Council Resolution 1409, the Goods
4 Review List Resolution on 14 May 2002, was to sustain
5 and strengthen the containment of Iraq, but we were
6 having problem was the containment, which you have
7 referred to in your memorandum and which we have
8 discussed with earlier witnesses, and then there had
9 also been 9/11, which, again, you describe in your
10 memorandum, as others have done, as having had a huge
11 shock effect on the international community, but
12 particularly, obviously, on the United States, and,
13 after 9/11, Washington's approach to Iraq changed.

14 As you and Sir Peter Ricketts argued in the spring
15 of -- in March of 2002, objectively the threat from Iraq
16 had not worsened as a result of 11 September, but what
17 had however changed was the tolerance of the
18 international community and especially that of the
19 United States.

20 Is that, before I go into my first question, a fair
21 summary of the situation thus far?

22 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, it is, Sir Roderic.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I ask to what extent in this period
24 before and after 9/11, before we in the
25 British Government were set on a new strategy, was there

1 a debate about the strategic options over Iraq? The
2 relevant Cabinet Committee, which was DOP, didn't meet
3 in this period. Were you putting a range of different
4 options before the Prime Minister?

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: Thank you. May I deal with the period
6 before 9/11 and after 9/11 separately, if I may?

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Please.

8 RT HON JACK STRAW: Before 9/11, we were essentially trying
9 to contain a drifting policy, which was containment.
10 I came in as Foreign Secretary in June of 2001 and I was
11 briefed on the problems that we were facing with the
12 existing sanctions. I saw papers that my predecessor
13 Robin Cook had submitted to the Prime Minister about the
14 future policy that we were seeking, which he had talked
15 to Colin Powell and the UK Government was talking to the
16 UK about, and, as it were, I took those over.

17 There were then negotiations which got going really
18 in late June of 2001, to try and get the so-called
19 smarter sanctions. We tried very hard to get this draft
20 resolution through. Sir Jeremy Greenstock, in his
21 memorandum of evidence, has given a great deal of detail
22 about that. But it simply wasn't possible to get
23 agreement. I think the Iraqis were kind of
24 comfortable -- the Iraqi regime, not the Iraqi people,
25 were in a strange way comfortable with this situation

1 and I have often thought about the facility and the use
2 of sanctions. They can work, they can also have all
3 sorts of paradoxical and inadvertent effects; like, they
4 can lead to corruption, they can lead to a strengthening
5 of an authoritarian regime and so on.

6 So there was a sort of weird identity between those
7 who thought we ought to -- needed to do something about
8 Iraq, those who were in the middle, those who were
9 making money out of the sanctions, and the Iraqi regime.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the sanctions, up to this point, had
11 worked?

12 RT HON JACK STRAW: They had worked up to a point, but from
13 the time in late 1998 when the inspectors left, because
14 the inspectors said they couldn't carry out their task,
15 there was increasing anxiety about what the Iraqi regime
16 was doing without the inspectors being there, and
17 alongside that there was the anxiety about the
18 enforcement of the No Fly Zones and there were arguments
19 with the French about whether we should run them. There
20 were concerns in the Ministry of Defence about the
21 safety of our pilots because the Iraqis' missile
22 capability was getting more accurate.

23 So in a sense, if you ask me, "Where were we in the
24 summer of 2001?" in a kind of stodge, it best can be
25 described as. It was all very difficult and no one

1 really knew -- I think we knew what we wanted to do, but
2 it was very unclear about how we were going to get any
3 kind of agreement, because of, as I say, this strange
4 situation where so many different interests had the same
5 vested interest in the status quo. That just led to
6 a kind of stasis in the Security Council and elsewhere.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although we did eventually get agreement,
8 as I mentioned, in May 2002. So we managed to drive
9 through the stodge to an agreement on smarter sanctions.

10 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, we did get agreement in May 2002.
11 If I may, could I just then answer your second question
12 about what happened post-9/11?

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Please.

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: As you have acknowledged, Sir Roderic,
15 and this is a truism, but 9/11 did change everything and
16 it changed everything here, but I think people in Europe
17 still don't quite comprehend the degree to which 9/11
18 completely changed the American sense of safety. This
19 was after all -- they had had Pearl Harbour, but I think
20 I'm right in saying that there not been that loss of
21 life on the American mainland since the Civil War. That
22 may be wrong, but I think it is accurate. They had had
23 no bombing in the second war, apart from Pearl Harbour,
24 which was traumatic but some thousands of miles away
25 from their mainland, and they had got this very strong

1 sense of exceptionalism, that they were exceptional in
2 so many ways, including their own safety. That was
3 shattered on 11 September, and, of course, it led to
4 great soul-searching and examination of where the
5 policies had gone wrong.

6 What that led to was a clear agreement in the
7 United States, but a consensus across the world, that
8 a policy of simply tolerating failing and failed states
9 was unacceptable, and there was a stark example of
10 Afghanistan, where, for a variety of reasons, because
11 the Soviet Union had been profoundly unsuccessful in
12 Afghanistan, but, to be blunt, the west had helped to
13 create the monster of the Taliban by funding the
14 Mujahaddin in Afghanistan against the Soviets.

15 Everybody had thought: this is all very difficult, and,
16 provided they don't cause a threat to international
17 peace and security, if they carry on being bloody to
18 their own people, well, we will just have to, as it
19 were, hold our nose.

20 That all changed. So to pick up the answer to your
21 question, yes, it is very hard to -- there is no Richter
22 scale of risk, except a perception of risk, and the
23 perception of the risk changed from 11 September
24 because, after all, if people had known before
25 11 September, what they discovered on 11 September, this

1 astonishing risk from a failing state or failed state in
2 Afghanistan, the strategy towards Afghanistan and other
3 failed states would have been different.

4 Could I just directly answer the other question,
5 which was 1409? We did indeed finally get 1409
6 in May 2002, but, as Sir Jeremy Greenstock himself
7 points out in his memorandum and oral evidence, that was
8 very limited in its scope. It was about the goods
9 review list and it left other very big issues on the
10 table, including wider issue of sanctions, the Oil For
11 Food programme and all the rest of it. So it was in
12 truth -- I mean, it was better to have it than not, but
13 it was of limited application.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. If we can now take the situation
15 therefore, as you have described, after 9/11, let's say
16 in the first three months or so of 2002.

17 By now, it is clear that the Americans are thinking
18 seriously about taking military action against Iraq, but
19 our official policy is still containment and we are
20 still in a situation in which containment has frozen
21 Saddam's missile programme, his nuclear programme. It
22 has contained his threat and the apparatus of
23 containment is there. There is an embargo on military
24 exports to Iran, a Naval embargo. We have forces
25 stationed in neighbouring countries as a deterrent. We

1 have the No Fly Zones. So it is a multiheaded policy,
2 but the Americans had moved away from it.

3 Now, at that stage, what advice were you getting
4 from your experts about the possible consequences of the
5 new American approach? What were our ambassadors in the
6 Middle East telling you at this stage?

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: I don't recall, in the late part of 2001
8 and the early part of 2002, getting much advice from
9 ambassadors about a change of policy in respect of the
10 Americans. The advice came through thick and fast a bit
11 later.

12 If I may just say this: as you are aware,
13 Sir Roderic, the policy of regime change in Iraq was one
14 that went back to 1998 in an Act of Congress signed by
15 Bill Clinton. So that was the official policy and it is
16 actually of great importance that that is recognised.
17 It was, as it were, a fact that that was a policy.

18 What changed was not the policy qua the policy, but
19 the decision, or the beginnings of a decision, that
20 post-9/11 they should do something about it.

21 What was the reaction? As I picked up from talking
22 to Foreign Ministers in the region, there was anxiety
23 about it. I have to say I don't particularly recall
24 a string of telegrams coming in at that stage, although
25 I can check the record, but, for sure, there was some

1 anxiety about it and it wasn't with the idea of there
2 being, you know, a next day when Saddam was not there,
3 there was a concern about dislocation across the region
4 by the process.

5 I mean, there were very, very few leaders elsewhere
6 in the Middle East who had a good word to say for
7 Saddam. Amongst other things, of course, he wasn't
8 regarded as a good Muslim, but they had all built up
9 arrangements with the Iraqi regime. Jordan and Syria
10 and Turkey were big conduits for smuggling. They had,
11 again, vested interests there. So it was complicated.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's not be time-bound about precisely
13 when you were getting particular kinds of advice, but
14 what was the generality of view that you were getting
15 from your ambassadors around the Middle East about the
16 likely consequences if military action was taken to
17 topple Saddam Hussein?

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, it varied, is the answer, but
19 there was a consistent theme in the advice, which
20 actually continued through to the early stages of 2003,
21 which was concern that there would be real problems on
22 the street in their own countries and the disruption
23 this might cause to the status quo for governments in
24 those Arab countries, few of whom had a popular mandate.

25 As it happened, looking at the consequences of

1 military action, none of that sort of conflagration on
2 the streets took place, interestingly. The Middle East
3 as a whole was remarkably calm.

4 But, if you ask me what the advice was, that was the
5 advice and, in any event, as I have made clear in the
6 memorandum, we didn't share the policy of regime change
7 as a purpose of our foreign policy with the
8 United States. It wasn't our policy in 2002, it wasn't
9 our policy in 2003 and there would have been no legal
10 base for it ever to be our policy.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You refer in your memorandum to the
12 effect that Suez had on Britain's relations with the
13 United States but Suez also had a huge effect on
14 Britain's standing in the Middle East, which lasted for
15 quite a long time. Were any of your officials, whether
16 stationed in the region or in the Foreign Office,
17 worried that military action to topple Saddam Hussein
18 could have a similar effect on our standing in the
19 Middle East and on Middle Eastern stability to that of
20 Suez?

21 RT HON JACK STRAW: I never heard it quite put that way,
22 although, as you know yourself, the -- amongst the
23 Foreign Office staff, most of them have to take a very
24 serious interest in political history and often are
25 steeped in an understanding of the region that they are

1 serving. So there were plenty of discussions that
2 I took part in about British foreign policy in the
3 Middle East since the war.

4 The problem with Suez, above all, was that we
5 decided to go it alone with France and Israel without
6 involving the United States, and that was absolutely
7 catastrophic, as we know. You can mark a kind of
8 decline in Britain's standing in the world from that
9 catastrophic and wholly secret decision, which, in
10 a sense, I'm sure we will get on to talking about, was not
11 Cabinet government.

12 It was kept from the Cabinet altogether, apart from
13 a handful of people, and I have tried to sort of think
14 through why -- what was the kind of mindset of people,
15 not just of ministers, but the kind of Zeitgeist around,
16 and I think that was part of it.

17 Of course, we were aware, for sure, that if we got
18 all this wrong, Britain's standing in the world would be
19 affected, especially in that region, and it was for that
20 reason above all, as well as the merits of the case,
21 that the Prime Minister and I and everybody else were so
22 concerned to see that alongside any strategy we had on
23 Iraq, there was real progress made on resolving the
24 conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I want to come back to that, but just on

1 the expertise on the Middle East, obviously, when Iraq
2 got to the top of the agenda, you must have been
3 pummelling your Middle Eastern experts, your research
4 analysts and so on, the people steeped in the region, as
5 you say, for their assessment as to what the
6 consequences would be in the region and also what might
7 happen inside Iraq after action to topple
8 Saddam Hussein. What sort of advice? Were they worried
9 about this?

10 RT HON JACK STRAW: We were all worried, if I may say so.

11 The President had publicly and formally surfaced his
12 concerns in the Axis of Evil speech on 22 January 2001.
13 I happened to be in Washington when he made that speech,
14 although not present, and I was concerned, too, about
15 the way that he had sought to link these three very
16 different problems together, and I just say
17 parenthetically that, in my view, it made the handling
18 of Iraq much more difficult, because we were at a point
19 where we were seeking a rapprochement with Khatami. He
20 reached out to us after 9/11, and that undermined the
21 reformists in the Iranian government.

22 But, I say, as this was put on the agenda, of course
23 there were a lot of discussions, formal and informal in
24 the Foreign Office and with ambassadors about the situation.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And you had some contrarian views in

1 those discussions.

2 RT HON JACK STRAW: Of course. This is the Foreign Office
3 and people have strong opinions. If I may say so, you
4 were one of those, and absolutely right. I have always
5 you know, worked on the principle that
6 I thought it absolutely essential that, if people had
7 a different point of view, they should feel completely
8 free to say so.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Jonathan Powell talked the other day
10 about our failure to anticipate the situation which
11 arose after Saddam was toppled. Now, is it fair to say
12 that we did fail to anticipate it?

13 RT HON JACK STRAW: We -- what we anticipated were different
14 problems. We first of all thought that there would be
15 quite a long, protracted military phase, because there
16 was the absolutely profound belief that Saddam still had
17 chemical and biological weapons, which he could deploy,
18 that the Saddam Hussein regime had some kind of consent
19 from the Iraqis. So we anticipated that there would be
20 quite a long military phase to the campaign and that the
21 losses might be significant.

22 It was certainly the case that there was anxiety,
23 which indeed I expressed to the Prime Minister from time
24 to time, about what the situation would be and how easy
25 or difficult it would be to manage the situation; and

1 the best way I can summarise this is -- and some of the
2 papers that I have been reading to refresh my memory --
3 there was a briefing that there would be a relatively
4 short period, where we would be welcomed, and
5 a relatively short period of calm, but the groups who
6 were welcoming us would then say, "Thank you very much,
7 and may we politely show you the door?"

8 I'm happy to talk about what happened in 2003.

9 I actually think that a significant number of the
10 problems that we faced at the end of the, as it turned
11 out, short military phase, could have been avoided by
12 better planning and co-ordination, above all in
13 Washington. We may want to come on to that.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will certainly want to come back to
15 that later. I think my colleagues do want to discuss
16 that in some detail with you. So if we get to the
17 situation as the Prime Minister was approaching his
18 meeting at Crawford with the President in April 2002, at
19 that stage the Cabinet Office OD Secretariat produces an
20 option paper. I think I'm right in saying that it was
21 the only Cabinet Office paper looking at strategic
22 options that was produced throughout this period, unless
23 you can remember another.

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: I can't remember another, but you have
25 all the papers.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is the only one I have seen so far and
2 that paper looked at essentially two alternatives:
3 toughening containment, maintaining containment, which,
4 as it said, had been a partially successful policy up
5 until then, or, alternatively, looking at regime change
6 by -- they identified three possible routes.

7 So that implies a certain level of debate is going
8 on, and then the Prime Minister also specifically
9 invited you and the Defence Secretary to offer your
10 views, which you both did, before Crawford.

11 Can you tell us to what extent, at this stage, there
12 was a real debate about different strategic options,
13 because this is really a critical time before we get set
14 on a particular course, and what advice you were
15 offering the Prime Minister about his options?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, there was a debate and crucial that
17 there should have been a debate, and my mind certainly
18 wasn't made up at this time.

19 Let me be clear about this: that -- and this I was
20 clear about -- whatever the policy of the United States,
21 which, as it happens was for regime change, as a purpose
22 of foreign policy, that was off the agenda so far as the
23 United Kingdom was concerned. I certainly, and always
24 had done, in the abstract and in reality, accepted that
25 you could have a diplomatic strategy for a different

1 purpose, which had to be backed by the threat or, if
2 necessary, the use of force, but a foreign policy
3 objective of regime change, I regarded as improper and
4 also self-evidently unlawful.

5 But leave aside the lawfulness of it, it had no
6 chance of being a runner in the United Kingdom. It
7 would not have got my support. The case therefore stood
8 or fell on whether Iraq posed a threat to international
9 peace and security by reasons of its weapons of mass
10 destruction, not on whether it had an extremely
11 unpleasant authoritarian regime that was butchering its
12 own people, because in international law, I am afraid,
13 that is not a good ground for intervention by other
14 states.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So that was essentially the debate?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So would your recommendation at that
18 stage have been that we should essentially aim to
19 continue with the containment rather than go down
20 a regime change route?

21 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, may I just say, the route that
22 I recommended to the Prime Minister, which seemed to me
23 to be a practical route, was not a route of regime
24 change. The route that I recommended to the
25 Prime Minister was not containment -- as I say, of

1 course, I thought about this and in a sense that's what
2 I was paid for and it would have been an extraordinary
3 dereliction of duty if I had not thought about this
4 and -- I don't want to use the word "agonise" in
5 the sense of -- because, you know, if you take these
6 jobs on you have got to make decisions, but you have to
7 think very hard about what you are doing.

8 Of course there was debate about whether we should
9 just put up with containment, but the problem with just
10 putting up with containment, notwithstanding 1409, was
11 that it wasn't going anywhere, and there we were.
12 Meanwhile, the perception of the risk had completely
13 changed and there was also -- I mean --

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The perception had changed. Had the risk
15 changed?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sir Roderic, I actually don't know what
17 the difference is between a perception of risk and risk,
18 because risk is something that is perceived.

19 May I just, if I may, give you this example? You
20 know, I have spent four years as Home Secretary and now
21 two and a half as Justice Secretary, and one of the
22 things you will hear me going on about is what a great
23 job we have done on crime and how crime has gone down,
24 and all that's true.

25 However, that is completely useless for somebody who

1 is an old lady living in a street where there has been
2 a burglary and you can't get on to them and say, "Madam,
3 your risk of being burgled is less than it was", because
4 she will say to you, "Actually, my sense of risk is
5 based on my perception, thank you very much, and the
6 house down the street has just been burgled".

7 Now, if -- whatever the -- the house down the street
8 has just been blown up and quite a number of people have
9 been killed, her perception of risk would change.
10 That's why, as I say, there is no Richter scale, there
11 is no objective -- you have to -- you have to measure
12 risk by people's judgment. So that was there.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just on that point, according to the
14 Sunday Times the other day, which purported to be
15 publishing something you wrote on 25 March 2002, and you
16 have just used the word "objectively", your judgment at
17 the time was that:

18 "Objectively, the threat from Iraq has not worsened
19 as a result of 11 September."

20 You then go on to say that what had changed, as you
21 have already said, was the tolerance of the
22 international community.

23 Objectively, the risk hadn't changed because
24 containment had kept Saddam in his box.

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: Okay, it is a nice point and I just say,

1 by the way, the version in the Sunday Times was taken
2 straight off the website and was first, I think,
3 published in -- leaked in September 1974, the version
4 I have got here --

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not 1974.

6 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sorry, 2004, apologies. The version
7 I have got here, reading these American dates
8 backwards -- seems to be 18 July 2005, but anyway ...

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is that quotation accurate?

10 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, it is. Sure.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Now, by the time you wrote that
12 and by the time you say you gave the advice you gave to
13 the Prime Minister, hadn't Number 10 already pre-empted
14 you? Because from the time of just after the Axis of
15 Evil speech through to March, hadn't Number 10 been
16 having private exchanges with the White House, including
17 when Sir David Manning went to Washington in the middle
18 of March?

19 Sir Christopher Meyer told us that he had received
20 changing instructions, which he had carried out, among
21 others, with Paul Wolfowitz, and the line that Number 10
22 were taking, according to Sir Christopher Meyer and
23 others at that time, was that they were indicating that
24 if the Americans were going for regime change but were
25 prepared to build a coalition, they were indicating that

1 the United Kingdom was prepared to be part of it.

2 Now, conditions were then stated which I want to
3 come on to in a minute, but if that message was already
4 going to the White House before March, was your advice
5 being pre-empted?

6 RT HON JACK STRAW: I wouldn't use the word "pre-empted".

7 There was a debate going on and my minute, I guess,
8 reflected part of that debate. I also say it was in
9 part a debate about how you handled the Americans, and
10 what has to be said from this is that the overall result
11 of all the work that was done by the Prime Minister, by
12 me, by many others, Jeremy Greenstock, Christopher Meyer
13 and many others, was that we converged to achieve the
14 policy objective that we wanted, which was the
15 commitment by the United States to go down the UN route
16 for the sole purpose, not of regime change, but of
17 dealing with, "The threat that Iraq posed to
18 international peace and security".

19 So you know, different of us have to handle our
20 interlocutors in different ways. I felt that my job on
21 this, as in I have done any other job in Cabinet, was to
22 say what I thought and not only to say what I thought
23 but to offer the Prime Minister a considered and
24 worked-through view about what I thought.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have said very strongly that our

1 foreign policy objective was not regime change. You
2 said it would have been improper, unlawful, it wasn't
3 a course that you could have recommended. Was that also
4 the Prime Minister's view?

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: I mean, none of us liked the
6 Saddam Hussein regime, and if there could have been some
7 way of ridding the world and the Iraqi people of that
8 regime, that would have been great. I think
9 Jonathan Powell was making that point when he gave
10 evidence the other day. So I don't want anything I say
11 to be misunderstood that somehow I was speaking up for
12 the Iraqi nation.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I don't think there was any danger of
14 that.

15 RT HON JACK STRAW: They were an odious group and if we
16 could have got rid of them or helped the opposition
17 groups to say goodbye to them, if sanctions could have
18 achieved that, that would have been great. But that was
19 not on the menu.

20 But the reason I'm being precise here is that what
21 was being talked about, discussed, considered was the
22 question of military action by the United States with,
23 at this stage, only the possibility of military action
24 involving the United Kingdom, and the Prime Minister was
25 as well aware as I was.

1 That, as I say, military action for regime change,
2 could not be an objective of Britain -- British foreign
3 policy and nor could it be disguised as an objective of
4 British foreign policy.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But he argued in a different sense for
6 quite a long time, the Chicago speech which has been
7 quoted already in our evidence, and there was
8 a consistent line of argument for him which went through
9 the speech he made at College Station in Texas just
10 after his Crawford meeting. He has continued to this
11 day. I mean, his interview the other day, 13 December,
12 with Fern Britton in which:

13 "If you had known then that there were no weapons of
14 mass destruction, would you still have gone on?"

15 He said:

16 "I would still have thought it right to remove him",
17 meaning Saddam Hussein, and he said he would have had to
18 have used different arguments.

19 We have heard from other witnesses how this seam of
20 argument on regime change had been cemented, if you
21 like, by the fact that it had appeared to have succeeded
22 in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and indeed in Afghanistan at
23 this stage. So did he hold a different view on regime
24 change to the one that you have expressed so firmly?

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: If I may, I think the best way to find

1 that out is to ask him.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We obviously will, but you say that you

3 were having a debate with him about it.

4 RT HON JACK STRAW: Look, we are two different people.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But in one government?

6 RT HON JACK STRAW: Of course, and we came to --

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm trying to work out what the

8 government's policy was.

9 RT HON JACK STRAW: Indeed. Of course. It is no great

10 surprise to know that people at senior levels of

11 government hold strong views and debate those, and what

12 I had to offer the Prime Minister, which I hope

13 I fulfilled, was my best judgment, coupled with my

14 loyalty, because -- and that's what I'd expect of

15 anybody else.

16 I don't in the least mind people disagreeing with

17 me, indeed I encourage it, but I do ask them to be

18 loyal, because, otherwise, you can't operate any kind of

19 governmental system. But can I just make two points, if

20 I may?

21 First of all about the Chicago speech. The Chicago

22 speech was a really important speech and what the

23 Prime Minister was seeking to do in that speech was to

24 alert the world to the fact that we had been too

25 tolerant of situations which were posing a threat to

1 international peace and security through internal
2 repression and humanitarian disaster.

3 It is also fair to say that it took Iraq and the
4 kind of -- what amounted to a kind of catharsis in the
5 system which followed that, that we had the high level
6 working group set up by Kofi Annan, and that that has
7 led, not to a change in the charter, but at least to
8 a broad agreement about what's now called the
9 responsibility to protect, and a wider sense of the
10 responsibilities of the Security Council, and Tony Blair
11 needs to be credited with getting that going.

12 The second thing is -- I know there has been huge
13 textual analysis of the speech that Tony Blair made at
14 Crawford. If you read the speech -- I mean, he talks
15 about regime change in general. I know it is a couple
16 of paragraphs later that he comes on to talk about Iraq
17 and, when he is talking about Iraq, actually he is using
18 language rather similar to that which I'd used about
19 there was threat posed to the world by Iraq's weapons of
20 mass destruction, and Jonathan Powell, I know, offered
21 you some exegesis about the link. I mean, I don't --
22 and I know you will have the opportunity to ask Mr Blair
23 all about that next Friday.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So there was a certain difference of
25 view, I think I interpret this, between you and the

1 Prime Minister on regime change, which you say is
2 perfectly natural, but you, at the same time, were loyal
3 to his point of view.

4 There were a number of occasions, and the
5 College Station speech was one, there were more in 2003,
6 where the Prime Minister bracketed disarmament, weapons
7 of mass destruction, with international terrorism in
8 justifying the approach he was taking to Iraq. In
9 2003, February, for example, he said:

10 "The stance that the world takes now against Saddam
11 is not just vital in its own right, it is a huge test of
12 our seriousness in dealing with the twin threats of
13 weapons of mass destruction and terrorism."

14 Now, Iraq had not hitherto been classified as
15 a country from which one was getting international
16 terrorism. Were you concerned at the way the
17 Prime Minister was, as one witness has put it,
18 conflating these two issues?

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: I would have been concerned if he had
20 been claiming, which he wasn't, and I have made that
21 clear in the memorandum which has now been leaked, and
22 plenty else, if there had been any suggestion of a claim
23 that the Iraqis had been involved in 9/11, because there
24 is no evidence whatsoever to that effect.

25 I don't think it was entirely unreasonable of him at

1 all, however, to suggest that these were the two
2 threats, because the problem that we saw was that of
3 failing and/or rogue states, and you could have a state
4 like North Korea, which, for its own reasons, was
5 unquestionably developing a nuclear weapons capability
6 and that state could also have turned out to be
7 a proliferator of weapons technology, not only of
8 nuclear weapons technology, but also much more portable
9 and directly usable technology into other rogue states,
10 which could then be available to international
11 terrorists.

12 After all, one of the things we finally comprehended
13 after 9/11 was the fact that bang next door to
14 Afghanistan is Pakistan. Pakistan not only developed an
15 effective, usable nuclear weapons infrastructure, but
16 also had within it terrorist operations, part of which
17 were sponsored by the state.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was in Pakistan?

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: Pakistan.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But not in Iraq?

21 RT HON JACK STRAW: What I'm saying is you were asking me
22 about was it unfair for the Prime Minister to put
23 together threats from terrorism and threats from weapons
24 of mass destruction --

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: With regard to Iraq.

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: I'm sorry, I thought you were talking
2 more generally.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, I'm talking about with regard to
4 Iraq.

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: So far as Iraq was concerned -- as
6 I say, the threat from Iraq, as at 11 September, as at
7 20 March 2003, was a threat, as we perceived it, from
8 its weapons of mass destruction. It had certainly been
9 involved in sponsoring terrorism against Israel. We
10 knew that, but I don't put that -- it was very serious,
11 but it was confined to the Middle East.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Support for the families of Hezbollah and
13 so on?

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So there wasn't really an argument that
16 Saddam was helping the sort of terrorism that was being
17 directed against us, certainly not Al-Qaeda. There
18 wasn't a scenario in which he or Iraq seemed likely to
19 be a country in which terrorists would get their hands
20 on weapons of mass destruction.

21 Pakistan is a very different case, as you say, but
22 with regard to Iraq, that scenario doesn't really seem
23 probable, does it?

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, there wasn't any evidence that
25 Iraq had been involved in Al-Qaeda, full stop. There

1 was evidence, however, that Saddam was ready to sponsor
2 terrorism when he thought it was appropriate.

3 Sir Roderic, I can't speculate on what would have
4 happened with the Saddam regime when we just allowed
5 containment to wither and die, which I think was the
6 alternative, except that --

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, the alternative was to continue it
8 and strengthen it, which was what you were trying to do.

9 RT HON JACK STRAW: I know, but we came to the view that it
10 wasn't going to fly.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You got a resolution through the UN.

12 RT HON JACK STRAW: I'm aware of that.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You had the other apparatus of
14 containment in place. Other countries thought --
15 evidently, the French, for example -- that this was
16 a viable policy.

17 RT HON JACK STRAW: The French allowed 1409 to pass.
18 I can't say they were, in practice, enthusiastic, and as
19 I say, the -- what 1409 dealt with was the goods review
20 list. It didn't deal with these other absolutely
21 crucial areas. If I may say so, it is quite difficult
22 to argue that, at May 2002, the whole apparatus of
23 containment was working. It wasn't, in my view, and
24 Geoff Hoon was telling you about the problems of
25 enforcing the No Fly Zones, for example.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it is the case that our assessment
2 was, at that stage, that he had not broken out in terms
3 of developing his weapons of mass destruction.

4 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, the other I think I was going to
5 add to this was that, of course, during this period --
6 and especially from the expulsion or removal of the
7 weapons inspectors at the end of 1998 -- we had this
8 stream of intelligence about what Saddam was doing and
9 the intelligence did not say he has packed up. It
10 didn't say that at all. We had the baseline, which
11 I mention in my memorandum to you, of the last UNSCOM
12 report of January 1999, 200 pages long, saying, "This is
13 what we have done, but this is what remains".

14 As I say, there were the known knowns and there was
15 this big unknown about what had happened to that and
16 this stream of intelligence that was coming through
17 saying, "This continues to be a real problem". After
18 all, if we had not had that, we could have abandoned
19 containment as well. We would have thought it was all
20 absolutely fine.

21 I wonder -- I know that obviously Sir John, one of
22 the key things you are looking at is how we arrived at
23 that and what are the lessons. There is just one other
24 thing I wanted to add about intelligence, although
25 I talk about it in my memorandum, and that's in

1 a similar sort of bracket to my observation about Suez.
2 It is about the Falklands, because these things sit in
3 the psyche of decision-makers and Parliamentarians and
4 I suggest the public. I was in the Commons for the
5 Falklands, and the charge against Peter Carrington,
6 I think it was Lord Carrington then, I think were very
7 unfair, but the charge was that he and his colleagues in
8 the Foreign Office had neglected to follow through
9 intelligence, not taken proper notice of it.

10 So there was, as I say, at an unspoken level, but,
11 as I say, alongside, as it were, the lesson of Suez,
12 which was, "Stay close to the Americans", there was also
13 the lesson of the Falklands, which was, "Take notice of
14 intelligence".

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I turn now to the Prime Minister's
16 correspondence with President Bush, and, indeed, beyond
17 that, get into the question of the negotiations which
18 you were rightly involved in with the American
19 administration throughout 2002? But let's just start
20 with the Prime Minister's correspondence with
21 President Bush, which you, I'm sure, will have seen
22 Alastair Campbell referred to the other day.

23 Now, you saw the Prime Minister's letters,
24 I understand, to President Bush. Did you see them after
25 they were written or did you see them in draft, and do

1 you think you saw them all?

2 RT HON JACK STRAW: I saw some of them after they were
3 written. I saw some of them in draft. It depended
4 really on the circumstances. Essentially, I think it
5 partly depended on, literally, my physical proximity.
6 Unsurprisingly, I spent a lot of time, as Foreign
7 Secretary, on aeroplanes and abroad.

8 I think there was -- I can't be absolutely certain
9 about this, there was one occasion when I was on an
10 aeroplane with the Prime Minister. We talked about
11 a memorandum he was writing and went through the draft.
12 When I was in London, I was in and out of the other side
13 of Downing Street all the time. So it depended.

14 On your question: did I see all of them? I think
15 so, is the answer. I am afraid it is for your archivist
16 to say whether I saw all of them, because I don't know
17 what the denominator is.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As Foreign Secretary, you presumably
19 would have expected to see letters to another head of
20 state?

21 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, and, look, I certainly never --
22 I certainly saw all the key ones. May I just say this?
23 I have obviously -- we have very good files in my
24 private office, and all of that has been made available
25 to you, but I have also looked at --

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, thank you.

2 RT HON JACK STRAW: That's all right. It was very important
3 they should be, but all that has been made available to
4 you, and that is a complete set of all the papers that
5 I received from Number 10. I have also seen some of the
6 Cabinet Office files and I have not come across
7 a memorandum from the Prime Minister which I had not seen.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I guess we had better let you if we find
9 any we think you didn't see.

10 There is one letter, while the text is not in the
11 public record, the delivery of it by Sir David Manning
12 to President Bush in, I think, late July 2002, has been
13 described in public and in print.

14 Do you recall that particular letter? It was
15 a pretty important one, end of July or so, 2002?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, I'm sorry, I have got a number
17 of -- in my head. I think I did, yes.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. In that letter, or those letters
19 generally, were you entirely comfortable with the way
20 that the Prime Minister was expressing himself to the
21 President?

22 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, if -- I mean -- to some extent
23 this will be easier --

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It would be much easier.

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: -- if there were private sessions.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It would be much easier if we had them in
2 front of us, one way or the other.

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: That, if I may say so, is not a matter
4 for me. I happen to place a high value on the
5 confidentiality of relations with foreign states and --
6 I just do.

7 If I may say so, you started talking about
8 David Manning. David Manning had been a personal friend
9 for 20 years before he and I ended up working closely
10 together. I had a very, very close relationship, still
11 do, with David Manning, and we used to talk all the
12 time. So just on what's the denominator, I can't say
13 whether there was a secret paper of paper I never saw,
14 but I don't think I did and --

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: My question was whether you were happy
16 with what the Prime Minister was putting on those bits
17 of paper?

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: So far as being happy with it, mainly --
19 would I have written the memorandum in the same way?
20 Probably not. Because I'm a different person.

21 What we were dealing with here was a personal
22 relationship, which was of profound importance to the
23 country, and may I make this point -- I can't speak for
24 the Prime Minister, but offer this as an explanation.
25 You have got the opportunity to ask him next week. But

1 he -- he was very close to the Democratic administration
2 of Bill Clinton. Indeed, I went with him on his first
3 government-to-government visit to Washington, which was
4 in February of 1998, which happened to be the week that
5 the Monica Lewinsky affair got a wider audience.

6 He became -- was very close and very supportive of
7 Bill Clinton. That led to considerable sort of
8 suspicion by the new Bush administration about whether
9 this "socialist", Tony Blair, and the rest of us -- and we
10 were "socialists" or "better socialists" behind him -- could
11 be trusted, and he had to build up a relationship.

12 Now, I had to do so with Colin Powell, but it was,
13 you know, a little bit easier. So I don't think you can
14 criticise Tony Blair for trying to work out where this
15 chap was coming from and trying to get alongside him,
16 and what I do say, too, is that you need to judge the
17 result of this kind of approach with his purpose, and he
18 went there, as I was talking to Colin Powell then and --
19 in the summer as well -- to try and persuade the Bush
20 administration to go down the UN route and that was what
21 was agreed in the end.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's a very important point. What you
23 say essentially is similar to what Jonathan Powell
24 argued the other day, which was that the Prime Minister
25 was making his commitment of support, his very strong

1 commitment of support for the President to some extent
2 for tactical reasons, as a way of gaining influence with
3 the administration, traction over the issues like the
4 UN, which we are going to come on to in a second,
5 whereas Sir Christopher Meyer has argued and others to
6 a degree too, that the Prime Minister's commitment, as
7 given, maybe for tactical reasons, became an assumption
8 in Washington that we were going to be with them because
9 of the way in which it was expressed and, therefore,
10 actually undermined our traction in those negotiations.
11 So we are trying to grapple our way between two
12 different negotiations.

13 We have got, I think, perhaps five or ten minutes
14 before we ought to take a tea break. If the Chairman is
15 in a state to continue.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: He has recovered.

17 RT HON JACK STRAW: I have got some very good throat sweets.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: Not now, but thank you.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will resuscitate the Chairman in
20 a minute over a cup of tea.

21 Perhaps I can at least start -- after the break,
22 I will come back to the Middle East peace process, but
23 can we, just before we take a break, look at the
24 generality of the sort of things you were trying to
25 achieve in these discussions with the Americans, just

1 sketch that out?

2 My understanding from the evidence we have had so
3 far is that you, the Prime Minister, Sir David Manning,
4 the people conducting most of these exchanges, were
5 insisting that a number of points were essential
6 pre-conditions if there was to be successful action
7 against Saddam Hussein and those pre-conditions included
8 having a sound legal basis, and that's something I think
9 we will want to discuss with you at a later stage.

10 They included, as you have just said, approval by
11 the United Nations, sometimes expressed as the UN route,
12 and diplomacy needed to be exhausted. This, I think, is
13 very much borne out in your memorandum, that war should
14 be a last resort. That's something that I think
15 Sir Lawrence Freedman wants to discuss in more detail
16 with you later on.

17 Another point that was made was the need for broad
18 international support. Another point was proper
19 planning for the campaign, and indeed also for the
20 aftermath, and another point -- I have not necessarily
21 point these in a priority order -- was that there needed
22 to be progress on the Arab/Israel dispute, the
23 Middle East peace process.

24 Is that fair summary of these pre-conditions?

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes ...

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I don't want to get into a big semantic
2 debate about whether they are conditions or
3 pre-conditions, but maybe you want to explain.

4 RT HON JACK STRAW: Pre-conditions for what? Our approach,
5 the British Government's approach was to secure the
6 disarmament, as we saw it, of Iraq's weapons of mass
7 destruction. A diplomatic approach, but backed by the
8 threat, if necessary, of use of force. But the
9 objective was not military action. That was a means we
10 might have to resort to, but it was never, ever the
11 objective of the British Government, nor would I have
12 been willing ever to be party to that.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The objective of the American Government,
14 though, was regime change.

15 RT HON JACK STRAW: The objective of the American Government
16 was regime change and that dated back to Bill Clinton.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, would it be fair to say that in your
18 exchanges with American Secretary of State,
19 Colin Powell, that he strongly supported our arguments
20 about these pre-conditions?

21 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes. I mean -- yes, he did. You are
22 hesitating --

23 THE CHAIRMAN: We are right to understand your view of the
24 conditions as being conditions necessary for success of
25 the strategy, rather than pre-conditions without which

1 we would not be able to go forward? Is that correct?

2 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, sorry, yes.

3 Sir John, I wonder if you would just explain what

4 was in your mind when you were asking me that point?

5 THE CHAIRMAN: A clear understanding, because we heard from
6 Jonathan Powell that essentially these were not
7 pre-conditions without which we would not act, and told
8 the Americans so, but rather this was our best view and
9 advice to the Americans of what would be required for
10 success. Is that right?

11 RT HON JACK STRAW: We go through the list. Some of them --
12 an obvious pre-condition was that -- was that of a legal
13 base. That was an absolute pre-condition. Approval by
14 the United Nations, which ran into the first but also in
15 terms of foreign policy, yes. War a last resort. Yes,
16 it is a means of achieving an objective, not an
17 objective in itself and certainly the Middle East peace
18 process, yes.

19 Could I just make, if I may, this point -- you may
20 want to come on to it in due course -- a point about
21 handling the Americans? Because you talk about the
22 Americans.

23 When I came to this job, I had three linked sets of
24 perception in my mind about handling the Americans. One
25 was from having read over the previous Christmas the

1 third volume of Robert Skidelsky's biography of Keynes,
2 in which he describes in entertaining detail Keynes'
3 view about trying to deal with the Americans. How they
4 never put anything on paper, they sat around and talked
5 endlessly, describing different players in the American
6 administration as bees buzzing around and suddenly
7 sniffing at the "White Hive", as Keynes called it, and
8 getting some faint odour, and then, finally, and
9 improbably, landing in the same place. So that was one.

10 There was a paper by Rodric Braithwaite which I was
11 given when I got in the Foreign Office about handling
12 the Americans based on his experience, which has become
13 one of the seminal documents in the Foreign Office, and
14 then Robin Renwick's brilliantly entitled autobiography
15 "Fighting with Allies".

16 People tend to think that because they were once
17 a colony and they speak roughly -- roughly -- the same
18 language, they must operate in a similar way. They
19 operate in a completely different way. You have got
20 this great swirl going on, and you have got so many
21 political appointees all the way down these systems,
22 including the State Department -- most of the people in
23 the State Department had been appointed by Colin Powell,
24 but some of them hadn't, they had been appointed by
25 people he regarded as his opponents. So there was this

1 swirl going on.

2 People taking part in discussions, which here would
3 take place internally, there they are spilled over into
4 the pages of Fox News, the American Standard, the
5 Washington Post, for all to see, and our aim, certainly
6 my aim, was to try and work the best system. Because
7 there was never an American view until the President had
8 pronounced, but getting to that point was an
9 extraordinary process which would not bear chemical
10 analysis.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: One more question about getting to that
12 point, and then I know that the Chairman would like us
13 to take a little tea break, and after that, I would just
14 like to talk about the Middle East before I hand the
15 baton on.

16 But you, in your memorandum, refer to an
17 unpublicised meeting you had with Colin Powell during
18 your summer holidays in August of 2002 at someone's
19 house on Long Island. This was at a very critical
20 juncture. The Prime Minister was heading for yet
21 another meeting with President Bush, the question, as
22 you note in your memorandum, of whether or not we would
23 go down the UN route, was very much in play in this
24 Washington orbit you have just described between
25 different factions.

1 When you saw Colin Powell on Long Island, how
2 worried was he about the likely reactions
3 internationally, and particularly in the Middle East, if
4 the policy that the Hawks were proposing in the
5 administration was the one that went through?

6 RT HON JACK STRAW: I don't think -- I'm extremely anxious
7 not to quote Colin Powell, because I think it is only
8 fair to say that he must be allowed to speak for
9 himself. However, one can see from the public record, generally,
10 he and I were in the same place on this sort of issue
11 and he had huge experience. After all, he had been --
12 including in respect of the first Gulf War. So he was
13 very, very sensitive to what was happening in the
14 Middle East, and it is also the case that he didn't
15 accept -- exactly see himself as a fellow thinker with
16 people who were described as Neo-Cons, and all that was
17 the base, the tension in the Bush administration between
18 the Neo-Cons and -- on the one side, and people I'd
19 describe as rather more sensible people, on the other,
20 was very well-known. So he had all these anxieties for
21 sure.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were you worried after you had seen
23 Colin Powell?

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: I was worried to a degree, but my job
25 was to try and assist in the British Government's

1 immediate foreign policy objective, which was getting
2 the United States down the UN route. The fact that
3 George Bush had been declared elected as President of
4 the United States was a reality. The Supreme Court had
5 decided. So he was President, he was installed.

6 They were not our natural, intellectual, political
7 allies but we had to work with them. You can't pick and
8 choose the administrations that you work with in foreign
9 policy. You accept them as a fact. That was one fact.

10 The second fact, above all, was 9/11 and how that
11 had sort of turned thinking and perceptions upside down,
12 particularly in the United States. We had to work with
13 that, and I thought it was an absolutely key part of our
14 overall approach which was that we should deflect those
15 in the United States administration who wanted to take
16 impetuous military action against Saddam Hussein for the
17 purpose of regime change and try and get to a point
18 where the United States' own objective was not, in
19 practice -- was not regime change qua regime change, but
20 the disarmament of Iraq, and that indeed was what we got
21 by the President's statement in the United Nations on
22 12 September.

23 You know, if I may say, without much modesty, that
24 was quite a significant achievement, above all for
25 Secretary Colin Powell and those who supported him. It

1 "The high point of British influence on the
2 Arab/Israel dispute was the American statement of
3 4 April ..."

4 That's 2002, just before Crawford:

5 "... in which, at a time when the Israeli defence
6 force was in the West Bank towns creating some damage
7 and casualties, the Americans called for Israel's early
8 withdrawal from the West Bank towns."

9 He went on to say:

10 "No sooner had that statement come out demanding the
11 early withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the
12 West Bank than a major political operation was launched
13 in Washington the following week to reverse the nature
14 of that call. Colin Powell had been sent to the region,
15 and, when he came back, he was strongly of the view that
16 he had been consistently undermined by his enemies while
17 he was away in the administration, in the US Congress
18 and by someone who is now the Israeli Prime Minister,
19 Benjamin Netanyahu, coming to Washington and effectively
20 working against him.

21 "The definitive American statement was then one made
22 in June, which rode back a long which from what they had
23 said on 4 April and effectively said in a practical
24 sense that, 'We will leave the Middle East on a care and
25 maintenance basis and, by the way, we are not going to

1 do anything until the Palestinians democratise
2 themselves', and what that means is getting rid of
3 Yasser Arafat, which he didn't do until he died."

4 That's all the quotation from
5 Sir Christopher Meyer's evidence because it sums up
6 a number of aspects about this negotiation.

7 The fact is that, by the time the conflict began
8 in March of 2003, we hadn't managed to secure progress
9 from the American administration on the Middle East
10 peace process, except for a very belated agreement to
11 publish the famous road map.

12 Why were we unable to get that progress at such an
13 important point for us?

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: There are related reasons. There was
15 never real agreement inside the European Union about
16 what to do in respect of the Middle East. Endless
17 discussions in Foreign Ministers' meetings and in the
18 heads of government at Foreign Minister level. But in
19 the absence of a very clear, agreed and enforced
20 strategy by the European Union, the only serious player
21 in the Middle East is the United States, and I don't
22 believe that we are going to get that -- you know
23 a serious consensus in the European Union for many
24 decades for historical reasons.

25 What then has to be understood -- and I know you do

1 understand it, Sir Roderic, but it is just worth
2 repeating -- is the unique nature of the relationship
3 between Israel -- the Government of Israel and the
4 United States. It is to do with how Israel was founded,
5 with what is regarded in Israel and by the Jewish
6 community as an unambiguous support for Israel, whereas
7 there is a high level of -- well, reality to their claim
8 that our approach was very ambiguous, indeed laid the
9 foundations for the later problems we have had with
10 contradictory policy positions like the Balfour
11 declaration and the Sykes-Picot agreement and all the
12 things that followed from that.

13 But -- and then coupled with that, you have got this
14 inherent, underlying instability of the Israeli
15 political system, because they have got this completely
16 ludicrous system of proportional representation of the
17 worst kind. So the coalition is constantly under
18 threat.

19 Now, added to that, what I think is a very
20 interesting, often overlooked part of this brew, is the
21 way in which the Republican Party and the Bush family in
22 particular, were traumatised by the very courageous
23 efforts of Bush 41 to take on the Israeli Government,
24 which is what he did, and James Baker did, in the
25 aftermath of the first Gulf War. James Baker and

1 Bush 41 were the last American administration to seek to
2 face down the Government of Israel, and, if you
3 remember, Baker went to the region and suspended their
4 debt facilities and their subsidies.

5 Within the Republican Party and the Bush family,
6 that has led to the view, which I think is probably
7 accurate, that that was critical in tipping support in
8 key states amongst the Jewish community from Bush to
9 Clinton and it is certainly a matter of record that
10 Clinton was merciless with Bush 41 for the fact that he
11 had not stood up for Israel.

12 That was there because -- it just happens to be
13 true -- the Republican Party is -- generally has not
14 been the one that represented the Jewish community, it
15 is the Democratic Party, but they have managed, one way
16 or another, to get some of the Jewish community over to
17 them through an alliance with the Evangelical Christian
18 movement, but all that was there.

19 You then had people in Washington who felt
20 passionately about Israel and its survival, for very
21 obvious reasons. I mean, I feel passionate about Israel
22 and its survival too. I just happen to think the policy
23 of the United States and the policy of Israel to secure
24 that survival is generally wrong.

25 But anyway, we are talking about Washington. So it

1 is a really difficult environment. What Tony Blair
2 sought to do all the way through his premiership was to
3 raise the Middle East up the agenda with Washington and
4 to get some change and he was relentless in seeking to
5 do that and I completely shared his agenda. It was
6 a matter of huge frustration that we weren't able to
7 achieve that, and, for example, when "efforts were made
8 to democratise the Palestinian authority", the elections
9 which were forced on the Palestinian authority were
10 mistimed. They led to the obvious result which was
11 Hamas would win, and then the international community
12 rather than -- it was perfectly obvious it was going to
13 happen -- rather than anticipating that, allowed it to
14 happen and then said, well, we are not now going to
15 recognise the result because we don't agree with the
16 consequences of the election.

17 So all those things, as I say, were in the brew.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The frustration you have just expressed
19 has been reflected by other witnesses. Jonathan Powell,
20 for example, talked of his disappointment, and others
21 have too, but effectively, what you were saying was you
22 and the Prime Minister were pushing on the White House
23 in one direction, the Israeli Government was pushing in
24 the other direction and the Israelis won?

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: It is a more subtle point than that. It

1 depended on the circumstances, it depended on what was
2 happening on the ground in Israel and the occupying
3 territories, all sorts of things and we made some
4 progress.

5 Actually, the Road Map is not to be dismissed. It
6 was a very important achievement, but if I look back on
7 that period, yes, it was very frustrating and it was
8 a consequence of this huge pressure by the Israelis and
9 their supporters in the American administration, and,
10 above all, within the Bush administration, it was those
11 supporters who sought actively to undermine
12 Secretary Powell.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the Prime Minister said to the
14 President, to get himself influence, "I will be with
15 you". We had started planning, as the Americans knew,
16 to be with them in a military sense if it came to
17 conflict in a very big way, probably with a land
18 contribution, though that wasn't confirmed until the end
19 of the year. So we had given ourselves some leverage.
20 We were saying, "This is a point that's really important
21 to us", but we were saying more than that. We were
22 saying, "This is a point that is really important to
23 making this policy a success". Despite all of that, we
24 failed?

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, it didn't appear that we were

1 going to fail, let me say. This is, by definition, an
2 investigation into things that have happened at the
3 time. It looked as though there was some chance of us
4 succeeding. The two were never going -- the sequence of
5 events was never going to be locked together. They were
6 going to be on slightly different tracks, because we are
7 dealing with, yes, adjacent countries, but different
8 circumstances.

9 But, as I say, with the publication of the Road Map,
10 I thought that was an important advance, and there were
11 other important advances, but overall, Sir Roderic, of
12 course you are right. As I say, at the time, I don't
13 recall knowing that I just thought it
14 was hopeless, I didn't think that at all.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: One of the strategic objectives that we
16 and the Americans shared was that dealing with
17 Saddam Hussein should be a step to improve security in
18 the Middle East, a step towards improvement across the
19 region, and one of your arguments was that prior
20 progress on the Arab/Israel track was vital so that
21 people in the region didn't continue to accuse us of
22 double standards.

23 So, did not the failure to achieve that prior
24 progress gravely undermine one of the strategic
25 objectives of the coalition?

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: It would have been much better if we had
2 been able to achieve that earlier. We didn't achieve it
3 at all, in the event. I don't think it gravely
4 undermined the whole approach, and as I said in the
5 session before the break, one of the interesting things
6 about the aftermath is that the difficulties across the
7 Middle East region as a whole, which we had anticipated,
8 did not come to pass, and I think that, whatever else
9 may be said about what happened, and there is quite
10 a lot, the region is better off without the Iraqi
11 regime.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. I think we should move on.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks. I want to pick up on the
14 process we were discussing before the break on your
15 efforts post-Crawford with the Prime Minister to get
16 a fresh mandate from the Security Council.

17 I just want to start by quoting something from the
18 memorandum, paragraph 24, where you say:

19 "In addition to serious questions about the legality
20 of any UK involvement in military action, without
21 a refreshed UNSC mandate, a United Nations Security
22 Council mandate, there was no prospect of agreement
23 within the British Cabinet or the Parliamentary party
24 without one."

25 Just to be clear what you are saying there, whatever

1 the Prime Minister may have felt about the value of
2 regime change, being with the Americans and sticking
3 shoulder to shoulder with President Bush, if there had
4 not been progress on the United Nations, you don't think
5 the Cabinet would have been able to support him and no
6 action subsequently would have taken place?

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, Sir Lawrence, that's what I'm
8 saying. That was my judgment and it was what I told the
9 Prime Minister on many occasions, and he understood that
10 fully and I know that he made that clear to
11 President Bush as well.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: He made it clear to President Bush
13 that, if there was no UN Security Council mandate,
14 further resolution, that he would not be able to bring
15 his Cabinet with him?

16 So this made the discussions through August and into
17 the Camp David summit of early September extremely
18 important?

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, of course. Yes.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the logic of this is that, when
21 you agreed this in principle with the President and
22 Secretary of State Powell, and, we have heard,
23 Vice-President Cheney, at Camp David on 8 September and
24 then this was confirmed in the President's speech to the
25 UN General Assembly a few days later, in a way this was

1 the critical moment in terms of our commitment to the
2 United States on a common strategy. Is that fair?

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: I think it was -- I think it is fair.

4 It is one of the critical moments, but it was also the
5 critical moment at which the United States committed
6 itself to the strategy which we had been arguing for.
7 They had committed themselves to the United Nations,
8 which was quite a hard call for many in the
9 US administration, who were root and branch opposed to
10 the United Nations, and it meant that we were embarked
11 on the strategy which, in my judgment, could easily have
12 led to a peaceful resolution of this major dispute and
13 that was fundamental to the approach of the
14 British Government.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed. Now, this had consequences
16 for the whole way that the issue was going to be handled
17 from this point on. Whatever the American
18 administration may have thought about multiple arguments
19 why regime change might have been a good idea, it now
20 really had to be based on disarmament, weapons of mass
21 destruction and non-compliance with a succession of
22 UN Resolutions? This was the basis really for all the
23 diplomacy of the next six months. Is that fair?

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, that's fair, although just to say
25 that, of course, one of the reasons, if not the reason,

1 why the United States had a policy objective of regime
2 change going back to 1998, was because of the holdings
3 of WMD which the Iraqi regime had unquestionably had,
4 its use of those, and at the judgment that we made that
5 it not only had them, but was developing them and they
6 posed a very serious risk.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there was also a question, which
8 you discussed before the break with Sir Roderic, about
9 the extent to which it was about how things could
10 develop in the future: the possible leakage of these
11 weapons to terrorist groups, the ability of
12 Saddam Hussein, should containment fail, to be able to
13 completely reconstitute his arsenals and so on.

14 So there was always a forward-looking aspect to this
15 problem as well as an immediate one?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, I mean -- yes, indeed,
17 Sir Lawrence, and when we were talking about a threat,
18 we were talking about a threat in the future. So --
19 I mean, we weren't just saying as a matter of historical
20 record, "This is what they have done". I mean, that was
21 the base for the case, which I tried to set out in my
22 memorandum, but to say that our overall judgment, taking
23 account of all the information and perceptions we have,
24 is that this man remains a -- and is a serious threat
25 now and for the future.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to quote what Jonathan Powell
2 told us:

3 "The specific state of Saddam's WMD was simply not
4 the essence of our concern. What concerned us was the
5 threat he could potentially pose."

6 The decision to topple Saddam, he said, was not
7 intelligence-driven, it was based on an assumption about
8 the weapons of mass destruction, the holdings that he
9 had, but how this could develop in the future.

10 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, I did my best in my memorandum to
11 set out what my thinking was. My thinking was -- led to
12 me making judgments. They were informed by what was on
13 the public record. They were informed by intelligence,
14 they were informed by my analysis of the behaviour of
15 the Saddam Hussein regime over very many years and
16 I added all that together.

17 A very important part of, as it were, the
18 understanding here, that alongside simply the fact that
19 they had had these large WMD programmes and had used
20 them, and all the other things that we know, that the
21 Saddam regime had been in open defiance of the
22 United Nations and its authority, and I felt some --
23 very strongly, as someone who had cared, and had done
24 for decades -- cared about the United Nations and was
25 aware of the history of the failure of the League of

1 Nations pre-war, that seeking to maintain the authority
2 of the United Nations was of fundamental importance. In
3 the first of the four major Parliamentary debates that
4 we had -- this was on 24 September 2002 --

5 I devoted quite a passage in my speech to this issue
6 of the authority of the UN and why the League of Nations
7 had failed and suggested what that had led to.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So there are two sorts of arguments
9 at play here. There is one, that this is a man who has
10 consistently been out of compliance with UN Resolutions
11 and that affects, as you suggested, the authority and
12 integrity of the UN as an institution, and there is
13 another argument about the sort of threat that this
14 could lead to in the future. There are two different
15 sorts of arguments, but they both can be at play at the
16 same time.

17 RT HON JACK STRAW: With respect, I would say they are two
18 parts of the same whole, is the way I would put it.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. What we have -- you have
20 mentioned, and you give some details, as you say, in
21 your memorandum, about the reasons why you were
22 convinced that there were stocks there, including those
23 that were unaccounted for by UN inspectors in the past
24 and there was certainly other information coming in that
25 reinforced that view.

1 However, just to quote what Sir David Omand told us
2 yesterday, if you looked hard at the intelligence base
3 for the propositions that were being put forward, your
4 reaction might have been, "Is that all there is?" and
5 I think you yourself at some point used the word "thin"
6 to describe the quality of the intelligence. Is that
7 fair?

8 RT HON JACK STRAW: If you say I used the word "thin",
9 I take your word for it, Sir Lawrence.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Please, you can tell us what you
11 thought.

12 RT HON JACK STRAW: I'll tell you what my perception was,
13 but I precede that by re-emphasising the point that the
14 case for taking Iraq seriously was in no sense based on
15 intelligence alone.

16 The intelligence supplemented what we knew already
17 about the threat. It went with the grain. There was no
18 reason whatever to disbelieve the intelligence and
19 I don't think there was a single piece of intelligence
20 which said, "Actually, the judgments that are being made
21 in the international community are all wrong", and bear
22 in mind that it wasn't only the Americans and the
23 United States intelligence services which had
24 intelligence from Iraq, but a number of other liaison
25 partners, some from countries which, although they may

1 have shared our perception of the threat, disagreed with
2 our strategy quite profoundly. They were feeding this
3 all through.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But we were the ones who were going
5 to be taking the initiative with the Americans drafting
6 the resolutions and so on.

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This -- you mentioned 24 September,
9 when you made your speech -- was also the day, of
10 course, that the September dossier was released. So the
11 context in which the dossier, which we have spoken a lot
12 of -- and I won't go into more detail today, but the
13 context of that was a need to demonstrate that this was
14 something that was serious, and the focus of that
15 document was on the existing capabilities as well as the
16 plans, but the existing capabilities of Saddam Hussein.
17 It fixed the move to the UN with the issue of weapons of
18 mass destruction. Is that fair?

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, I wouldn't use the verb "fixed".

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Linked?

21 RT HON JACK STRAW: "Linked", okay. Yes, it is, and the
22 reason why we produced that information was because of
23 great demands from Parliament and that document, as
24 Butler readily concedes, was never designed as a case
25 for war. It was designed and written as a case for

1 saying, "We need to take this seriously".

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, but it went to the heart of

3 what had been raised at Camp David and beforehand, which

4 is the "Why now?" question.

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: "Why are we doing this now, why not

7 wait and see how things develop?" It was an important

8 part of the case, even if it wasn't a case for war.

9 Is that one reason why the issues that we have been

10 discussing a number of times in these hearings, where

11 intelligence that was described in the JIC estimates as

12 "patchy", "sporadic", "limited", and so on, why, once it

13 became tightened and hardened within the language of the

14 dossier, for whatever reasons, or whoever did this, it

15 made it sound as if we had a much stronger case in

16 practice than we did, and that, when the Prime Minister

17 used the words "beyond doubt" in the foreword, that

18 indeed reinforced that impression?

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, I understand what you are saying.

20 However, I think it is fair to say that, when the

21 dossier was published at that time, it was not perceived

22 in this way. I mean, I think weirdly,

23 Mr Andrew Gilligan described the dossier the next day as

24 "dull".

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's irrelevant --

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: With great respect, I don't think it is
2 irrelevant, because a lot of the commentators said this
3 simply describes what we know already, and because of
4 the great concern about the 45-minute claim, which arose
5 following the death of the late Dr David Kelly, there
6 has been an assumption that the public reception of the
7 dossier at the time was a sort of, "My God! Have you
8 seen this?" when in fact it wasn't like that at all. It
9 was treated as really rather prosaic and telling people
10 what they knew.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The point I'm making here is
12 a rather different point, which is, leaving aside the
13 question of the excitement and the drama that it
14 generated, the fact that it was considered prosaic is
15 irrelevant if it also created an expectation that there
16 was something there, and, should inspectors go back into
17 Iraq, they would find it.

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, there was certainly that
19 expectation, but, with respect, that expectation was
20 there anyway. The inspectors expected to find a great
21 deal, including Dr Blix.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed.

23 RT HON JACK STRAW: So I don't think the document itself
24 raised any expectations about that.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are talking here about the

1 presentation of the British Government's position and
2 what it was saying in this process was most important
3 and, given the criticality of this moment, it is not
4 unreasonable to assume -- and indeed, you have not said
5 anything to suggest otherwise -- that the question of
6 the existing state of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction
7 was the reason why all this was going ahead and that
8 would have important consequences should, as we hoped,
9 inspectors get back.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I raise one point, Mr Straw, about the
11 immediate reception of the dossier in the public mind?

12 You are, of course, correct that the Committee on
13 which I sat concluded that it was seen as a dull
14 document and had little impact. There was, however, one
15 very dramatic picture and lead-line in the
16 Evening Standard on the day of publication, "Missiles
17 connected to 45 minutes in the public mind".

18 We have heard from several witnesses, including
19 Alastair Campbell, there was no sense in government that
20 this was something that needed correcting. Was that
21 because of a judgment that it was a passing moment, in
22 terms of media presentation?

23 RT HON JACK STRAW: I read Alastair Campbell's evidence.

24 I think what he was saying was that it wasn't open to
25 the press secretary at Number 10 to seek a correction

1 from the Evening Standard. Life wasn't like that.

2 So I don't think that -- because you have to live
3 with exaggeration day by day. I just say for myself
4 that the -- plainly, that reference should have been
5 much more precise, because it only ever refers in the
6 intelligence to battlefield weapons.

7 I mean, certainly in fairness to Alastair Campbell,
8 my understanding was that, however, the final text was
9 signed off by the JIC and I don't think there was ever
10 any suggestion that Alastair or anybody else had
11 interfered with the intelligence judgments but, as
12 Sir David Omand was indicating yesterday, that was an
13 error and it is an error which has haunted us ever since
14 without any question.

15 But, I say, overall, the purpose of it was to set
16 out our analysis of the risks from Iraq.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I -- you have mentioned other
18 governments, which didn't agree with our policy, had
19 a similar view. There was one that didn't. The
20 exchange, I think, is important. This was when Prime
21 Minister Blair met Putin in Russia in -- I think it was
22 12 October. Putin said the following:

23 "Russia does not have in its possession any
24 trustworthy data that supports the existence of nuclear
25 weapons or any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and

1 we have not received any such information from our
2 partners as yet. This fact has also been supported by
3 the information sent by the CIA to the US Congress."

4 So there was at least one doubter in that.

5 What I think is interesting is the Prime Minister's
6 response to that. He said:

7 "There may be a difference of perspective about
8 weapons of mass destruction. There is one certain way
9 to find out and that's to let the inspectors back to do
10 their job. That is the key point on which we are both
11 agreed."

12 So there was an inference there that this was
13 a matter that could be settled by inspectors.

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, inference -- I mean, my view was
15 that, putting it at its very lowest, it was the
16 preferred option. My whole aim, Sir Lawrence, about
17 this period, was to resolve this matter by peaceful
18 means, but if I may just say so, if Mr Putin was
19 referring to the national intelligence estimate, which
20 went before Congress in, I think, October 2002, I mean,
21 that, when I re-read it recently, actually made bolder
22 claims than those that were in the 24 September dossier,
23 not less bold claims.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Absolutely, but in a way you could
25 argue that was also part of the problem, in that now

1 that the United States had agreed that this was the
2 focus for its effort, there was going to be even more
3 pressure to strengthen and -- I'm not going to use the
4 word "sex-up", but to strengthen the intelligence to
5 confirm the position that was being taken, and, as you
6 know, there have been critiques of the national
7 intelligence estimate that suggest that's exactly what
8 did happen.

9 RT HON JACK STRAW: Allow me to make this point, if I may.

10 Two things: one is that a report which had influenced me
11 was neither the NIE, on which there was a bit of
12 a health warning even at the time it was issued, nor the
13 dossier, on which there was no health warning, and
14 people of the highest integrity and professionalism,
15 like John Scarlett and David Omand and many others, and
16 William Ehrman, had been involved. But there was the
17 document with which we had absolutely nothing to do,
18 published by the IISS on, I think, 9 September, in
19 advance of the President Bush's speech and in advance of
20 our dossier, and what the IISS was saying was:

21 "Each year we publish the military balance. We are
22 the most authoritative independent body in the world for
23 assessing these things. Our considered judgment is ..."

24 Then they spelt it out, in, actually, slightly more
25 severe terms than we did a couple of weeks later, but

1 the other point, if I may, that I would make, is this:
2 if you read my speeches of all kinds, what I was seeking
3 to do was to make the case from that which no one could
4 challenge; in other words, from what was on the public
5 record.

6 Yes, it was true that an important component in
7 addition to that was what we said the intelligence
8 suggested, but, you know, what I have taken people back
9 to was the Gulf war, the inspectors going in after that,
10 their extreme difficulty in operating there, things like
11 the Iraqis' denial of an active biological weapons
12 programme for four years, only revealed when Saddam's
13 son-in-law defected, and then the removal of the
14 inspectors, and what was then left unanswered, and then
15 said to people, "Now, look, you know, they were cleared
16 out. The intelligence suggests that not only is it
17 still there, but it is going on, but in any event, do we
18 not need to do something about this, given what we know
19 about the behaviour of this regime?"

20 I thought that was a much more powerful case than
21 saying, "We found this piece of secret information". As
22 I say in my document, intelligence is, as you called it,
23 "patchy" and "sporadic" by its nature, and part of the
24 thing we didn't realise at the time we were doing this
25 was, in the public's mind, intelligence is seen in

1 a different way.

2 Because it is secret and it is held tightly, people
3 you know, think there is a kind of moment when the
4 private secretary rushes in and says, "Do you know about
5 this? Here it is on tablets of stone". All of you have
6 had to handle these in different ways. It is not like
7 that at all. It is little bits of information.

8 However, all the little bits of information, however
9 patchy and sporadic, all pointed in one direction and
10 not one I ever saw pointed in the opposite direction.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's the case. I'm not arguing --
12 suggesting that these thoughts were not there and
13 genuinely held, the point is really one of expectation,
14 and you have more or less said that in your answer; that
15 an expectation was created that there was something much
16 more possibly behind these statements that were being
17 made by the British Government than inevitably was going
18 to be the case.

19 Can we then move on to the actual negotiations?
20 I don't want to spend a lot of time on the negotiations
21 themselves, we have had very full evidence from
22 Sir Jeremy Greenstock on that and you cover it in your
23 memorandum. I just want to note two points really.

24 The first, which Sir Jeremy makes much of, was that
25 a real cause of delay in getting Security Council

1 Resolution 1441 was the intervention of those in the
2 United States administration who were hostile to the UN
3 process and thought the best way to derail it would be
4 to sort of ramp up the demands in the resolution. It
5 took considerable effort by you and Secretary Powell to
6 push that back. That was an indication which followed
7 from what we said before that this was by no means
8 a consensual policy within the United States.

9 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sir Lawrence, I think that's a very kind
10 description. No, it wasn't, and it is, frankly,
11 a toss-up as to whether the negotiations, once we had
12 got an agreed draft with all the other partners in the
13 Security Council, were more difficult or less difficult
14 than those with the US. But it was very hard going with
15 the United States at the beginning and it took a series
16 of telephone calls from the Prime Minister to
17 President Bush and then a six-way call, telephone
18 conference call, with, from the American side,
19 Secretary Powell, Condoleezza Rice and John Negroponte
20 in the UN, and, on our side, David Manning,
21 Jeremy Greenstock and myself on the other side, to sort
22 out the basic parameters of a resolution even then.

23 It carried on being hard going, and so -- when you
24 have sort of talked, say, to Dominic de Villepin, or
25 Colin would, and David and Condi would talk to their

1 opposite numbers, and you thought you had then got
2 a kind of deal, and then it would go back into this
3 extraordinary sort of beehive of the American system and
4 you would have to wait in Keynes' phrase until some of
5 them -- the bees -- sniffed some odour from "the White
6 Hive."

7 So -- anyway -- but in the end, we got there.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This gave you some indication of the
9 problems that were likely to come as the UN process
10 progressed?

11 RT HON JACK STRAW: I think it would be fair to say I was
12 aware of them before that.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm sure you were.

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: However, President Bush had said what he
15 had said with great clarity on September 12th and he had
16 pronounced -- for all the swirl in the American system,
17 there is a moment when the President pronounces, the
18 President pronounces. He had pronounced and that was
19 the template, and, in any event, as I said, what the
20 Americans were going to do, it was not a possibility for
21 the UK Government, in practice, to be involved in any
22 strategy involved with military action at the end of it
23 without a UN mandate.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then you make a point very strongly
25 in your statement -- and this has been confirmed by

1 Sir Jeremy Greenstock -- that you did not believe that
2 military action thereafter, in the event of
3 non-compliance, would depend on a second resolution. It
4 would be desirable but it wasn't dependent on that.

5 We are not, today, going into the legal arguments on
6 that. Sir Jeremy's basic contention was that he had got
7 the Americans and British into a comparable position as
8 before Desert Fox in December 1998. So I think that's
9 quite important, that your understanding, at least of
10 the position, was that it wasn't absolutely essential to
11 have a second resolution.

12 RT HON JACK STRAW: I was not in any doubt about that and
13 neither was Jeremy Greenstock, and for very good
14 reasons, which is that there had been talk by the French
15 and Germans of a draft which would have required
16 a second resolution, but they never tabled it.

17 We tabled a draft, which, as I set out in this
18 memorandum, and which Sir Jeremy Greenstock confirms in
19 his memorandum, was aimed to be self-contained, in the
20 sense that, if very important conditions were met
21 through failures by the Saddam regime, that of itself
22 would provide sufficient authority for military action,
23 and no doubt the next time we will get into the wording
24 of the resolution, which, as I say in this memorandum,
25 I can virtually recite in my sleep, but there are

1 reasons why in OP12 we use the language that we do, and
2 serious consequences are mentioned in OP13 and so on.
3 For sure, we wanted a second resolution after that
4 and -- well, again, I set out --

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to that in a moment.
6 You also mentioned in your memorandum, this famous quote
7 of yours, which you say was not meant initially for
8 attribution, which was you are giving odds on 60 to 40
9 against war, which it is just as well people didn't put
10 their life savings on it. But I just wonder what gave
11 you that optimism at that time? Why were you optimistic
12 that the movement into the UN was going to be
13 successful?

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: This was the 3 or 4 January of 2003.
15 Because we had got a consensus. It had been
16 extraordinarily difficult to get it, very hard and at
17 times quite unpleasant, but we had got it, including
18 even Syria, which was remarkable. The inspectors had
19 gone in and Saddam Hussein had complied with the first
20 requirement, which was to serve a -- a full disclosure,
21 and the one he had served was 12,000 pages.

22 We didn't know -- I certainly didn't know at that
23 stage what was in it. I think he served that up on
24 9 December.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: 7 December.

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: Thereabouts, anyway. I think there was
2 some emerging evidence of what was in it.

3 But it was just a sense -- it was not post-Christmas
4 optimism, it was a sense that, if we kept up the
5 pressure, since he complied here, the inspectors had
6 moved in very quickly, that they would be able to do
7 their job. So that was why I was optimistic, and to
8 some extent it is reflected in minutes to the
9 Prime Minister and other papers contemporary to that
10 date, but, as I say, it wasn't to be.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There was a sort of a sense that the
12 issue was being brought to a head at least, that either
13 Saddam Hussein would comply, in which case, problem
14 solved, and people have described this as itself as
15 a regime-changing event or he didn't comply and the
16 inspectors would say so and that would be a basis for
17 taking matters further.

18 So in that sense, it seemed like, either way, there
19 would be a satisfactory result.

20 RT HON JACK STRAW: A satisfactory result would have been
21 compliance and no war. I don't regard the war --
22 I never use the adjective of "satisfactory" for that --

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Absolutely.

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: -- but it was part of our strategy.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to be clear, I wasn't

1 necessarily saying it was, because I think it is fair to
2 say that there was an assumption, which you can see in
3 a lot of papers, that, if it became clear that the
4 pressure on Saddam Hussein was becoming severe, that he
5 was being found non-compliant, then either there might
6 be a coup or something in Baghdad or other Arab states
7 would try to do something about him, find him a safe way
8 to spend his retirement.

9 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, and it would have been rather good
10 if that had happened.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that was quite an important part
12 of the British Government's, and indeed the American
13 Government's, thinking at the time, that it wasn't
14 inevitably the case that evidence of non-compliance
15 would lead to war?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: No, I mean, not at all. We wanted
17 compliance, and, indeed, even right at the end, when you
18 know -- well, the evidence of non-compliance was
19 overwhelming in any event. It is worth just bearing in
20 mind that Saddam was given an ultimatum, just as the
21 Taliban had been in Afghanistan. He could have taken
22 it.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Here we get to the problem that
24 I was alluding to before, back when we were talking
25 about the dossier. What, in your view, would have

1 constituted a material breach or did constitute
2 a material breach?

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, I'm sorry to be -- I mean, what
4 constituted a material breach was that which was set out
5 in OP4 of 1441. So we'd make an assessment.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Operative paragraph 4.

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes:

8 "Decides that full statements or omissions in the
9 declaration submitted by Iraq, pursuant to the
10 resolution and failure by Iraq at any time to comply
11 with and co-operate fully in the implementation of this
12 resolution shall constitute a further material breach."

13 It is -- there is no question but that they were in
14 further material breach, whatever else -- that's as
15 plain as a pikestaff.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is important, because these are
17 words you repeated back during the early months of 2003,
18 indicating that the question of material breach was
19 really about compliance with the various resolutions and
20 we have discussed with Tim Dowse and William Ehrman the
21 fact that the resolution required disclosure by Saddam,
22 which was then being validated or not. That was the
23 process.

24 However, what Jeremy Greenstock said to us was that
25 with inspectors back on the ground, only an adverse

1 report from the inspectors themselves would convince the
2 Security Council that there was -- stronger action
3 should be taken, and I think we have heard evidence that
4 really only a smoking gun -- that was the phrase that
5 keeps on getting used -- would be sufficient.

6 So this is why I think the expectations created by
7 the dossier -- and other intelligence provided by the
8 United States -- could be important, because, given the
9 nature of the arguments that had been made, people would
10 have a not unreasonable expectation that, once the
11 inspectors went in, they would find something. It
12 wouldn't just be a question that the Iraqis would be
13 unhelpful and disorderly.

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: I have not quite understood what was
15 meant by the "smoking gun" argument.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was a phrase you used in some of
17 your correspondence.

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: Did I use it? Okay.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: With Colin Powell, I think you did.

20 RT HON JACK STRAW: Okay, I will have to go back and find
21 out what I meant. I don't think I used it publicly very
22 often.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Probably not.

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: But anyway. Let me just answer this.

25 First of all, the inspectors did find things, if you

1 look particularly at the issue of missiles, and the
2 Iraqis declared that they had Al Samoud and Al Fatah
3 missiles, but they said that they were all within the
4 150-kilometre maximum range which was provided by
5 Security Council Resolutions. That then led to their
6 examination by the inspectors and, as Dr Blix reported
7 I think 14 February, the meeting at the Security
8 Council, the Iraqis were found to have not been telling
9 the truth, because this missile capability broke the
10 regulations, and also, as Dr Blix pointed out at the
11 same time, the capability had been imported in clear
12 breach of other Security Council Resolutions.

13 I mean, if I may -- let me just answer the question.
14 I think what you are asking is: was compliance
15 impossible for Saddam in the circumstances? Because you
16 are saying --

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's partly it, but there is more
18 to it than that.

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: All right. Allow me to just answer
20 that, and my short answer to that is no. What OP4
21 required was cooperation with the inspectorate. It
22 refers to false statements or omissions and cooperation
23 fully in the implementation of this resolution. It did
24 not say -- and none of us ever said, "Unless you produce
25 10,000 litres of anthrax, unless you produce this

1 biological weapons capability, this amount of mustard
2 gas" -- no, really, if I may, a very, very important
3 point: we never said this.

4 It said, "You have to have a totally frank and
5 complete set of statements and comply fully", and if
6 they had done both of those, and, for example,
7 critically allowed for the interviewing of all their
8 scientists, outside Iraq, and if Dr Blix had then come
9 along and said, "In our judgment, Security Council, Iraq
10 is complying with the resolution", that would have been
11 the end of it from UNMOVIC's point of view. What
12 conceivable argument could one have advanced, even if
13 one had wanted to, to say, "We should go to war",
14 I certainly wasn't going to do that.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's just go through the very
16 interesting issues you have raised there. Let's go
17 through a couple of them.

18 First, the missiles, and this had always been the
19 strongest part of the intelligence picture, and the
20 missiles were found. The point Mr Blix made was that it
21 was destroying -- that is, here was something that could
22 be found and there was a way of dealing with them
23 through the provisions of UNMOVIC. You didn't need to
24 do anything else thereafter. He had found them. He had
25 made the point. He dealt with them.

1 The other question on the intelligence was that the
2 issue that you were saying about going to war, not going
3 to war, depended very much on a political understanding
4 in the Security Council, indeed in this country, so
5 that, though you may well have been right about what the
6 resolution required and what was needed, nonetheless you
7 were dealing with a political perception, within the
8 Security Council, that something more was required and
9 this was a difficulty all the way through, that the
10 people were expecting to see more.

11 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sir Lawrence, everybody was expecting to
12 see more. Leave President Putin out of it, but the
13 level of the international consensus that Iraq had
14 weapons of mass destruction was very broad, and as
15 I record in my memorandum, Dr Blix himself says after
16 the war that he thought they continued to have stocks --
17 his assumption all the way through had been that.

18 But there was a -- there was no war party on the
19 Security Council -- I mean, we can say maybe on the part
20 of the United States administration, but I certainly, in
21 the UK Government -- I certainly didn't want war and
22 I say, if Dr Blix had said -- and Dr El-Baradei, but if
23 Dr Blix -- because this was where the focus was -- "This
24 regime is complying with and it fulfils, as it were, the
25 test in OP4", that would be the end of it from our point

1 of view.

2 I don't know what the United States would have done,
3 but there would have been no case whatever for us taking
4 part in any military action, and the strategy of 1441,
5 which was to resolve this by peaceful means would have
6 succeeded.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, I want to get on to the second
8 resolution, and I think we will probably take another
9 break before we do so. Can I just conclude this little
10 bit?

11 We come back to where we were before. It is true
12 that a lot of people, including Dr Blix, to start with
13 believed that there was something to be found and that
14 there were stocks that were there, but the problem now
15 was that the lack of hard evidence that we had -- and
16 let me quote David Omand again from yesterday, where he
17 said, talking about SIS, that:

18 "They overpromised and underdelivered on the
19 intelligence."

20 I think you were saying at this time:

21 "Reality has not matched the expectation generated
22 by the intelligence."

23 That there was a problem, that, as the inspectors
24 went in, where one might have expected to find things,
25 things were not being found.

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, I mean, during the period leading
2 up to the decision to go to war, I used to question
3 people from SIS about the sources of intelligence and
4 I was concerned that we weren't getting as much
5 intelligence as I thought we ought to, but on each
6 occasion when I put questions about this, I was
7 satisfied with the answers about the difficulty of
8 running agents and obtaining sigint in a very hostile
9 environment in Iraq, but could I just say that Dr Blix
10 said that it was his opinion at the end -- not at the
11 beginning of the period -- no, with respect, it was also
12 his opinion at the end, and I quote this in my
13 memorandum, I'm just trying to turn up the exact
14 quotation, but in his book, as Butler records -- this is
15 paragraph 69 of my memorandum. This is the book he
16 wrote after all of this. This is the last sentence. He
17 says:

18 "My gut feelings, which I kept to myself, suggested
19 that Iraq still engaged in prohibited activities and
20 retained prohibited items and that it had documents to
21 prove it."

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was this at the start of his entry
23 or at the end?

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, no, I mean, I think -- but the
25 perception I had was that this ran all the way through

1 his -- certainly up to the military action.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, I think -- I'm not sure he

3 did, and I think it is probably best if we leave that

4 until we get into the discussion of the second

5 resolution.

6 RT HON JACK STRAW: Okay, but just allow me to say this:

7 when we did get into the discussion of the second

8 resolution, the suggestions about what should go in the

9 second resolution, the components, in a significant part

10 came from Dr Blix, and I may also give you some more

11 detail about the meeting I had with him on 6 March.

12 I never got any impression from him whatsoever that he

13 thought there wasn't a problem.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I don't think that's the issue, but

15 let's possibly break now and then that's something to

16 come back to after the break.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Ten minutes.

18 (4.18 pm)

19 (Short break)

20 (4.28 pm)

21 THE CHAIRMAN: Well, let's resume for the final part of the

22 day for the next 40 minutes or so. Lawrence, back to

23 you.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So, now we are going to talk about

25 the diplomacy of January to March. You told us before

1 that Resolution 1441 had been designed so there was no
2 need for a second resolution. So why, then, did you go
3 for a second resolution?

4 RT HON JACK STRAW: Because -- for a number of related
5 reasons. First of all, because, although we were clear,
6 and it would have been designed in this way, that we
7 didn't need a second resolution, it unquestionably would
8 have made the handling of the issue in the
9 United Kingdom much easier and the building of an
10 international coalition.

11 Secondly, because, in the absence of the full
12 cooperation that we were seeking from Iraq, as required
13 by OP4, we wanted give the Iraqi regime a second final
14 opportunity, and it was certainly my belief that, if we
15 had been able, with the authority of the Security
16 Council, to present them with these -- this list of
17 benchmarks, all of which were attainable, and they were
18 designed to be attainable by the Iraqi regime, with an
19 ultimatum that, if they did not meet these, then there
20 would be military action, I thought we would get
21 compliance from Saddam Hussein.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When did you come to the conclusion
23 you wouldn't?

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: Oh, in the period between the end of the
25 Security Council meeting on 7 March, which I attended,

1 which was a ministerial meeting, and the following
2 Friday, when Sir Jeremy Greenstock reported that the
3 efforts to secure a consensus had fallen away.

4 Sir Lawrence, if you are asking me at what moment
5 did I think this was not going to be possible, it is
6 the moment when I turned on the television and saw
7 President Chirac saying that, whatever the
8 circumstances, France would veto a second resolution.

9 We worked extremely hard to get nine members of the
10 Security Council on board. Without going through the
11 whole list, we got the three African states on board, we
12 thought we had the Chileans and the Mexicans, and
13 Jonathan Powell spelt out the work that we had done with
14 them and with some of the others on the Security
15 Council, including Pakistan, but it was one of these
16 negotiations where it was very finely balanced, but if
17 you didn't get them all together, they all went, and
18 President Chirac came out with this, which I think was
19 designed to be totally disruptive in the negotiations
20 and certainly had that effect, then President Fox of
21 Mexico decided to admit himself to hospital with a bad
22 back. That's a chronic condition. It had not become
23 acute, so far as we know, but, anyway, it was
24 convenient, and then President Lagos of Chile said that
25 he wasn't willing to go without President Fox. So the

1 thing fell away.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that was how it ended. Let's

3 just look a bit at how it developed. When the

4 Prime Minister met the President at the end of January,

5 I think that was the point at which it was agreed to go

6 for a second resolution. Is that right?

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: I think so. I mean, we certainly had it

8 in mind.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The timing is quite significant in

10 two respects. The first was that this followed

11 Dr Blix's presentation to the Security Council on

12 27 January, which was very critical of Iraq. So perhaps

13 that encouraged the view that there was a pattern of

14 non-compliance developing that would bolster the case

15 for a second resolution. Is that fair?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, well, just to take us back a bit,

17 as I said just before the break, Sir Lawrence, my

18 feeling was that we might be seeing the beginning of

19 compliance and what I was hoping for by 27 January was

20 Dr Blix saying, "We are getting cooperation on process,"

21 which he did say, "But we are also getting cooperation

22 on substance", and then looking forward to another

23 report and we could have been there.

24 In the event, as you say, the report from Dr Blix

25 was very critical of Iraq. So we had to start thinking

1 of the detail of the second resolution.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, the second important point was

3 that we are now getting some understanding of when

4 military action is likely to take place and dates in the

5 middle of March are starting to be discussed. So did

6 this create a sense of a deadline for the diplomacy?

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: The original dates, which some in the

8 United States had in mind, were earlier than that.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: January.

10 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes. So -- and amongst some in the US

11 system, there was some impatience about the fact that we

12 were pushing the date to the right. My view was that we

13 should push it to the right as far as was practicable,

14 and so I talked to Secretary Powell about his judgment

15 about how long you could keep such a large expeditionary

16 force at a state of alert without it, as it were,

17 degrading. You know much better than I, you can't

18 continue them in that state of readiness for long, but

19 the advice which I got, as well as from our own people,

20 but it was crucial to get his take on what the

21 United States felt, was late March/early April.

22 When I went to the Security Council on 14 February,

23 we had, by that stage, drafts of a second resolution in

24 mind and started actively to consider them because the

25 atmosphere was very difficult at that meeting. We

1 decided to take a bit more time.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is a reason for that. Just

3 stepping back a bit, though, wasn't there already a risk

4 that you had two contradictory timetables? You had one

5 timetable which was the time it would take for Dr Blix

6 to provide a compelling explanation of why Iraq was

7 non-compliant and for the Security Council to accept

8 that, and another timetable that was pressure for

9 military -- or the deadline being set by the

10 United States for military action?

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I interject just to ask whether in the

12 context of these two timetables, whether they are

13 parallel or in tension, the closer you get to pressing

14 the military button, the greater the pressure on Saddam.

15 That must be in your minds and the machinery minds. The

16 critical moment is actually right at the very last

17 minute. Is that right?

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, Sir John, and, as I say, he

19 could -- even after we had had to abandon the search for

20 a second resolution, and prepared for military action,

21 an ultimatum was presented to him which he failed to

22 take. I am sorry, I thought you had another question.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: No, it was really we have got the negotiating

24 history of the second resolution pretty much on the

25 record, it is really what's driving our approach to it

1 through these last days, to get it and then to apply
2 a pressure, but also at the price, as Sir Lawrence is
3 pointing out, of having to hold back some of the
4 military decision-taking.

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: One of my great frustrations -- and
6 I tried to bring it out in my memorandum because
7 I couldn't for the life of me understand why the French
8 and the Germans were not agreeing to a second
9 resolution, because this was the way to resolve this
10 peacefully, and they had accepted that argument in
11 respect of the first resolution.

12 Had the second resolution passed, military action
13 would have been pushed to the right for a period because
14 you would have had to allow the Iraqis to comply. For
15 example, I mean, a key element of this was unfettered
16 interviewing of scientists, and there were other tests
17 which would deliver up anthrax and so on. We now
18 know -- some people may say those were impossible to
19 achieve, because we have not been able to find it ever
20 since.

21 However, the reason why the interviews were so
22 fundamental is that, if Dr Blix and his team had been
23 able to interview these scientists, give them anonymity
24 and security outside Iraq and, if necessary, give them
25 safe passage as well, and the results of these

1 interviews had been to say, "As it happens, we think the
2 whole of the programme has been degraded", then Dr Blix
3 would have reported that and he would have said to the
4 Security Council, "There has been a surprise turn in
5 these interviews, but this is my conclusion".

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: He never wanted to do that. He
7 always thought that created all sorts of difficulties.
8 He wanted to interview scientists in an unfettered way,
9 but one of the proposals was that he took them outside
10 of Iraq, and there were always going to be problems
11 getting the interviews that he wanted.

12 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, if I may say so, he never said
13 that to me, and I had a lot of conversations with him.

14 If I may say so, Sir Lawrence, there are some of
15 those who were involved who sought to give an account of
16 what they were saying at the time without gloss. There
17 are others who have sought to give an account of what
18 they thought they were saying at the time with gloss,
19 and I think the jury is out on which camp Dr Blix is in.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: All right. We will leave that for
21 a moment.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I interject again? I'm sorry. It is
23 just to ask this: throughout these difficult few weeks,
24 indeed days, there must be some rolling estimation of
25 the chances of compliance.

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: Of the chances of compliance?

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Do those chances reduce as we get nearer to

5 the final moment, or do they actually increase because

6 of the pressure effect on Saddam, as the whole scheme is

7 designed to put?

8 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, had we had a second resolution,

9 then we would have been able to sort of work out the

10 metrics of that, Sir John. Let me just, if I may, sort

11 of spell out what was in my mind and the difficulty.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

13 RT HON JACK STRAW: We had the report on 27 January. Far

14 from saying that Saddam was complying, it said in great

15 detail -- it explained why he wasn't complying. We then

16 had the report on 14 February, which was more qualified

17 but did not say he was complying.

18 As I say, the moment Dr Blix had said, "This man, in

19 my judgment, is complying", he would have added

20 a codicil, "This is a matter for the Security Council",

21 but on the record, in public, even if I had wanted to,

22 which I did not, there would be nothing whatever to say

23 to Parliament, here, in the House of Commons, other than, "We

24 have secured our objectives and we are pleased to say no

25 British troops will be put in harm's way". That would

1 have been the end of the story.

2 But, as at 7 March, that was not the case and, in
3 addition, which is a much, if I may say so, neglected
4 part of the story, we had this lengthy, detailed
5 document from Dr Blix, which I had read on the plane
6 over there and --

7 THE CHAIRMAN: You saw a draft of the thing, as you were
8 a member of the --

9 RT HON JACK STRAW: Of the Commission. So, quite properly,
10 I saw a draft and I read it on the plane over. The only
11 difference between the draft and the final version was
12 the final version was six pages longer and it had more
13 detail. It didn't detract from the judgments in the
14 document.

15 It was around that time that I thought there really
16 was a very serious problem in Iraq. I had always
17 thought it was serious, but, having read this, I thought
18 that this was the most contemporaneous assessment of the
19 scale of the task of disarming Saddam Hussein. It
20 didn't say, "We know they have got these things". We
21 had 29 separate chapters of unanswered disarmament
22 questions, but this is, after all, in March 2003,
23 12 years after the Gulf war, very serious indeed, and
24 I didn't bring this out in the memorandum but it is
25 quite an important part of the story, since,

1 Sir Lawrence, you are talking about Dr Blix, and I have
2 checked my recollection very clearly.

3 When I had this private meeting with Dr Blix -- and
4 Simon McDonald and Jeremy Greenstock were there --
5 I said to him, "I have just read this. I have read
6 every word of this document", and he said to me, "That's
7 more than I have done". I was astonished by this.
8 Those of us -- absolutely astonished that here was the
9 head of UNMOVIC, who hadn't read this document which was
10 about to go to the Security Council.

11 Anyway, I took it as a sort of quip, but I then said
12 to him, words to the effect, "I assume you are going to
13 present it to the Security Council so that they can read
14 it in advance of your presentation".

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Was the meeting to be the following day?

16 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes. I got to New York some time on
17 the 6th, which was the Thursday, and the ministerial
18 meeting with the Security Council was on the Friday. So
19 I went to the Security Council, and, to add to my
20 astonishment, no document. It only became available --
21 and again I have checked on this, at the end.

22 Now, I thought it was extraordinary that --

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Are you saying that, if this
24 document had been available, it would have swung around
25 opinion in the Security Council at this time?

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: First of all, Sir Lawrence, I'm saying
2 it was the UNMOVIC Commission which produced it. Others
3 on the UNMOVIC Commission, from different nationalities,
4 including one from a nationality whose government was
5 saying there wasn't much of a problem, were telling us
6 privately a very different story, that there was
7 a problem.

8 Sorry, if I may finish, Sir Lawrence. Dr Blix,
9 since he ran this organisation, I assume had made the
10 decision to have the document produced and, at the
11 minimum, my judgment was that, having produced the
12 document, he had a duty to make it available to the
13 Security Council.

14 I can't judge what the reaction would have been of
15 other members of the Security Council, except I think
16 most people round the table reading the document would
17 have come to the same conclusion as me, that here is
18 a problem, and to answer your question about the time,
19 by this stage, we are four months -- November, December,
20 January, February, four months after the passage of
21 1441, which is quite a time, and Dr Blix himself had
22 said, "All this can be resolved in a relatively short
23 space of time".

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Isn't that the issue about 7 March,
25 that a lot of discussions within the Security Council

1 was not that there are many difficult problems to
2 resolve, but that we needed time to do it, and time was
3 what you didn't have because the military clock was
4 ticking very fast and was going to come down very soon.

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, I mention in my memorandum
6 Dr Blix's very impatient reference to the behaviour of
7 Saddam, in which Dr Blix, in one or other of his reports
8 to the Council, says "Saddam could have closed all these
9 dossiers 12 years ago, had he complied."

10 Dr Blix himself says in one of his reports, "All
11 this could be now resolved in a short time," and
12 Sir Lawrence, what we knew -- we didn't need any
13 intelligence about this. We knew from the behaviour of
14 Saddam Hussein that he was adept at playing the
15 international system. So he would give a little bit and
16 then he would take it back. It led to his demise.

17 As I said in my reflections, I worked on the basis
18 that here was an extremely unpleasant leader of a very
19 unpleasant regime, but they were rational, and
20 I couldn't work out why they were refusing to co-operate
21 and we were saying publicly and anyway he had his -- he
22 knew what was going on --

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was --

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: -- in Britain, that we (overtalking) for
25 an answer.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was clear already, and you have
2 alluded to this, that the Security Council was deeply
3 divided on this issue and had been divided for some
4 time. The reason that maybe you are so irritated with
5 Dr Blix was that, in many respects, our strategy had
6 become dependent upon Dr Blix because, as you've
7 indicated, it was what he said to the Security Council.

8 Let me just quote to you from a speech you made to
9 IISS, the worthy body you mentioned before, just before
10 the presentation on 14 February.

11 RT HON JACK STRAW: February, okay.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You said:

13 "If Dr Blix and El-Baradei [who was dealing with the
14 nuclear issue] will report to the Security Council this
15 Friday", "they will report":

16 "If the evidence they present confirms the behaviour
17 which has put Iraq in continuing material breach, then
18 the case for a second resolution would be overwhelming."

19 That was why you indicated before that you were
20 prepared at this point to come forward with a second
21 resolution. But two things happened: first, El-Baradei
22 is moving towards a position where he is giving a clean
23 bill of health, almost, on the nuclear issue and
24 secondly, Blix, perhaps worried that he had gone too far
25 on 27 January, is backtracking or saying there is now

1 more cooperation.

2 The other thing that happens is, on 15 January,
3 there is the most enormous demonstration in the UK and
4 elsewhere against the war.

5 So at this point, the strategy that you have been
6 developing for a second resolution is in quite serious
7 trouble. You are not getting Dr Blix giving you the
8 green light and the political difficulties in the
9 United Kingdom are growing, so that the move to a second
10 resolution after that is taking place against a much
11 more unpromising background than it had been in the
12 period up to 14 February.

13 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes. I think you meant 15 February.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I am thinking of St Valentine's Day.

15 RT HON JACK STRAW: If I may just take you back to the
16 beginning of your question, you said words to the effect
17 that we had made a kind of misjudgment and --
18 I paraphrase your question -- that we had, as it were,
19 delegated the question of whether Iraq was in compliance
20 to the inspectors. Well, to a high degree, we had.
21 That was the purpose of 1441. It wasn't, you know,
22 something inadvertent.

23 The whole structure of 1441 was to say: put the
24 inspectors in, these are the requirements on Iraq. Yes,
25 of course, the formal position is that on the basis of

1 evidence the Security Council will meet to consider the
2 position, and, if there is a clear breach, Iraq will
3 face serious consequences, but in practice, of course we
4 were relying on what the inspectors said and,
5 Sir Lawrence, had the inspectors said on 14 February
6 "They are complying", I have to tell you, nobody would
7 have been happier than me. That's what I was hoping for
8 back in January --

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But what they were saying --

10 RT HON JACK STRAW: -- and we would have had something to
11 say to the demonstrators as well.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But what they were saying was that
13 it is still very unclear, there is still a lot more work
14 to do, which was why the pressure was growing -- and we
15 heard from Jonathan Powell that we asked for nine more
16 weeks, I think he said, in order to try to take this
17 further.

18 But one of the consequences of the 15 February
19 presentation was that it undermined the American faith
20 in what the inspectors were going to do because they had
21 always been more sceptical of this route and of Dr Blix
22 than had been the British Government. So it made it
23 even more difficult to keep the Americans working on the
24 UN process.

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, part of the American

1 administration, as we have discussed, were always more
2 sceptical.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the key thing is what effect it
4 had on President Bush's own views.

5 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes, but we have got their cooperation
6 for a second resolution. There was a great deal of
7 to-ing and fro-ing, there always is with the American
8 administration, and as I say in my memorandum, I can't
9 speak for the position of the American Government, had
10 Dr Blix said they are complying.

11 I certainly can speak for the position of the
12 British Government and I can speak for myself first of
13 all. If Dr Blix had said, "They are complying", I would
14 have said, "They are complying".

15 Number 2, even if I had been mad enough to say they
16 weren't, there wouldn't have been a dog's chance of
17 getting a resolution through the House of Commons, but
18 what I wanted was a report from Dr Blix saying, "They
19 are complying". He didn't say that then and, far from
20 saying that, on 7 March, a document, which, weirdly, he
21 delayed the publication until after the meeting, was
22 saying quite the reverse.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is clear that he was not able to
24 give Iraq a clean bill of health at this stage. The
25 question is whether or not, with more time, this matter

1 might have been resolved.

2 You mentioned the position of the French. Now,
3 there are all sorts of issues about what the French
4 really were after. It has been suggested that the
5 French tried to indicate that they would not -- if they
6 just went ahead on the basis of 1441, they wouldn't say
7 very much, but as soon as the issue of a second
8 resolution came up, on the basis of where the inspectors
9 had got to, they were bound to oppose it, and they made
10 that clear quite early in January.

11 So there was no secret that the French were working
12 extremely hard in the opposite direction to the British
13 and the United States at this time. It wasn't a sudden
14 surprise in the middle of March.

15 RT HON JACK STRAW: It certainly wasn't a sudden surprise.

16 Indeed, Dominic de Villepin, in mid-January, had decided
17 he wanted to call -- because they had the Presidency of
18 the Security Council -- to call a ministerial meeting to
19 discuss terrorism and Colin Powell had called me to say
20 what did I think about this, and I said, "I wonder if it
21 will just discuss counter-terrorism. I wonder if we
22 might get on to the Iraq subject".

23 Anyway, we were promised that it was simply to
24 discuss counter-terrorism. But it quickly developed
25 into a discussion about Iraq, and then this press

1 conference, which Dominick gave whilst the rest of us
2 were at the French Legation for our lunch, in which he
3 ripped bits out of the American system, which didn't go
4 down --

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It went down very badly.

6 RT HON JACK STRAW: Before that, relations had been okay,
7 but may I just come back to this point? We were dealing
8 with a regime which had wilfully refused to comply with
9 UN Security Council Resolutions going back 12 years.

10 They thought they had got away with it, and there
11 was some evidence to suggest that they were, by messing
12 around, playing the system, got comfortable with
13 sanctions, and, pre-9/11, the thing was just drifting
14 away. We had 9/11. We had been through this process.
15 We then get 1441, and they, to begin with, start to
16 comply, and then they start messing around.

17 So to the degree they were complying, they were only
18 complying because a very large military force was at
19 their gates. That's the truth. On the issue of time --
20 first of all, I will check the record, but,
21 Sir Lawrence, I have no recollection whatsoever of the
22 French saying to me "It will be" -- you know, they can
23 say --

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: As I say, there is some discussion
25 in the United States --

1 RT HON JACK STRAW: As I say, I will check this back, but as
2 you know, when you want to get a diplomatic message, you
3 do not have to send a letter, there are all sorts of
4 ways you can communicate. There are all sorts of ways
5 we can communicate, but I never had that information at
6 all.

7 What I would say, however, is, if -- because
8 personal relations were -- certainly with Joschka Fischer
9 and, really, with Dominic de Villepin, were still okay.
10 If they had said to us, "We will come with you to
11 a resolution. This is its structure, and we think this
12 will work", we would have sat down and said, "Fine".

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If you look at what President Chirac
14 said, one interpretation of it -- and this is what the
15 French did say -- was not that he was saying he would
16 never support another resolution, but that, not now,
17 that he still wanted to give the inspections process
18 more time.

19 I think we keep on coming back to this point, and we
20 have had both David Manning and Jeremy Greenstock saying
21 to us that it really would have been desirable if we had
22 given ourselves more time. In a sense, it was the
23 abruptness with which the whole exercise had to come to
24 a close that gave it this sort of drama, but also that
25 there was no way out because the Americans had lost

1 faith in the process and just wanted to get on with it.

2 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sir Lawrence, I know there has been some

3 textual analysis of the use by President Chirac of the

4 word "Le soir", but I watched him say this and I took

5 this as no more than saying, "This evening", comma, and

6 then he announces, "France will, whatever the

7 circumstances", he says, right? If he was saying,

8 "Look, just for tonight, we are going to veto, but not

9 tomorrow", he would have said that, but this was a great

10 Chirac-ian pronouncement. "Whatever the circumstances",

11 he says, "La France will" --

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The basic point is that things had

13 been brought to a head, not with Saddam particularly,

14 but between allies within the Security Council, and that

15 relations have broken down by this point so that we were

16 not going to get a second resolution.

17 Can I just -- because I'm sure other colleagues want

18 to get in. Let me just conclude that in a couple of

19 questions as to where we were at this point?

20 After the middle of February, the Americans did go

21 along with a -- with the effort to get a second

22 resolution, but it was very clear that this was as

23 a political favour to the United Kingdom, that --

24 because it was believed that Tony Blair would find it

25 very difficult to get a Parliamentary majority, retain

1 the Cabinet, without a second resolution. Is that
2 a fair statement?

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, I think the fair analysis is that
4 it would be more difficult. In the event, he did get
5 a majority, but unquestionably, had we had a second
6 resolution, first of all, and above all, we might have
7 avoided the war, but, secondly, if we had not done so,
8 there would have been wider international and domestic
9 consent.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The second question is: was there
11 a point, either after the second set of presentations by
12 Blix and El-Baradei and the big demonstrations in
13 mid-February, or after the breakdown of the second
14 resolution, when you, colleagues, felt, "This isn't
15 going where we wanted it to go. Let's stop and think,
16 and question, do we need to take another course?"

17 RT HON JACK STRAW: I mean, certainly I was profoundly
18 concerned about the anger of a very large proportion of
19 the British public, which included many friends of mine
20 as well, personal friends. My constituency of Blackburn
21 has a very large population of people of Asian heritage
22 and Muslim faith, and most of those were very angry and
23 so was quite a high proportion of the white population.
24 I mean, the demonstration sort of added to that, but if
25 you were an active constituency member of Parliament, as

1 am I, you know what people are feeling. So I was fully
2 aware of that.

3 My efforts, as those of Colin Powell, were to just
4 keep on working to try and get a peaceful resolution and
5 I believed it possible, either as a result of sufficient
6 Iraqi compliance, that Dr Blix could come forward and
7 say, "Look at the test on OP4. They are complying".

8 As I said, if you look at those tests, they were not
9 tests really of substance.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But you weren't going to get that,
11 and so the question is: at a point when you weren't
12 going to get it, was there, for example a plan B that
13 you could turn to?

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sorry, with great respect, we didn't
15 know we weren't going to get it. You are talking about
16 mid-February.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Well, from mid-February to the next
18 few weeks.

19 RT HON JACK STRAW: But we didn't know that. You mean, you,
20 yourself, Sir Lawrence, have said that Dr Blix was very
21 critical of the Iraqis on 27 January. He was more
22 qualified on 14 February. I didn't know what he was
23 going to say subsequently, but if he had said -- instead
24 of producing 173 pages, raising very serious concerns,
25 he had produced ten pages saying, "They are now

1 complying", which he could have done on 7 March, the
2 whole story would have been different.

3 I mean, was there a plan B? Of course, I thought
4 about and made submissions about alternative approaches,
5 for sure, and that was part of my job, to think of the
6 alternative contingencies, and I did so.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the alternative contingencies
8 was that we should give support to the United States,
9 help with intelligence, logistics, Diego Garcia and so
10 on, but not necessarily take a full part in the
11 operation?

12 RT HON JACK STRAW: Yes.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How was that received?

14 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well, that -- that had been one of the
15 alternatives, in terms of options which had been
16 examined, I suppose, going up to 12 months before that,
17 as one -- on a varied menu of participation, and I know
18 you talked to Mr Hoon about this when you interviewed
19 him, but -- and you will be aware that when we came to
20 make -- really had to make a decision in October 2002
21 about the preferred military contribution we were going
22 to make, there were three options put forward then, and
23 on the advice of the then Chief of the Defence Staff, as
24 well as other considerations, but very particularly on
25 that advice, the Prime Minister agreed and I supported

1 him on going for the bigger option.

2 How was my advice received? I mean, you need to ask

3 Mr Blair this.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is also a question of whether

5 this is a discussion with other ministers as well or was

6 it just a question of you making a suggestion to the

7 Prime Minister?

8 RT HON JACK STRAW: I submitted formal minutes to him. This

9 was far too serious to make suggestions to him. So

10 I thought about this a very great deal. I talked to my

11 officials and advisers in the Foreign Office and the

12 agencies about this. I prepared a paper for Mr Blair.

13 I talked to him about it. If you are asking me who else

14 was present in discussions, I can't directly answer

15 that, but just bear in mind that this was a very

16 fast-moving situation, that I was spending a huge amount

17 of time on the telephone, trying to get up this second

18 resolution, very often outside the country, and, of

19 course, that didn't stop communication, but it makes

20 face-to-face meetings impossible.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So this was not discussed with

22 Mr Hoon or Clare Short?

23 RT HON JACK STRAW: It might have been discussed with

24 Mr Hoon. I don't think I discussed it with Clare Short,

25 not because I was -- I discussed a lot of things with

1 Clare Short -- no, I did.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm sure.

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: Any more than she discussed things on

4 the international aid programme of that dimension, with

5 me. She may have asked me about this in the margins of

6 a Cabinet meeting because this was, you know, an issue

7 before the Cabinet at every meeting up until -- well,

8 and beyond the war, but in terms of the operations, who

9 would I have discussed it with? In the office with

10 Sir Peter Ricketts, with Dr Michael Williams, who was my

11 special adviser with huge experience of the

12 United Nations, with my private secretary and other

13 officials from the defence and security side of the

14 office, and with David Manning, as well as obviously

15 talking to Colin Powell about it.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think you say in your memorandum

17 that your position now is absolutely critical in the

18 Cabinet's and in the government's position, and that, if

19 you had resigned, indeed if Colin Powell had resigned,

20 the whole political complexion of the issue would have

21 changed.

22 Was there any point at which you thought you could

23 not go along with this, that you would argue for

24 a second resolution, that you felt that without it, it

25 was going to be -- put the British Government in an

1 impossible position and you didn't want to be part of
2 it?

3 RT HON JACK STRAW: I never got to that point. As I say,
4 I have been very anxious in all of this, you know, not
5 to put a gloss on what I was thinking at the time,
6 which -- you are historians -- it's extremely easy to
7 do, and to try and remember what I was thinking at the
8 time and to ask those very close to me if they can
9 remember.

10 What I -- an absolutely fundamental point which was
11 resolved before this, was in respect of the role of the
12 House of Commons. I had been in, as I said, the House,
13 when the Falklands war arose and whilst I supported the
14 Falklands war, I thought it was preposterous that the
15 debate on the Falklands war lasted three hours on
16 a Saturday morning on a motion for the adjournment.
17 I mean, you know, it might -- I know the old story was
18 that it was a motion on the adjournment that led to
19 Chamberlain's resignation, but that was in 1940, and the
20 situation was different, and had I not got agreement --
21 I talked to Robin Cook about this, because on
22 this we were absolutely agreed -- that we had to have
23 a series of debates on substantive resolutions in the
24 House of Commons, and that any decision to take military
25 action had to be on the explicit vote by the House of

1 Commons, then I would not have been able to continue
2 with my job. The fact that we did get that agreement,
3 of course, meant we had to make the case publicly.

4 Did I ever think I'm going to resign over this? No,
5 I didn't. I mean, we all have our bottom lines. Did
6 I understand the nature of the responsibilities on me?
7 Yes, I did, for sure, and weighed them very heavily.
8 But in the event, I came to the decisions that I came
9 to, and I said in my memorandum I did so very
10 reluctantly, but on what I judged to be the best
11 evidence available at the time, and made my decision and
12 I made the statement to the House of Commons on 17 March
13 and wound up the debate on 18 March. As I say, that's
14 my responsibility.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we have come pretty much
17 to the end, but just before I do, I'll ask my other
18 colleagues if they have a question. Martin?

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I just have one question, Mr Straw: to
20 what extent was your advice to the Prime Minister in
21 this final phase, the advice you say both in writing and
22 in person, to what extent was it being discussed in the
23 Cabinet and what was the general tenor of Cabinet
24 opinion?

25 RT HON JACK STRAW: It wasn't the minutes that I wrote to

1 the Prime Minister. The minutes that I wrote to the
2 Prime Minister were not circulated to the Cabinet. Most
3 of them -- and I know you have copies of them -- were
4 pretty closely held because they had to be. So -- but
5 the wider issues were discussed in Cabinet and each
6 Cabinet meeting -- there are 26 or 27 of them -- had
7 discussed Iraq and there would have been a Cabinet
8 meeting the previous Thursday, which I guess would have
9 been 13 March, and the previous Thursday before that.

10 If you are asking me, Sir Martin, was there
11 a Cabinet or Cabinet Committee where my alternative to
12 the Prime Minister was discussed, the answer to that is
13 no.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were your views in that specific sense
15 known to colleagues or was this something in a way which
16 was kept between yourself and the Prime Minister, the
17 depth, if you like, of your concerns?

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: I think they were known to Geoff Hoon
19 and they would be known to other senior ministers.
20 I can't say for certain but I may well have talked to
21 Mr Brown about them. Would they have been known more
22 widely? No, because it is an eternal verity that, I am
23 afraid, members of the Cabinet sometimes, particularly
24 if they are not directly involved in an issue, natter to
25 their friends in the press, and it was extremely

1 important, in terms of the international diplomacy, that
2 we were speaking with one voice internationally and
3 nationally.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Finally, with regard to those who did
5 know in the inner circle, what was their response? Did
6 you find support from them?

7 RT HON JACK STRAW: Well -- I was putting the alternatives
8 forward and my contingency, and the contingency was that
9 we wouldn't get a second resolution and that we then
10 judged that British involvement in the military action
11 was not going to be feasible because we wouldn't get it
12 through the House of Commons, and partly -- I mean, sort
13 of -- there was a paradox that, as the international
14 climate moved one way, to a degree certainly the
15 Parliamentary climate moved the other way, and whilst at
16 the beginning of March I judged that we would not have
17 got a resolution through the House of Commons, because
18 of the debates in the Security Council with
19 President Chirac and then the evident effort that we
20 made for the second resolution, the support in the House
21 of Commons started to change and it was something that
22 the whips were measuring day by day.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: Usha?

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you. Mr Straw, in your
25 memorandum you say:

1 "I had never wanted war, but the strategy we had
2 adopted to secure Iraq's disarmament was diplomacy
3 backed by the threat of force."

4 Yesterday, when we were talking to Sir David Omand,
5 he said:

6 "What strikes me is that greater care is needed in
7 threatening the use of military force to back up
8 diplomatic measures. It is quite an easy thing to say
9 that tyrant X will not move unless there is threat of
10 force behind them. I'm sure it is correct, but military
11 deployments generate a huge momentum of their own and
12 they are subject to their own railway timetables."

13 And he went on:

14 "That's what turned out to be the position, because
15 we were forced to look for, and get the inspectors to
16 look for, the smoking gun in double quick time before
17 the window for invasion closed."

18 And the window was conditioned by the American
19 political timetable. Would you agree with that?

20 RT HON JACK STRAW: Not completely. I mean, I agree with
21 David Omand's overall view. We have got to be careful
22 about selling on a strategy of diplomacy backed by the
23 use of force, but my judgment was that this was an
24 appropriate strategy and in the debate on
25 24 September 2002, which I quote in this memorandum,

1 I in turn quoted Kofi Annan, where he says that
2 diplomacy often has to be backed by the threat and, if
3 necessary, the use of force, and that's just true.

4 This was hard diplomacy, so-called. Soft diplomacy,
5 or even medium-hard diplomacy, with sanctions, plainly
6 wasn't working. I know Sir Roderic raises a question
7 about whether containment would or wouldn't have worked.
8 It certainly hadn't worked in a sense, and on the issue
9 of time, let me just see if I can turn it up, it was
10 Dr Blix who said -- yes, this is 14 February, last
11 paragraph -- there he said:

12 "If they had provided the necessary cooperation, the
13 period of inspection --"

14 Oh, he said -- that's right, it is quite
15 a complicated sentence:

16 "Today, three months after the adoption of
17 Resolution 1441, the period of disarmament through
18 inspection could still be short ..."

19 His words not nine:

20 "... if immediate, active and unconditional
21 cooperation with UNMOVIC and the IAEA were to be
22 forthcoming."

23 He would have written that in early February. We
24 didn't actually take military action until 20 March. It
25 was Dr Blix who was saying -- using the adjective

1 "short".

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that's Dr Blix's view, but I'm
3 really asking, as you were giving us some reflections,
4 reflecting back on what Sir David Omand said, "Greater
5 care has to be taken in threatening military force", are
6 there inherent views in that? I'm asking you your view
7 as of today.

8 RT HON JACK STRAW: Baroness Prashar, I think we did take
9 great care, is the answer. I have very great respect
10 for Sir David Omand, and I say that in the best sense of
11 the word, not the way it is sometimes used. He is
12 a friend of mine, he was my Permanent Secretary for four
13 years.

14 I think we did take care and the whole purpose of
15 1441 was an illustration of the care that we took. Had
16 we just bulldozed -- or tried to -- it would have been
17 illegal, it would have blown up in our faces,
18 et cetera -- but just said "678, 687, authority, we
19 don't need Parliament's support, we will just do it",
20 yes, for certain, but we didn't, and I'm sorry to come
21 back to this issue, but we got 1441 through, the
22 inspectors went in pretty quickly after that -- after
23 all, UNMOVIC already existed. They started work. Three
24 months later, you know, Blix, instead of saying what
25 I hoped he would say, which was compliance, was still

1 saying no compliance, and still later, four months after
2 that, he was still saying effectively no compliance, and
3 the issue was: how long did you go on?

4 My worry about this was that if we didn't get
5 a second resolution and didn't pursue the matter, that
6 the whole effort would be diminished and degraded and we
7 would be back in a worse position with Saddam than we
8 thought, and bear in mind behind all of this was our
9 profound belief that Saddam had, and was going to use,
10 weapons of mass destruction.

11 If I may say, Sir John, so profound that in the
12 Foreign Office we acquired for our staff protective
13 clothing for them, including protective gas masks, which
14 I actually had in my office and inspected myself. The
15 sense -- and it was true right across the system
16 including in DFID -- that he had this materiel and was
17 going to use it, was very powerful indeed. It was not
18 made up, and in those circumstances, my own view was,
19 faced with the choice between presenting Saddam with an
20 ultimatum, as we had to, the UK and the US, or just
21 allowing extra time without any sense of a deadline,
22 would have actually taken us back to a worse position,
23 and even though, in the event, no WMD was found, if that
24 had been the consequence, they would not have known
25 that, and Saddam, as I said right at the end of my

1 memorandum, would have ended up with a greater sense of
2 power and influence in the region than even he had
3 before.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Time is running on, I think we will
5 come back to you next.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic, last one?

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If it is not overtaking your patience and
8 that of the wonderful stenographers, can I just seek
9 quick clarification on President Chirac?

10 He made his celebrated remarks, not in a formal
11 government statement, but in a television interview, and
12 if you read them in context, and I have re-read them in
13 context, they are certainly ambiguous.

14 Did you do what one often does in diplomacy and go
15 back to the French to try to establish to what extent
16 these remarks -- what they really meant, whether they
17 should be taken literally and as applied for all time
18 and whether there was an area for negotiation or did you
19 just say, "That's it, game over"?

20 RT HON JACK STRAW: Sir Roderic, I didn't say the latter.

21 But we had a lot to do with President Chirac. I knew
22 him pretty well, Tony Blair knew him better, and a lot
23 of contact with the French, and I watched
24 President Chirac make that statement and my French isn't
25 bad, and, yes, you say it wasn't a formal French

1 Government statement, but I mean, from the times of
2 De Gaulle, French Presidents have pronounced to
3 la France. That's what they do, and that was
4 President Chirac pronouncing to la France.

5 Now, the most senior politician in France, you have
6 to work on the basis, with somebody of that seniority,
7 that he knew what he was saying, and if he had said,
8 "Look, this is really difficult for us and we find it
9 very difficult to approve a resolution, and this is what
10 we want in it", we would have been in business, but he
11 must have known that the effect, say, on the African
12 states, on the Latin American ones, just saying -- leave
13 aside the "Le soir" bit, whatever the circumstances,
14 whatever the circumstances, "Quelque soit les
15 circonstances" --

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's one of the ambiguities. I don't
17 want to have a long conversation.

18 RT HON JACK STRAW: I don't think there is any ambiguity
19 about, "Quelque soit les circonstances". You know, it
20 means what it says.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The answer to my question therefore is
22 that you did not go back to Dominic de Villepin or
23 others?

24 RT HON JACK STRAW: I will double-check on the record.

25 I may well have had a telegram from Paris about it. As

1 I say, my relations with Dominic de Villepin remained
2 pretty cordial and were restored very quickly
3 afterwards, as I report in my memorandum, because we
4 didn't want to go through that again. We got going the
5 E3 axis on Iran, which was very productive for a period.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I normally offer our witnesses
7 a chance to offer final reflections, but since this is
8 not the last session and you have given us a substantial
9 section in your memorandum of evidence on reflections,
10 may I take it that you are content to close here until
11 we begin again?

12 In that case, we have much ground to cover in our
13 second set of sessions in a week or so, but for now, may
14 I thank our witness and our audience through quite
15 a long afternoon, and then just to note that tomorrow
16 morning we restart at 10 o'clock, where we have as
17 witnesses, first, Sir Suma Chakrabarti,
18 Permanent Secretary of DFID at the time, and then
19 Sir Nick Macpherson, Permanent Secretary to Her
20 Majesty's Treasury.

21 With that, I'll close the proceedings. Thank you.

22 (5.24 pm)

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

24

25