

1

Friday, 30th July 2010

2 (9.30 am)

3

RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT

4

RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Good morning.

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Good morning.

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Good morning and welcome, everyone and welcome to

7

our witness this morning.

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For our final session in this round of public

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hearings we welcome Lord Prescott. You were Deputy

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Prime Minister and a senior member of the Cabinet

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throughout the whole ten years from 1997-2007 when

12

Tony Blair was Prime Minister.

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I say this on each occasion. We recognise that

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witnesses give evidence based on their recollection of

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events and we, of course, check what we hear against the

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papers to which we have access and which we are still

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receiving.

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I say on every occasion I remind the witness he will

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later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence

20

given to the effect that the evidence he has given is

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truthful, fair and accurate.

22

With those preliminaries, Lord Prescott, I think you

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would like to say a few words before we start our

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questions.

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RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I would, Sir John, if I could.

1 First of all, to express my deepest sympathy to the
2 families of those who lost their lives in Iraq.

3 As you pointed out, Sir John, my role as the Deputy
4 Prime Minister between 1997 and 2007, of course, was to
5 support the Prime Minister and I used to meet him two or
6 three times a week privately. As well as running The
7 Department of Environment, Transports and Regions and
8 then the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, I also
9 chaired nine of the Cabinet committees and vice-chaired
10 a further seven committees in which most of the
11 Government's business was done.

12 I also supported the Prime Minister in his
13 international duties, most notably on the climate change
14 and --

15 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: A bit slower.

16 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Please forgive me. I will go
17 slower. At least it will take more of the time.

18 I also chaired nine of the Cabinet committees,
19 vice chair of seven of the Cabinet committees, where
20 indeed most of the business was done.

21 I supported the Prime Minister in his international
22 duties, most notably on the climate change by helping
23 secure the Kyoto Agreement -- Kyoto Protocol, the UK's
24 EU presidency and chairing the China task force.

25 Can I just say I have learned an awful lot reading

1 the evidence given to this Inquiry especially with
2 regard to the Government's decision-making in Iraq.
3 I chaired four of the Cabinet and three War Cabinet
4 meetings that discussed Iraq in the absence of the Prime
5 Minister and also attended 23 of the 28 War Cabinet
6 meetings.

7 I was reminded in your discussions during this
8 evidence of what was called the seminal moments when the
9 perception of the risk of Iraq changed, particularly in
10 America on 9/11.

11 I would like to point out in my view what also
12 changed on 9/11 was the Prime Minister when the Prime
13 Minister and I were watching the planes crash in the
14 world towers while they were to the TUC conference from
15 Brighton. The Prime Minister turned to me and said,
16 "This is a world changing event". I replied, "Not
17 unless we deliver social justice for the Palestinians
18 through the Middle East process".

19 To my mind it was a real achievement to persuade the
20 United States to follow the UN route on Iraq and provide
21 a road map for the Middle East process, sadly yet to be
22 realised. The Prime Minister passionately believed in
23 the humanitarian interventions and we used to discuss
24 that from time to time, which he set out in his speech
25 in Chicago in 1999 which you have discussed in your

1 evidence as The Doctrine of International Community.

2 This was consistent in his approach to Kosovo in
3 1999, Sierra Leone in 2000 and Afghanistan in 2001,
4 policies that were all endorsed by the Cabinet and
5 Parliament.

6 This belief in humanitarian interventionism stemmed
7 from his desire to prevent the repeat of the genocide
8 that he saw in Rwanda in 1994, when the UN failed to act
9 and almost 1 million people were murdered

10 Finally, Sir John, I note the concerns expressed in
11 the Inquiry about the move to a more presidential style
12 of Government. I believe modern politics, bilateral
13 discussions almost immediately between world leaders,
14 and the 24-hour news cycle have all played their part in
15 this inevitable process.

16 Thank you.

17 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you very much, Lord Prescott. We
18 will move to our own questions now and I will ask
19 Sir Roderic Lyne to start us off. Rod.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Lord Prescott, we are trying to establish
21 how Cabinet decision-making, to which you have just
22 referred, operated on the important issue of Iraq, which
23 engaged the collective responsibility of the Cabinet for
24 a decision to go to war.

25 We have now heard evidence from the then Prime

1 Minister, Mr Blair, and I think from all of the Cabinet
2 ministers whose departmental responsibilities were
3 engaged.

4 Clearly as the Deputy Prime Minister you held a very
5 influential position within the Cabinet and the
6 governing party.

7 Now you have mentioned Cabinet committees, many of
8 which you chaired, as places where most of the business
9 was done. You have mentioned the way in which this
10 question came up in a lot of Cabinets that you attended,
11 and in the War Cabinets after the conflict, but we have
12 heard in earlier evidence that a lot of the discussion
13 of Iraq took place in ad hoc meetings, meetings that
14 weren't actually minuted. To what extent were you
15 involved in the ad hoc discussions around the Prime
16 Minister in the period leading up to the conflict in
17 2002 and the first part of 2003?

18 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. I notice in the evidence
19 you do talk of large ad hoc committees and small ad hoc
20 committees. Therefore I think they have to be
21 differentiated between when officials met with certain
22 ministers to discuss the detail and logistics perhaps of
23 military planning and indeed the settlements afterwards,
24 reconstruction.

25 I was able to attend any Cabinet meeting. That was

1 the right I had as the Deputy Prime Minister and all
2 those committees. I attended more of the ones during
3 the process of the war than the ones when we were
4 dealing with the reconciliation and the development of
5 reconstruction, which I think in a way was more specific
6 to particular ministers, for example, Clare Short was
7 very actively involved in those policies and had her
8 share of criticisms, as she has expressed here.

9 I was satisfied in attending those that I was
10 getting sufficient information to make my judgments and
11 to give my advice to the Prime Minister both in the
12 personal and private meetings as well as the discussion
13 in the Cabinet meetings.

14 I was a little concerned where you get the problem
15 in these Cabinet committees of how do you then report
16 back to a cabinet, because all Governments have gone
17 through this process of the Cabinet Office and the
18 Cabinet itself.

19 One that caused some concern was when you are
20 dealing with the detail of a policy, you got into
21 different timetables between the military planning and
22 that of the political one. Tony Blair, the Prime
23 Minister, had convinced us all, and we were absolutely
24 supportive, that at least the Americans were now going
25 along the UN route.

1 How do you have a discussion in the Cabinet if the
2 military people are beginning to say, "We need a longer
3 timetable to make our decisions", and the political one
4 of, "How far can you go to get a second resolution?"
5 That is a conflict. I think if that had gone to the
6 Cabinet there would have been a big discussion and then
7 the press would have gone out saying, "You are not
8 trying to find a UN solution. You are just looking for
9 a military one."

10 There are difficulties of what confidentiality can
11 you maintain in some Cabinet committees or the Cabinet
12 itself? I note that Jack Straw in his evidence did
13 actually say there were times he couldn't give the full
14 information because he thought it would leak. I think
15 that's unfortunate but it is the reality of political
16 life, and does affect the general atmosphere of debate
17 about Iraq.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have made a number of points there
19 I think we will want to come back to, including about
20 the UN, but in the period between 9/11 and March 2003,
21 when the invasion happened, can you recall roughly how
22 often you were engaged in these small groups with the
23 Prime Minister discussing policy on Iraq?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Very often. I mean, most of
25 the actual military after -- you are talking before we

1 actually went into a military situation?

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: In those discussions before
4 then, they were largely about what progress you could
5 get with the UN. I am satisfied there was quite a lot
6 of discussion. At one stage when they were trying to
7 get the second resolution, I think they were proposing
8 I go to Guinea, for example, to talk to the leader
9 there, I think it was the Prime Minister or the
10 President, forgive me, I can't quite recall, but then we
11 were trying to get as many people on board for that
12 second resolution.

13 So they were the nature of the discussions prior to
14 the military intervention, but, of course, inevitably,
15 as you have seen in your evidence to the Inquiry, the
16 timetable some months before the intervention began to
17 be more about the options military. Was it, we going to
18 use the three options about: were we going to use the
19 troops in the theatre at the time? Were we going to
20 have a maritime contribution or did we have to make the
21 larger one for which the Americans were pushing? We
22 give up a grade size, armoured grade, which we
23 eventually settled for.

24 Clearly you are having discussions about that at the
25 time when you are trying to say our priority as it was

1 was to find a solution in the UN.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we go back to a slightly earlier point
3 than the lobbying for the second resolution and so on,
4 if you go to the first half of 2002, the time when the
5 strategy was being formed, and the question arose as to
6 whether or not we should be prepared to take part in
7 military action, at least on a contingency basis against
8 Iraq, the big strategic question, were you part of
9 discussions then about the strategy on Iraq in the first
10 half of 2002?

11 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes¹, I was, in the various
12 committees that dealt with it. As you know, the ad hoc
13 committee -- there was a War Cabinet dealing with the
14 war -- was in stage 1 and 2. It dealt with more of the
15 rebuilding of Iraq in its second stage, but the first
16 stage was about the general strategy, which obviously
17 was reported to the Cabinet. I was a strong advocate,
18 as indeed the Prime Minister was, that our priority must
19 be to secure a UN resolution. Though, as you know from
20 the discussions that went on in Camp David with the
21 Americans, the American military were pressing for
22 a commitment and then they could make their planning.

23 We found that very difficult. There was a real
24 problem between military planning and political
25 decision-making, and another point that came out, which

¹Witness's note: I would like to clarify that the discussion I was involved in during the first half of 2002 on the strategy for Iraq was solely concerned with engaging the Americans in the UN decision-making process.

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1 we used to discuss: where are we going in the end of
2 this? If you are going into war, will the Parliament
3 then, and a lot of discussion, be given the right to
4 make the decision? Parliament did and was given. That
5 was quite critical, though the Americans felt that you
6 didn't have to do that, but they had a regime change
7 argument from Clinton's resolution some time before.
8 Ours wasn't that and it seriously wasn't that. It was
9 a hope we could get a UN solution.

10 So while we discussed these all things, it was
11 hopefully to win the UN argument that if there was to be
12 an intervention and if it was in that sense regime
13 change, it was done by international agreement through
14 the UN and the resolutions, but as you know, as it is
15 now history, we were not able to achieve that. Though
16 in the process of discussion you had to have these facts
17 in mind.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, but in the first half of 2002 --
19 indeed throughout 2002, as earlier evidence to the
20 Inquiry has shown, and also the Butler Committee heard,
21 there was no discussion in any cabinet committee about
22 Iraq and, as Tony Blair told us, there were a lot of ad
23 hoc discussions. He said it didn't matter whether it
24 was a small "a" or a big "A" on ad hoc. That's where
25 the strategy was formed.

1 Now most of these discussions were not minuted. At
2 that stage -- this is before we get into the details of
3 going to the UN -- do you recall being part of this
4 decision-making process?

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: It's an interesting question.
6 What do you mean by the decision-making process? If it
7 is the ad hoc committee and I was surprised to find out
8 when they asked how many did I attend, they didn't have
9 the names on. We just --

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It wasn't a committee as such. In your
11 own book you talk about Tony Blair "making his decisions
12 with his chums on the sofa, which I admit sometimes
13 included me". Now his own description of this did not
14 include the word "committee" really. It was that he
15 would get together with groups of people, officials and
16 ministers --

17 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: That's what has become known as
18 the kind of sofa government. That was the nature of
19 Tony. Perhaps I could say one or two words about that.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: My question was: were you on the sofa in
21 the first half of 2002?

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I was on the sofa all the time.
23 Quite remarkable. I took a photograph of the sofa
24 before I left. I think there is a picture in my book.

25 Don't let's ignore the fact that Tony Blair, as

1 Mrs Thatcher did in Cabinet Government, always had
2 senior ministers they used to talk to about they had
3 done a difficult decision, "Are we going to get your
4 support?"

5 What I think Tony did was have more of that than
6 working through Cabinet committees. The distinction is
7 made by Lord Butler and others who have given you have
8 evidence about Cabinet Government and Cabinet Office.

9 They have made the point that, basically, Tony used
10 to have these kind of bilateral meetings. I was in
11 them. Not every one, because sometimes he would have
12 his advisers in and have separate decisions, but since
13 I was going in two or three times a week obviously what
14 was going on would be told to me throughout that
15 meeting.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now you were kept briefed throughout this
17 process.

18 Did you see policy papers on Iraq and did you see
19 intelligence assessments on Iraq?

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Can I deal with the policy one
21 first and then intelligence ones? I was a bit worried
22 about the policy ones, because I think I realised from
23 your evidence to the Inquiry that the preparation of the
24 documents of the three options, which were the military
25 options, they were being worked out when there was still

1 a feeling that we had to go on the UN route. Therefore
2 I didn't see that document in its form as it was in its
3 preparation.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't?

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I didn't, no, but I knew from
6 Tony that the talks were going on about: being pushed in
7 America, what are the options, what are we going to do?
8 Because the Americans right from the beginning were very
9 clear they wanted the biggest contribution from us, not
10 that the Americans needed Britain to go into Iraq, I
11 think that's clear, but they did want the coalition and
12 political support. So we were being pressed in that.

13 So on the one hand I had the privilege of hearing
14 from the Prime Minister himself the difficulties he was
15 having and then the process in the Cabinet as to how to
16 achieve that.

17 On the intelligence committees --

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just pause before intelligence.

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Okay.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you see the options paper of March
21 2002. That's not about military packages. That's about
22 when you go on with containment or you go for regime
23 change?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. There is two documents
25 here we talk about. One is the military one about what

1 is the contribution.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Which is later.

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. Then there is the other

4 one at the early stages: are we into regime change --

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you see that?

6 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I knew from the discussions

7 that went on prior to when Tony went to Camp David and

8 these sort of issues were becoming --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This is before he went to Crawford?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, but even in the

11 preparation of that thinking I think even the Attorney

12 General gave an earlier version of what he thought about

13 whether it was legal to have a military intervention.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not at that stage.

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Pardon?

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not at this stage.

17 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, but I am just saying there

18 were early stages when papers were being produced and I

19 didn't necessarily see them, though in the course of

20 discussion I did hear it was going on. I didn't demand

21 to see the papers. It was all part of that process.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in the period before the Prime

23 Minister went to Crawford -- he went to Crawford in

24 April 2002.

25 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, he did.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: There were a number of papers produced.
2 There was an options paper, there was minutes by the
3 Defence Secretary, the Foreign Secretary.
4 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: To prepare for the meeting.
5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You don't recall seeing those papers at
6 the time?
7 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I can't recall whether I saw
8 exactly the papers. I was aware of them --
9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You knew what was going on.
10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: -- because that's how I had my
11 bilateral discussions. I knew that ministers were
12 involved in them, the Foreign Minister, the Defence
13 Secretary. All those were involved. That was one
14 example, if you like, where a Prime Minister, and not
15 unique to Tony Blair, would talk to the key players in
16 these matters and say, "I am going to meet the
17 President. I'm probably going to be pushed on this, I
18 want to do that. Can you give me brief?"
19 I think in Tony Blair's evidence he does say he did
20 ask for the briefing because it was likely to be brought
21 up. So there were a lot of preparation meetings.
22 I didn't necessarily see the details of these papers.
23 This was in the early stages before the military
24 intervention we are talking about, but I was aware of
25 them from the unique position I had.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Shall we move on to the

2 intelligence then, the JIC assessments?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. That's interesting,

4 because when I kept reading them, I kept thinking to

5 myself, "Is this intelligence?" It is basically what

6 you have heard somewhere and what somebody else has told

7 everybody. That's presumably how intelligence is

8 brought to bear. So I got the feeling it wasn't very

9 substantial but it clearly was robust. As we move more

10 and more whether there was evidence about -- involved in

11 the weapons of mass destruction, the conclusions were

12 a little ahead I think of the evidence we had, but

13 perhaps that's the way it is. So I am curious to have

14 then read the evidence provided I think in 2004 by JIC,

15 if we look at their recommendations they made to us,

16 they were frankly wrong and built too much on too little

17 information. I think that was made by a number of the

18 witnesses to you.

19 That was my impression at the time, but, you know,

20 I just thought, "This is the intelligence document.

21 This is what you have". It seemed robust but not enough

22 to justify that you could do that. What you do in

23 intelligence is a bit of tittle tattle here and a bit

24 more information there and a judgment made, isn't it, to

25 be fair.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did it convince you that Iraq posed
2 a serious and growing threat to the region and to UK and
3 western interests? You say it wasn't very substantial.

4 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think you are right, there
5 was a threat to the region anyway by its actions,
6 whether it was an invasion of Kuwait or whether it was
7 primarily this war between Iran and Iraq. It was
8 obviously not a very stable situation there. I didn't
9 need JIC to tell me that. Where we were concerned with
10 the intelligence on JIC was to whether he was
11 cooperating with the resolutions from UN in giving
12 information as to whether he was actively involved in
13 weapons of mass destruction.

14 So to be fair to the intelligence agency, when they
15 said in our report which led, in fact, to the
16 information produced on the document, that there might
17 be something happening in 45 minutes, they have this
18 ability, they have these missiles, you do tend to accept
19 that's the judgment and there must be something in it.

20 I didn't totally dismiss it. I didn't have any
21 evidence to feel that they were wrong, but I just felt
22 a little bit nervous about the conclusions on what
23 I thought seemed to be pretty limited intelligence.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did it suggest there was a nuclear threat
25 from Iraq?

1 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: It certainly was leading to:
2 they are going to do that. I mean, I see in the
3 interview with the intelligence agency they say,
4 "Perhaps we should have used a different word than we
5 did there", but I think in the main the words they did
6 use did lead you to believe that they had believed it
7 and so did other intelligence agencies, that they were
8 actively involved in developing weapons of mass
9 destruction and the missiles to deliver it.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Chemical and biological weapons, but
11 didn't the JIC assessment suggest that the nuclear
12 programme was effectively frozen, although he was trying
13 to make some efforts to procure materials? Wasn't that
14 the message from them?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: It was, yes, but I think the
16 suggestion also was: this was a serious situation.
17 I mean, since then, with hindsight, we do see that they
18 are perhaps thinking they had not gone as far as they
19 had done that, that the early stages of dealing with the
20 weapons of mass destruction had been effectively dealt
21 with, but at that stage we were saying it is still
22 an active part of the use of them and here was a guy who
23 had used them. This was not something who was just
24 developing something, he had actually used them against
25 his own people, particularly in regard to chemical

1 weapons.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Apart from the JIC written assessments
3 did you receive, as some other ministers have told us
4 they received, direct briefing from the Intelligence
5 Services?

6 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I did request a discussion once
7 or twice when -- I think it was John Scarlett and
8 others, if I remember their names. You obviously did
9 take the chance to have a chat with them about it. They
10 were very forthcoming but you were left with the
11 impression that the intelligence was that there was
12 an active part in Iraq in developing weapons of mass
13 destruction, which was the matter which was absolutely
14 crucial to the observance of whether there was any
15 breach in the UN resolution, which then led to the legal
16 judgment that if there has been a breach, then there is
17 a legal right. So it was important for us to form
18 an opinion as to whether that was happening.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were convinced from what you read
20 and what you heard in briefing of the seriousness of the
21 threat of weapons of mass destruction from Iraq?

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think I liked to exercise a
23 kind of sceptical judgment, but I don't think I was in
24 a position to say, "You are wrong". I didn't have that
25 kind of evidence. It was crucial to the whole issue

1 both in the UN and whether you were justifying
2 a military intervention. So I rather took their
3 evidence and hopefully thought it would all get settled
4 in the UN anyway, but then eventually, if you come to
5 a regime change and you are in that school of thought,
6 as they were in America, it wasn't an important issue
7 anyway, because they were embarked upon regime change
8 and the diversion to the UN by President Bush was not
9 a great deal more than that.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were you aware that Robin Cook was taking
11 a very sceptical view of this evidence --

12 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- against the background of his
14 experience as Foreign Secretary and interpreting it in
15 a different way to other people?

16 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, I was, and I think more so
17 since I have read your evidence. He is a very serious
18 politician, Robin Cook, and I listened very carefully to
19 his judgments and I think the one I felt at the time,
20 confirmed again in reading your evidence, that whilst he
21 didn't say this in his speech when he resigned, he
22 referred to not getting the second resolution, he was
23 a person who did believe, as indeed more time should be
24 given to Blix to be able to find out if this was true,
25 but he did believe in the use of sanctions and the

1 containment of it. He believed that was happening.
2 I think this changed particularly when Jack Straw, not
3 due to him, at that time became the Foreign Secretary.
4 He clearly didn't believe in that, in my view. What he
5 wanted to do was say, "It has not worked. Let's go to
6 the soft and hard approach. You have diplomatic but we
7 are coming in, boys, if you don't change", and I think
8 that was a signal change I think between Robin Cook's
9 approach and Jack's. Though we have to bear in mind it
10 is the Prime Minister that made the changes and
11 assumingly he had already got sceptical about whether
12 the sanctions were actually working.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. In his resignation speech Robin
14 Cook said:

15 "Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in
16 the commonly understood sense of the term."

17 Now did that view of his worry you at all? Did it
18 diminish your confidence in what you were being told?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, because in the discussions,
20 particularly in the Cabinet, I don't think Robin was as
21 hard in there as he might have been in these bilaterals
22 that went on, because I think there is a very strong
23 feeling in a Labour Government not to lead to divisions
24 of thinking, though it did lead to his resignation in
25 the end. I think sometimes these differences were

1 fought out inside the committees rather than in the
2 Cabinet itself, though eventually it did come to a head.

3 I have to say I did go and see Robin and ask him not
4 to resign. Tony asked me to do that and I think it was
5 part of the role I had as the Deputy Prime Minister. I
6 had similar role with Clare Short. I wasn't so
7 successful there.

8 In Robin's case, I had to point out to him that
9 since the issue was about the authority of the UN he had
10 authorised a certain amount of military action without
11 UN support in combination with America. I just
12 thought -- I couldn't help by point out to him it is not
13 so absolute as you are perhaps putting forward, Robin.
14 But at the end of the day he was right.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I ask you about the terrorist threat
16 from Iraq? In recent evidence to the Inquiry the former
17 Director General of the Security Service, Baroness
18 Manningham-Buller, said in the period before the
19 conflict her service regarded the threat of terrorism
20 within the UK and to British interests from Saddam's
21 Iraq as, "Low, very limited and containable". She said
22 that this assessment of this low threat was reflected in
23 the JIC assessments, the ones that you will have been
24 reading as a Cabinet minister.

25 Were you surprised then to hear the Prime Minister

1 of the day say in the House of Commons on 18 March 2003
2 that:

3 "The real problem is that underneath people dispute
4 that Iraq is a threat, dispute the link between
5 terrorism and weapons of mass destruction"?

6 Was there a link between terrorism and weapons of
7 mass destruction? Was that the evidence you were
8 seeing? Was terrorism part of the picture of the Iraqi
9 threat?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Oh, undoubtedly terrorism was.
11 Whether it was established --

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Terrorism from Iraq?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No. That was -- terrorism was
14 a big issue. Whether, in fact, it was the combination
15 of Al Qaeda and Iraq had been established was certainly
16 under doubt. I mean, you have examined that in your own
17 committee here. Therefore it was very much an issue,
18 but I have to say in the evidence that was given by
19 Baroness --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Manningham-Buller.

21 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I am sorry. Manningham-Buller,
22 she was on the JIC committee that actually produced the
23 actual document that was used by the Prime Minister to
24 say, "This is a threat".

25 Her argument, as I hear, is that -- from what I hear

1 in the Inquiry, "I was only a junior partner [if you
2 like] and I didn't influence it". Well, you were in the
3 document that we were all looking as JIC intelligence.

4 Though I do recognise her responsibilities were the
5 connection to terrorism and whether the intervention in
6 Iraq was going to make it more difficult to deal with
7 terrorism in this country. She probably had a point.
8 I think she did have a point. But she did sit on JIC,
9 and the points you are making about the Prime Minister
10 and his statement to the House were based on that
11 document and that's why that document was produced.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At the moment I am focusing specifically
13 on what was said in JIC assessments about a threat of
14 terrorism from Iraq.

15 Was that part of what you were being told, that
16 there was a threat of terrorism from Iraq, leaving the
17 weapons of mass destruction on the other side for the
18 moment?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: It is an interesting question.
20 I am not sure how I can answer it, except to say in
21 thinking about that time that it was accepted that
22 terrorism was connected and he was conducting an awful
23 lot of terrorism against his own people. Then you asked
24 me: was it proven in the JIC intelligence? I can't say
25 it was. It was more accepted as a kind of fact that

1 there was a connection between terrorism and what was
2 happening in Iraq. Presumably perhaps I should not have
3 made that judgment. I am just saying it was one of the
4 given facts we accepted.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was your perception, although she
6 has told us that the Security Service experts assessed
7 the threat of Iraq using terrorism against us or our
8 interests or internationally as, "Low or very limited or
9 containable". So she didn't in her evidence to us
10 depict the threat of terrorism from Iraq as being
11 something substantial. Your perception is different?

12 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I don't know what she means by
13 that. I listened to her before in Cabinet committees.
14 She was always on, quite rightly in my view, about the
15 threat of terrorism. Along with it came, "Please give
16 me more money."

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Terrorism from Iraq?

18 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Terrorism generally in the UK.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's different?

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I do take your point, but since
21 her evidence that when she came to us was largely, one,
22 we are going to get this terrorism in the UK and we are,
23 concerned, I don't have enough money, please give me
24 most money, as most agencies tend to do --

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But she says the money she had to devote

1 to Iraq was rather low because the threat was coming
2 from elsewhere?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. I read that she said
4 that. She was probably right. I have no evidence to
5 dispute it, except that she came across, she had
6 a difficult job to do, she wanted more resources.
7 I remember when we were cutting back in certain areas,
8 her demands, I tended to feel were perhaps: see it in
9 the light of a demand by another authority that wanted
10 more money. She was not on her own.

11 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Let's move on to another topic,
12 relations with the United States. I would ask Baroness
13 Prashar to pick this up.

14 BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you. Lord Prescott, when did you
15 personally first become aware of the discussions between
16 the President and Prime Minister that might lead to the
17 removal of Saddam Hussein?

18 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, I think the first
19 awareness was when I visited the United States --

20 BARONESS PRASHAR: That was when?

21 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Just a couple of days after
22 9/11. I had a meeting with Mr Cheney, the
23 Vice-President, and I can recall the meeting, because
24 him and the President were being hidden in different
25 parts of the UK and I had to conduct my interview by

1 a video screen.

2 BARONESS PRASHAR: You mean different parts of the USA?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. Sorry. Thank you. I had
4 to do it by a video screen. I couldn't help but point
5 out that perhaps he was hiding in the cave that was
6 probably more luxurious than Bin Laden, but in going to
7 America at that time I talked to a number of my senator
8 friends, Democrat ones, and I was absolutely surprised
9 to find them talking about an aggressive attitude, that
10 Iraq was unfinished business.

11 One of my own friends for 25 years, Senator Chris
12 Dodd, I said, "Chris, how can you be expressing this?"
13 He said, "It is unfinished business. We have to sort it
14 out".

15 When I talked to some of the chairmen of the various
16 defence committees there, it is clear they were
17 planning. I came back to Tony and said, "I don't know
18 what you think and what you are getting, but they are
19 planning to go in with or without us, but they are going
20 to do it". I think the evidence has shown that.

21 That was my first alarm, that it was being planned,
22 that it was a military intervention, it was regime
23 change and that's what they were embarked upon, while we
24 were talking about, "Let's get them through the UN".

25 BARONESS PRASHAR: When you came back and you mentioned it

1 to Tony Blair, what was his reaction? What did he say
2 to you?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think it was just a piece of
4 information he had in mind. I think he would be foolish
5 if he didn't see that was the way. He knew he had to
6 get them off the course onto UN and it was the Camp
7 David meeting -- was it in 02/02, I can't remember the
8 date -- where the first thing then it was that they
9 agreed not only that we should try the UN and also the
10 Middle East agreement.

11 So I think in his mind he knew that the military
12 people were planning but he had to get them off that
13 course.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Again, speed, please.

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I am sorry.

16 BARONESS PRASHAR: So your understanding was that you were
17 just feeding the information back to Prime Minister
18 Tony Blair and you didn't get a reaction back from him
19 as to what he was thinking at the time?

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: His thinking was: yes, I am
21 aware that they are really on this road, but I want them
22 to go via the UN. His mind was on how could he achieve
23 that, and I think in his evidence and the reports of the
24 meeting, he was quite cock-a-hoop, I think Mr Manning
25 says that as well in his evidence, to have achieved

1 that. I think that was quite an achievement.

2 BARONESS PRASHAR: Now as the situation developed, how much

3 did the Prime Minister tell you about his conversations

4 with President Bush? Because you said earlier you saw

5 him almost three times a week?

6 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: He would tell me. I suppose

7 I didn't get everything, but everything in a chat

8 occasion that would give me the flavour of it. Indeed,

9 he invited me on one occasion to attend one of the

10 videos. He did say to me, "Don't be worried about his

11 language". I don't think he meant swearing but the

12 style and aggression that would be involved. I must say

13 having listened to it I now know what he means.

14 BARONESS PRASHAR: Can you recall when this was, when you

15 observed the videolink conversation?

16 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I can't tell you. I could

17 check and send the information, if you like, but I have

18 had some difficulty finding some of the dates and times

19 when you check back.

20 I am trying to give further reflection. I can't

21 remember the exact dates but the Cabinet presumably has

22 the times and days and who attended. There was, I found

23 with the ad hoc committee you can't necessarily assume

24 every bit of information is there and recorded.

25 BARONESS PRASHAR: Apart from the videolink conversation did

1 you actually see any of the Prime Minister's letters to
2 the President?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No.

4 BARONESS PRASHAR: You didn't see any of the correspondence?

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No.

6 BARONESS PRASHAR: Did you, in the course of these
7 discussions with the Prime Minister, become aware of the
8 extent to which he had committed himself to support the
9 President over Iraq in the first seven months of 2002?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I was certainly aware that the
11 Americans wanted him on board, and --

12 BARONESS PRASHAR: That's what they wanted, but what was the
13 level of his commitment? Were you aware of what kind of
14 commitment he had given?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I don't think he was -- I think
16 the evidence you have received here was that he was not
17 giving any commitment and he certainly never told me
18 that he had, that he was clearly being pressed on the
19 matter. His, obviously, policy was to go for the UN.

20 BARONESS PRASHAR: But Alastair Campbell, when he gave
21 evidence to us, said, and I quote, what he said:
22 "If that cannot be done and the only way left is
23 through regime change, through military action, then the
24 British Government will support the American Government.
25 That is the message he will have been putting over."

1 Was that your understanding?

2 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, I wasn't at that meeting.

3 BARONESS PRASHAR: No, you were not at that meeting, but you
4 said you saw him regularly. He must have given you some
5 indication of the kind of commitment he had given to
6 President Bush?

7 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, he didn't say he had given
8 any commitment and I don't think it has necessarily been
9 proved. There are people -- Sir Christopher Meyer, he
10 said something else and he was not even at the meeting.
11 So, I mean, there are disputes about these issues. He
12 didn't tell me, since that's the direct question, that
13 he had promised that eventually he would stay with them.
14 I had no doubt about this man, that he was always clear
15 that every Prime Minister has to have -- to make up his
16 mind what is the relationship with America. I think
17 there is a lot of evidence for that. He clearly knew it
18 was important. His international thinking was, "You
19 have to work with America", and indeed, therefore, knew
20 probably at the end of the day if he failed in the UN,
21 and he was optimistic of getting agreement, that he
22 wouldn't have to go down that road of a military
23 intervention solely with America but perhaps with the
24 UN. But he never did tell me whether he had come to any
25 agreement. I am sure it would be in his mind that the

1 Americans -- it was President Bush who said, "I am going
2 to go through the UN". There were many people in
3 America who didn't agree with that, particularly on his
4 own staff, but he did do that. At the end of the day
5 the question would come, and I was aware of it of
6 course, and he did tell me this, that the Americans were
7 quite prepared to go without us. He gave the offer to
8 Blair, "You don't have to come". He told me that, but
9 it is the nature of Tony Blair that he had the
10 understanding and priorities that he felt he would have
11 to bring it back to the Cabinet.

12 Even if he did make that decision, he did come back
13 to the Cabinet and he did go to Parliament. Those
14 decisions then confirmed that policy. So even if he had
15 done that, it wasn't him that made the final decision,
16 as we always said to the Americans, it had to be
17 a political one, and it had to be Parliament. That's
18 what happened.

19 BARONESS PRASHAR: So your understanding was that Tony Blair
20 was always trying to get the United Nations route and
21 that he had not given a firm commitment of support to
22 President Bush?

23 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think -- I don't want to get
24 myself in the position of others that are making
25 judgments about whether he did or didn't. I don't

1 really know. I don't know. I would have to say
2 honestly. I think some of the others should say they
3 don't know. Alastair Campbell is a little different,
4 because he was sitting in some of those kind of
5 meetings.

6 And I think the point -- it was the same argument
7 about regime change. The American Ambassador -- what
8 was it -- I call him Red Socks. I think his real
9 name is Christopher Meyer.

10 BARONESS PRASHAR: Christopher Meyer.

11 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Christopher Meyer. He is the
12 man who actually said on regime change, the first time
13 the UK got involved, and Blair, was after the meeting
14 with -- I think it was the Crawford meeting, one of the
15 Camp David meetings.

16 You know, as Alastair Campbell has pointed out,
17 there were three or four speeches before that the logic
18 of what you do if you can't get international agreement
19 through UN may lead you to a policy that that possibly
20 would lead to regime change.

21 BARONESS PRASHAR: Were you aware of the exchanges that were
22 taking place between other Cabinet colleagues like Jack
23 Straw and Geoff Hoon with their counterparts?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, I was aware of it because
25 there were obviously some differences in nuance and Tony

1 used to talk about it, about what the defence felt about
2 it, whether there was enough truth, whether there were
3 enough things, Jack Straw's argument about how far can
4 you go in the UN in trying to get the second resolution.
5 Because at the end of the day the political judgment, as
6 it came to the second resolution, was: do you go into
7 the UN and lose? If you go in and lose what, do you do
8 then?

9 I think the reality of a failure to secure, whether
10 it was due to the French or not, I think poor old French
11 got blamed for an awful lot of it, you can make your
12 judgment what Chirac meant by his comments, but at the
13 end of the day the UN was at the end of the road. Then
14 you have the judgment: does regime change come into your
15 mind? I am sure that's exactly what Tony Blair had to
16 face.

17 But don't forget, even if that was in the air,
18 Parliament endorsed it.

19 BARONESS PRASHAR: We know that. So you were aware that
20 Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon were talking to their
21 counterparts and you were aware of the differences
22 between the USA administration?

23 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Absolutely. I mean more than
24 so, because we used to play to our good partners and not
25 necessarily the bad ones, and complained about the bad

1 ones. I mean, Powell was one which had a great deal of
2 identity with the same views we were pursuing through
3 the UN. That was not the same with Mr Rumsfeld.

4 BARONESS PRASHAR: What about Dick Cheney?

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Hardliner.

6 BARONESS PRASHAR: You said you were in America and you
7 talked to him. I know he was a hardliner. Did the
8 Prime Minister ask you to do work with the Vice
9 President? Because there is no sort of equivalent
10 counterpart here. You were the Deputy Prime Minister.

11 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. I saw him when he came
12 over in the kind, when he is over here he is obviously
13 going to be seeing the Prime Minister, but that was the
14 same when Al Gore came over, that I would see them as
15 the Vice President --

16 BARONESS PRASHAR: How many times did you see him during the
17 course of 2002?

18 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Vice President Cheney?

19 BARONESS PRASHAR: Mmm.

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think it was about two or
21 three times. It was not flying over to see him
22 directly. I was doing other business in America. It
23 was like, "Oh, we can have those chats and discussions".
24 I would talk to Tony about that, because we know he was
25 a big player in the developing of the policy in the

1 American administration.

2 BARONESS PRASHAR: You were aware, you said he was
3 a hardliner. Did you try to influence him in terms of
4 looking at alternatives?

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: We would put the views, and he
6 would just look at you and you had not convinced him of
7 anything.

8 BARONESS PRASHAR: You just came to that conclusion it was
9 difficult to influence him?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: You can talk to him, you know,
11 and it is a polite conversation but he had pretty strong
12 views. He certainly wasn't for the UN role. He felt
13 that, you know, the UN kind of pussyfoots along these
14 situations. This was unfinished business. We needed to
15 sort it out. We are going in. Let's play around with
16 the UN where we are. He didn't quite put it to me like
17 that but that was the conclusion I got from the
18 discussions with him.

19 BARONESS PRASHAR: Do you think we could have done more to
20 balance those views? There we were, having --

21 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: With Vice President Cheney.

22 BARONESS PRASHAR: To balance the views he was putting
23 forward?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Your evidence I think from
25 various people who have come here have said they met

1 Cheney and tried to argue constantly with him and also
2 Dr Rice at the same time. All these people were
3 approached by all the various advisers, Mr Manning
4 particularly talking to them all. I don't think it
5 changed any of the positions. The only man who changed,
6 frankly, was the President, who decided to agree with
7 Tony Blair to go through the UN. He was the man who was
8 making the decisions. He might be a big influence on
9 Bush but frankly Bush was making his own decisions in
10 this case, in my view.

11 BARONESS PRASHAR: Earlier when you were making your
12 statement at the outset you said that one of the prizes
13 to win was the Middle East peace process. Was that hope
14 realised to some extent or not?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, I didn't realise quite
16 frankly either until I read your evidence that a date
17 was set on it, that they would achieve it, I think it
18 was by -- was it going to be by 2006 or 2003. I am not
19 sure now. There was a date set. I was surprised about
20 that, because I didn't know a date was set on it. It
21 was going through the usual American things. They give
22 you statements about it and then they can't deliver on
23 it, but with the Bush case, which was quite encouraging
24 to many of us over this business, influencing what
25 happened over Iraq, was at least President Bush had gone

1 further than President Clinton or the Democrats in
2 recognising a two-state solution. So we were hopeful
3 that the President, perhaps in our joint working
4 together on Iraq would recognise that at the end of the
5 day, as I said when I witnessed those planes, unless you
6 bring social justice to the people in Palestine, we are
7 going to have a running sore and that's still the
8 position, and they failed to deliver.

9 BARONESS PRASHAR: During any conversations with Prime
10 Minister Blair did you actually impress on him the
11 importance of the Middle East process?

12 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I did, but I didn't need to.
13 He actually believed that and still believes it now and
14 spends an awful lot of time trying to get that road map
15 still on the road. So he was -- he felt very much about
16 this business about -- in this international bipolar
17 kind of thing that the whole issue about Muslims and the
18 conflict that was beginning to occur, which is at the
19 heart of an awful lot of this, that we had to settle
20 a grave injustice that had been perpetuated in
21 Palestine, vis-a-vis Israel.

22 BARONESS PRASHAR: Why do you think he failed to kind of
23 influence President Bush?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I don't think it is a case of
25 us failing. Well, he failed, yes, but the Americans

1 failed, and anybody who knows the American position and
2 the personalities and pressures that come in the
3 American political system, the Israeli influence is
4 phenomenal, and you don't change a great deal of it, and
5 every time when the good hopes of finding an agreement
6 have failed on the political facts and elections in my
7 view.

8 BARONESS PRASHAR: In retrospect you don't think it was
9 a realistic expectation there would be progress on the
10 Middle East process?

11 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think what Tony said about
12 that, confirmed I think in the evidence, was that Bush
13 felt he wanted to do something, and here he was working
14 with a man who was committed to have a go, was
15 courageous, wanted to take account -- agreed with
16 a great deal of the American position, that the Middle
17 East, he was right, felt something had to be done about
18 it, and I think he felt honestly that he could achieve
19 something.

20 I have got to believe that's what he did believe,
21 but because he said the road map was developing, it took
22 a little time to develop the road map, but when it was,
23 it was a very good sign that the Americans from our
24 point of view were serious this time, and we had
25 a President committed to it. It wasn't the kind of

1 statements we got from President Clinton, who I might
2 have said was our kind of natural ally in these matters.

3 BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could I just try to sum up this set of
5 exchanges, and you will tell me if you agree. The
6 British Government from after 9/11 took up a broadly
7 supportive political stance vis-a-vis the Bush
8 Administration. Not with a military commitment at that
9 point at all, but broadly supportive. Working that
10 through 2002 what was actually achieved against the
11 general drift of American policy was a commitment to the
12 UN route in dealing with Iraq, which was secured and it
13 carried through to into February of 2003, and it got
14 from the President a verbal public commitment to the
15 Middle East peace process but not action thereafter.

16 Now, is that a fair summation and --

17 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. I think it is a fair
18 summation really. Though I would just add one word
19 that.

20 I think Tony in our early discussions when we came
21 into Government always was impressed with the fact that
22 every British Prime Minister has to decide what kind of
23 relationship he wants with American or she wants with
24 America, and it has often been with their alternative
25 political friends, if you like. Macmillan was with

1 Kennedy. So to that extent you have to make up your
2 mind about that. He was very strong about that. If you
3 believe in the internationalism, he does believe that
4 America had the assets to make that policy work, that
5 Britain wasn't big enough. We did it in Sierra Leone,
6 but in Kosovo, without the kind of military invention we
7 got with the aeroplane support from Clinton, you
8 couldn't have achieved what he called the pursuit of
9 this humanitarianism. So you need America to achieve it
10 and that's what he felt strongly about.

11 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You need the American chicken to lay the
12 British egg.

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: And we still might basically
14 might be called the junior partner without getting into
15 the controversy about that, but that is the reality and
16 they could have gone without us in a way in Iraq,
17 without a doubt.

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Turning to the United Nations, a
19 dimension of this that is important, obviously.
20 Roderic?

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have already underlined the
22 importance of the UN. The critical period was the
23 autumn of 2002. In September of 2002 the Prime Minister
24 went to Camp David, he and the President, with I think
25 Vice President Cheney, discussed --

1 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: To their surprise.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- whether or not to go to the UN. Then
3 the President goes to New York, announces that he wants
4 UN resolution, Security Council resolutions, and by
5 November you get, after a very long detailed negotiation
6 that I don't think we need to discuss now, resolution
7 1441.

8 How critical was it to obtain UN support?

9 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think from our point of view
10 absolutely critical. I am not sure the Americans felt
11 the same way about that. They had already got the
12 Clinton one about Iraq and the regime change effectively
13 on their own books.

14 With us it was absolutely critical, because quite
15 frankly you could not have got the political support
16 here in the UK without at least making a very serious
17 effort to get and work through the UN and Tony Blair
18 absolutely believed in his concept of internationalism,
19 that the UN needs to be at the centre of it.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When we started down this route in the
21 autumn of 2002, had the Government worked out what it
22 would do if we could not get UN approval for military
23 action?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: That was the dilemma that
25 I mentioned before about these different timings. For

1 example, it was clear the Americans were pushing us for
2 the logistics of a military intervention and were you
3 with us. That required some time, whereas the UN was
4 negotiating right up to the last minute until we found
5 that we could not get the second resolution. So that
6 means you were trying to maintain this difficulty of:
7 does it mean, as Blair did recognise at one stage, that
8 you might end up in the UN getting regime change?
9 Though regime change under the UN carried a great deal
10 more authority than regime change under America and UK.
11 So the UN was quite critical for us, not only because it
12 was right, but because you couldn't have got the
13 political support in Britain without it.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You talked earlier about the question of
15 the second resolution and whether you would go into the
16 UN and risk losing.

17 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why did we try to obtain a further
19 Security Council Resolution in February and March of
20 2003?

21 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: The second resolution?

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

23 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. Why? Because we needed
24 it. I think we did seriously need it. I would
25 imagine -- it is only my view -- you have the Americans

1 on your back saying, "Listen, what is happening in the
2 UN is actually what we told you. We are getting our
3 troops ready. Are you with us or not?"

4 I mean, that was the reality that was coming up. It
5 was absolutely critical to try to get that -- and a lot
6 of effort went in by Tony Blair both in Europe and on
7 the other members of the Security Council to get
8 an agreement. But it failed. I mean, the argument
9 about whether Chile and America would come together, all
10 the things you have discussed in your committee, it was
11 becoming increasingly clear you were not going to get
12 it.

13 Then I am sure your mind began to turn to, "What if
14 we fail to achieve that", because that was more than
15 evidence when we were scurrying around and they were
16 considering sending me to Guinea, that we were on the
17 back foot on this. What are you going to do then?
18 That's the crucial moment the Baroness I think was
19 referring to. What did he decide in his mind? Well, he
20 is a man who kept it to his own mind. I was asked did
21 he tell me? No. But we know the issue was coming, and
22 I think the Cabinet by that stage had got to this man
23 who in Iraq was such a threat to security, he had been
24 involved in a war with his neighbour, he had invaded
25 Kuwait. We felt, well, if we have exhausted that, you

1 will have to come to Parliament if you are going into
2 military intervention, because you either get it through
3 the UN or get it with America. That was the choice.

4 I am sure then you are you are looking at that and
5 surely these committees are looking, as they are: Do we
6 send in a brigade? Do we use the maritime? That was
7 passed pretty early in those three options we were going
8 to send a brigade because the Americans wanted us to
9 have. Not that they needed that to conquer. Shock and
10 Awe was one of the real problems.

11 The military, they thought that could be done in
12 a few days and, in reality, they didn't worry about what
13 was happening afterwards. They were going to throw
14 garlands of democracy and pull down the statues of
15 Saddam. We didn't need to worry because the people
16 would take over. It is a different story and another
17 one all together.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had we thought through the consequences
19 of not getting a resolution before we started asking for
20 one?

21 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: We are already at that stage,
22 and we know, because of this timetable, that our
23 military people had come to a decision. There was a bit
24 of a hiccup at the beginning because the Americans went
25 in earlier than expected, 24 or 48 hours, but the

1 pressures were then on. Were you going to have a war in
2 almost impossible summer conditions or go in and sort it
3 out?

4 We would have thought through what our military had
5 to do, what his role was. As Lord Boyce has said, you
6 needed time to get that together, since we were going to
7 have to bring -- then I had the other problem, a fire
8 strike for 12 months, in which the problem was I had to
9 deal with for 12 months whether we were using 10,000 or
10 20,000 troops to maintain the fire service during the
11 strike. That was another difficult time, but that was
12 the planning that was inevitable, and I am sure when it
13 was announced they were going in, we had our military
14 ready, which required decisions some months before the
15 breakdown on the second resolution.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you say we needed UN approval for
17 military action. You say that was very important in
18 order to carry people in this country?

19 Now we didn't get UN approval for military action.

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, no.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We tried and we failed. What were the
22 consequences of failing to get it? If we need it and
23 don't get it, where does that leave us?

24

25 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Wait a minute. The important

1 part for any Cabinet member then is: if you haven't got
2 the UN, is it legal? Then you go back to the UN
3 resolutions and the discussions you have had in this
4 committee, whether it was justified to say there was
5 a breach and therefore the authority in those earlier
6 resolutions gave you an authority to intervene.

7 Now that was the judgment Peter Goldsmith had to
8 come to, whether it was legal. We in the Cabinet then
9 asked, "Is it legal?" We were told yes. That means we
10 crossed the line, but Parliament had to agree it.
11 Parliament did agree it. Probably the first time
12 a Parliament had had a vote on a military intervention
13 of this scale and size. So the democratic
14 accountability was satisfied even if the President --
15 the Prime Minister had come in his mind to, "I might
16 have to be into a regime change, but I am going to have
17 to do it without the UN". Though it is not totally
18 without the UN the legal justification was based on UN
19 resolutions. That's where there is a certain amount of
20 controversy.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the consequence was it raised the
22 question of whether it was legal or not. We will come
23 back to that and also come back to Parliamentary
24 approval a bit later on.

25 Just to conclude the point on the UN, you also said

1 earlier that the poor old French got blamed for a lot of
2 it. Clare Short in her evidence told us that you were
3 part of a meeting with Tony Blair and Gordon Brown which
4 decided to:

5 "Blame the French and claim they had said they would
6 veto anything."

7 Is that a fair reflection? Do you recall being part
8 of that discussion?

9 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, I heard it. It was very a
10 strong view at that time.

11 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You thought it was right to blame the
12 French?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, not necessarily, because at
14 the same time they were arguing did they really mean
15 that? That is the problem with diplomacy. When they
16 says things, do they mean it? I have heard in your
17 committee you heard about the words of French, what
18 does it actually mean? In reality he was really
19 exercising a veto, but was he doing it for more time for
20 Blix to go in and do more work or was he doing it to
21 say, "This whipper snapper Tony Blair is thinking he can
22 carry Europe as well as the Americans, well he can't".
23 Those issues go on. They are part of the personality of
24 politics, but at the end of the day of the French had
25 led them to say and they had acted not to support

1 a second resolution.

2 So it was fair to say, whether you blame totally the
3 French, they were not on their own. There were others
4 who were not prepared to support a second resolution.
5 That is probably why I used, perhaps unwisely, "Poor old
6 French". It is very often, in our case, we blame the
7 French.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Isn't that the point, that it wasn't only
9 the French?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: You are right. You are right,
11 but, I mean, we are heading in a war situation, the UN
12 has not actually given us a second resolution, we are
13 now using other resolutions to justify it. Who were the
14 people who were not wanting to get rid of, as they see
15 it, Saddam, as it would have been seen? It was the
16 French and others. The French easily come to mind in
17 the Brits' mind about whether we want to blame people.
18 There is a lot of history for that. Basically that was
19 a view expressed. Clare disagreed fundamentally with
20 it. She got some of the statements. I think the
21 Ambassador put out a statement saying it didn't actually
22 mean that. No, but it meant they were not giving time
23 for a second resolution. The only justification was
24 they needed more time for Blix to go in and do that.

25 Then we are on the downhill. We are going into

1 a kind of military situation where the UN, and that's
2 the point I made about: if they tried to win -- and they
3 know before -- a resolution and lose, then it is in
4 total defiance of the UN. I think that was the same
5 thing over Kosovo, wasn't it? We knew in the case of
6 Kosovo that the Russians would veto, so nobody asked the
7 question. It is just the American and the Brit got
8 together to stop that kind of genocide and another
9 Rwanda happening in Kosovo.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At the time Chirac made his remarks,
11 which was on 10 March, at that point had we got nine
12 positive votes on our side in the Security Council or
13 had the other people, sufficient of them, declined to
14 support us, that we were not getting a resolution
15 anyway.

16 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think it is an interesting
17 question. It is the minds of the various nine, if you
18 like, but a great deal of effort was put in to try to
19 persuade them.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had that effort succeeded? Did we have
21 Chile? Did we have Mexico?

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think it was all about -- was
23 it Chile? We will do it if Fox in Mexico does it. You
24 had all of these, "Are we are going to upset the
25 Americans?" In these negotiations what was clear,

1 nobody wanted to do it with a willing heart. So a lot
2 of pressures were brought on to get these extra members
3 of the Security Council to do that.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had it succeeded or not?

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Had they succeeded in getting
6 them? No.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We had not got them. So was it right for
8 the Foreign Secretary --

9 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: We were still arguing for it.
10 Then you must make a judgment: Do you think they are
11 going to come for us, and we put it to the vote. The
12 judgment clearly was no.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was it right for Jack Straw to tell the
14 House of Commons that:

15 "We had been close to achieving the consensus we
16 sought on the further resolution. Sadly one country
17 then ensured the Security Council could not act"?

18 Tony Blair told the House of Commons:

19 "We very clearly had majority agreement."
20 Before President Chirac made his statement.

21 I come back to your point about blaming the poor old
22 French. Was it actually accurate to say it was just the
23 French that stopped us?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, it wasn't, to be honest,
25 but what I have to be careful about is they are

1 negotiating with these people. How near did they come
2 for an agreement and were they persuaded by the --
3 perhaps I should not use the word "Poor old French".
4 They are hardly that, are they? But the French, who
5 might have just said, "Well, if you go along this road,
6 we are not going to do it". So they might have been on
7 an impossible task, mightn't they? If the French are
8 stopping it, why actually get in and be on the losing
9 side and therefore offer your support. The French are
10 a big and influential group but they were not the only
11 ones.

12 You would have to know what Jack knew and indeed --
13 I think when it came to the legal agreement it is
14 interesting that Peter Goldsmith talked about how Jack
15 wanted to tell him of a process of negotiations that had
16 gone on in -- is it 144?

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: 1441.

18 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: 1441. So he knew the minds of
19 them. I can't answer that question.

20 So if he said it was just the French, I have to
21 accept that's his judgment and I can't dispute it. The
22 point is we were not going to get it.

23 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We are about halfway through. Think we
24 might take a break now for about ten minutes.

25 (10.30 am)

1 (A short break)

2 (10.40 am)

3 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Let's resume. I will ask
4 Sir Roderic Lyne to take up a different aspect of the
5 questions. Rod.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This is really a continuation.

7 Lord Prescott, before the break you referred to Lord
8 Goldsmith's views.

9 Were you aware that up to at least the end of
10 January 2003 the Attorney General was advising the Prime
11 Minister that resolution 1441 did not authorise the use
12 of military force without a further determination by the
13 Security Council?

14 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I was aware that Peter was
15 unhappy about the making a decision whether it could be
16 legal without a second resolution and I think, as he has
17 said in his evidence, that he took further advice and
18 then arrived at that framework of the other UN
19 resolutions to justify legal action, but I think he
20 found that was a difficult decision to make, but worked
21 his way through the process.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As he worked his way through the process
23 he delivered to the Prime Minister on 7 March a long
24 paper which subsequently has been published, which was
25 his formal advice, 36 paragraphs of this, and he said in

1 that paper that he remained of the opinion that the
2 safest legal course would be to secure the adoption of
3 a further resolution to authorise the use of force.

4 So that was consistent with the previous view.

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He then added to that and he said: but he
7 now accepted that a reasonable case can be made that
8 resolution 1441 is capable in principle of reviving the
9 authorisation in 678 without a further resolution.

10 So that was -- that's from his summary at the end of
11 this 36 paragraph -- towards of the end of the
12 36 paragraph, "Formal advice", a very important
13 document.

14 Were you shown that document?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No. We were aware he was going
16 to through this process and I think at that stage went
17 over to America, talked to Greenstock and others about
18 it.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He had done that.

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: He had done that and arrived
21 then at this conclusion. I think most of us in the
22 Cabinet, people said to me, "Did you see the document",
23 as you have done. I said no. All I really wanted to
24 know from the legal adviser is, "What is your advice as
25 Attorney General to the Cabinet?"

1 You would not normally say, "Can I see all the legal
2 papers on it?" He was saying it was legal and that was
3 enough for us to accept.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He was also saying that the safest legal
5 course would be a further resolution.

6 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I hear that, but he still said
7 it was legal to actually use, as you said, 678, where
8 there had been a breach of that resolution, and the
9 other resolution did not cancel that recommendation of
10 the use of force if it was a breach, and therefore
11 arrived at that conclusion. What most of us wanted to
12 know is, and he was there for it, the Attorney General,
13 however he has arrived at this process, "Are you saying
14 a military intervention is legal or illegal?" There is
15 no doubt. He said it was legal.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you think as Deputy Prime Minister you
17 should have seen this advice, you should have known the
18 safest course is a further resolution?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, because you trust the
20 judgment of the Attorney General. Look, this was not as
21 if somehow he just comes out and gives a view. There
22 was a great public debate with all the academics in the
23 world giving different views as to whether it was legal
24 or not. A bit like the economists, really, who will
25 give you different views about the economy. We as

1 politicians read that and understand there is
2 a difficulty. All we want to know from him, frankly,
3 "You have taken into account all this evidence, is this
4 intervention legal or illegal?" If we take Lord Boyce
5 as making it absolutely clear that he needed that as
6 a justification for any military intervention, and was
7 not prepared, I think, to go anywhere without it. Here
8 was the Attorney General saying it is legal.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Lord Boyce came in after 7 March document
10 and then the Attorney General then came to what he
11 called a better view at a later stage. There was
12 a further evolution.

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: He kept pressing Lord Boyce in
14 attendance in the War Cabinets, and he was very clear,
15 he had to have -- and he was right to say that --
16 a legal right to be involved in a military action.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the previous position had not been
18 sufficiently clear for Lord Boyce?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, he kept asking for it
20 until he got it.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He needed it.

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Don't forget, I don't think
23 there was any statement to the Cabinet -- we were clear
24 we wanted a second resolution. All the energies were
25 put into getting a second resolution. The question was,

1 if you didn't get a second resolution, was it legal?
2 And that was when these other resolutions came in and
3 the reasonable case could be made, as Peter said, based
4 on UN resolutions of taking an action if there's
5 a breach of 678? We accepted that was the judgment and
6 he said yes.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have had two people who sat with you
8 in the Cabinet at the time, Clare Short and Paul
9 Boateng, telling us they think that the Cabinet should
10 have seen the full advice, the document of 7 March, but
11 you don't agree with them?

12 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, I didn't desire to see
13 it. I accepted the Attorney General's view, as most
14 people do in Cabinet. You ask, "Is this legal or
15 illegal?" He will work out all the processes.

16 We were aware it was a judgment. In Paul's case,
17 I don't know, I have not talked to him about it. He has
18 a legal background, I suppose he would be very
19 interested in legally reading it through. Did he say he
20 disagreed with the final judgment?

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, he said what he said in his
22 evidence.

23 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: That's quite important, isn't
24 it? "We want to read it in order to see whether the
25 judgment was right". I mean, did he not accept the

1 judgment? It was clear enough to the Cabinet the
2 reasons. It wasn't: I will come in and say "Yes, it is
3 legal". He gave us the reasons why. Using other
4 resolutions he had arrived that it was reasonable to
5 says you could legally justify a military intervention.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now that's exactly the point,
7 "reasonable". Do you think the Cabinet should have been
8 aware of what Lord Goldsmith meant by reasonable? Do
9 you think they should have been --

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, they only want to know
11 whether it is legal or not. Reasonable, there are whole
12 books in law devoted to what's reasonable. All I wanted
13 to know, and I think the Cabinet and the Prime Minister,
14 "Is it legal and can you legally justify military
15 intervention?" He said yes.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He said in his document of 7 March to the
17 Prime Minister that:
18 "A reasonable case does not mean that if the matter
19 ever came before a court I would be confident that the
20 court would agree with this view."

21 Now if you had known that was how he interpreted
22 "reasonable", ie I will not necessarily win with this in
23 court --

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Cor blimey --

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- would that have influenced your

1 opinion?

2 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No. Lawyers always talk about
3 the argument what's meant by reasonable. That is
4 a constant argument in all our courts, almost the reason
5 why we have the courts.

6 All I want to know from him, frankly, myself: is
7 this -- whatever the case -- reasonable or not? Is
8 there a legal justification? Is it a legal act to enter
9 into a military intervention in Iraq? He said: no, you
10 could legally justify it. Frankly as a responsible
11 Cabinet Minister that's what I want to know. He is
12 there to give the advice.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You wouldn't have wanted him to say to
14 you, "I can call this reasonable, but I would not
15 necessarily win with this in court". That would not
16 have influenced your view?

17 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Listen, anybody had seen Peter
18 all through this process was not a very happy bunny. He
19 knew there were difficult situations, he knew the
20 interpretations may well be difficult, but at the end of
21 the day he would have to make a judgment. I think in
22 his evidence to you he talked about when was the time he
23 was asked the question. He said there were debates
24 going on, but it was only when he was asked as the
25 Attorney General to give that advice. Once he was

1 asked, and it was well into the arguments publicly about
2 whether it is legal or not, we had had resignations
3 I think even from the Foreign Office of lawyers in this
4 dispute as to whether it was legal or not, and when he
5 was asked, he came to that judgment. He used UN
6 resolutions. Reasonable or not, yes, it was legal.
7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The resignation from the Foreign Office
8 I think only happened at the very end of this process.
9 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, but you saw in the
10 evidence there were big arguments going on between the
11 legal advisors as to whether it was or was not.
12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. We have heard those arguments
13 extensively --
14 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.
15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- and they are very interesting.
16 You say he was not a happy bunny and when you talked
17 to the New Statesman last year you said he was not
18 a happy man. What do you mean by that? Why wasn't he
19 happy?
20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: He had the weight on his
21 shoulders about having to give a legal opinion about
22 something that the best course of action for UN support
23 was to get the second resolution. If you didn't get
24 a second resolution -- it was very clear if you got the
25 second resolution, but if you didn't, the problem didn't

1 stop there.

2 He knew there would be a question then. The
3 Americans were very clear they didn't need it, they
4 believed in regime change anyway. So to that extent he
5 knew he would be pressured for his judgment. It is not
6 an easy judgment to make, as we can remind ourselves of
7 the cost of the Iraq war, a very, very difficult
8 decision. For the Prime Minister as well, but at the
9 end of the day in Government you must make a decision.
10 You must be clear you are being advised it is legal. If
11 not, you will be pursued for illegal act and all sorts
12 of war criminal charges if you don't have that.

13 So we were conscious about it, but don't forget this
14 also, that argument then went to Parliament, lords and
15 Commons, and they voted in support.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If he had not been able to find
17 a reasonable case after we had failed to get a second
18 resolution, what would have happened?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think if you haven't got
20 an agreement on UN grounds, it would have been very
21 difficult to get an agreement in Parliament whether in
22 the Lords or Commons.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But we did not get an agreement from the
24 UN?

25 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No -- well, I mean, you are

1 into the argument about the uses -- the way I would see
2 it, resolutions, you mentioned 678, there was another
3 one, 87², I think it was. They were both connected in
4 that sense, that if he didn't carry out what he was
5 required to in those legislations then they would take
6 action against him. That was implicit in 678. It
7 wasn't in 144³, and the judgment made then was to use the
8 authority, as you well know, in 678 to do the
9 intervention, and that was a legal action. It was legal
10 in that interpretation. As you just mentioned before
11 perhaps he was not happy whether he could win that case
12 in court. We can't wait to go to the court to find out.

13 The courts, judges and indeed academics were very
14 much disagreed as to whether it was right or wrong. We
15 had to make a decision, we asked for the advice, the man
16 to give it to the Cabinet was the Attorney General, he
17 told us it was legal and we accepted it.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If he had not been able to find
19 a reasonable case what would have happened?

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: If you couldn't get a UN
21 connection I think it would have been very difficult.
22 I don't think then those in the Cabinet or indeed
23 I think in Parliament would have agreed if it had just
24 been a unilateral action. Let's be fair, Kosovo was
25 exactly that in a way. You could show some dimensions

² Secretariat note: this is UNSCR 687

³ Secretariat note: UNSCR 1441

FINAL

1 of other countries supporting it, but inevitably it
2 wasn't a UN supported, but action was taken and we went
3 in that way. That was fully endorsed by Parliament.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So was it politically essential --

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- that the Attorney General should find
7 a ground on which we could go ahead with this?

8 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: It was politically important to
9 have the connection to a UN authority. Otherwise you
10 could have said, "Okay, we will go with the Americans.
11 We believe what they say and let's go in". That was not
12 how we could get that accepted in Britain, politically.
13 We kept telling them, the Americans, and you know from
14 your evidence, "You have to recognise we are going back
15 to Parliament".

16 I think they found it quite quaint we should think
17 about going back to a Parliament, but that was the point
18 that Tony Blair made from the beginning, kept it, and
19 was always going to be the democratic sanction for any
20 military action if that was to be. It would have been
21 more difficult without a UN connection, make no mistake
22 about that. I think possibly impossible.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is that why Lord Goldsmith was not happy,
24 that it all rested on him?

25 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: None of us were happy. I mean,

1 this is a serious situation. We are declaring --

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am using your words, "not happy"?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, I know you are. I am just

4 saying, I just want to correct them to that extent. You

5 can't be happy about going to war. I mean, this has

6 serious implications as we now know for the many deaths

7 that did occur in pursuing this policy.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why do you identify Lord Goldsmith

9 particularly as being not happy in this situation?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: A lot of people call me not

11 happy. His demeanour was that he had the weight on his

12 shoulders about having to give a decision. Everybody is

13 coming up to him and saying "Hey, Peter, is it legal?"

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was he under political pressure?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: He was under pressure from all

16 of us who ask, "You are a lawyer, Peter, can you tell us

17 whether it is legal or not?"

18 Peter's answer would be, "If you get a second

19 decision in the UN it would be very clear."

20 Later, when he came to study it he thought you could

21 make a reasonable case using previous UN resolutions

22 while still within the UN framework. He knew that's not

23 as safe a judgment, if you like, as the one that was the

24 second resolution, but that was being ruled out.

25 I think to that extent the point I was making

1 before, perhaps risking my arm in it, is to say that if
2 you had gone for a vote in the UN and got defeated that
3 would have been a very clear and different situation.
4 But of course as in Kosovo they didn't go to the UN. As
5 in Sierra Leone we didn't go in. A lot more people are
6 alive today, thank goodness, because we made that
7 decision.

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I would like to move on in a moment.
9 Just to take up a different angle on this absolutely
10 essential theme of the legal advice, what was implicit
11 in Lord Goldsmith's statement in the course of his
12 advice, that he could not be confident a court would
13 agree with the view he took, that there was a reasonable
14 case, that exposed ministers and potentially the
15 military to risk that we were signatories to the
16 international criminal court by then.

17 Was there not a need in exercising a political
18 judgment on the basis of that legal advice to be aware
19 there was a serious risk dimension involved in the
20 degree of certainty and confidence that the Attorney
21 General could give you?

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, we certainly had now the
23 International Court, which was a new development where
24 you could have charges against you if you act in that
25 illegal way. Lord Boyce was concerned to make it clear

1 he did not want to be in charge of troops that were on
2 an illegal act.

3 So it is a judgment you will have to ask and I think
4 lawyers often give us advice on things and hopefully you
5 are right. Sometimes you are often turned out to be
6 wrong. There is an alternative, and that's the
7 international court now that can make a judgment about
8 it. As a lawyer and the Government's legal advisor, he
9 is bound to say, "Look, please know, I think you can
10 justify that, but do bear in mind there might be
11 a challenge about that." That is always so. You have
12 to make up your mind. We were in the momentum of
13 something now. What we were always saying, "This must
14 be a judgment. Legal is one thing, but you must be
15 democratically accountable for it". Hence the decision
16 for Parliament to make that decision.

17 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We would like to come on to exactly that
18 point. I will turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman about the
19 decision itself.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In his memorandum to this Inquiry
21 Jack Straw wrote that if he had refused his support:

22 "The UK's participation in the military action would
23 not in practice have been possible. There almost
24 certainly would have been no majority either in Cabinet
25 or in the Commons."

1 Was your support equally critical?

2 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think the judgment is right.

3 I don't think you could have got that political
4 agreement without a legal statement and the UN
5 framework. I accepted that it was legal. We are
6 embarking upon an action and I am not going to look back
7 if hindsight and say I was wrong. I supported it.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are moving on from legal now.

9 This is about political support. What I was quoting was
10 Jack Straw as Foreign Secretary saying that without his
11 support -- I mean, you have indicated that without Lord
12 Goldsmith's support it would have been extremely
13 difficult.

14 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Sorry.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Without Jack Straw's support he says
16 you could not have got a majority. I am saying without
17 your personal support would it have been possible to get
18 a majority in the Cabinet or Commons?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I don't think I had that kind
20 of influence. I come back to the same point though,
21 most of us as politicians would want to know if it was
22 legal or illegal and make the political judgment based
23 on that.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, we are talking about
25 something now that's much more than the legal question.

1 We are talking about views about the future of the
2 Middle East, we are talking about the prospects of
3 occupying Iraq after a war, we are talking about the
4 potential consequences of the war itself. So there's
5 a broad political judgment being taken by the Cabinet in
6 the middle of March 2003 --

7 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Uh-huh.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- of which you were a part. Jack
9 Straw had said directly to us that if he had withheld
10 his support, that would have -- in a sense he could have
11 stopped the war happening. I am asking you if you were
12 in the same position?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, he could have resigned,
14 of course. That's what Robin Cook did. I mean, they
15 are the judgments every politician is faced with.
16 I wouldn't have faced that situation, since we had gone
17 all the way through this road. I could see the
18 inevitable course we were involved upon. I thought it
19 was important to get democratic accountability and in
20 the Cabinet itself each member must make up their mind,
21 because we had arrived at a situation where Jack Straw
22 had been involved in trying to get the second resolution
23 and he had failed. If he was then to say, "I can't go
24 any further on this", as Robin Cook did, because we
25 cannot get the second resolution, but if he was actually

1 saying, "I would then vote against and still stay in the
2 Cabinet", or whatever, that would be a difficult
3 situation, but I am not so sure it would have stopped
4 it.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you face any -- he indicated to
6 us this was a difficult time for him. None of your
7 colleagues were happy. You weren't happy. Did you ever
8 think, yourself, that when it came to the crunch you
9 might not be able to go along with it?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, I would support the
11 Prime Minister if he had the legal judgment and I think
12 that's exactly what I would do, and did so, in fact,
13 calling constantly in Cabinet to maintain our unity in
14 Cabinet, which I think is one of my responsibilities.

15 If I didn't think it was right then I could resign
16 like Robin Cook did or anyone else, but there would be
17 political fall-out from that. I don't think there is
18 any doubt. All of us were faced: do you want to then,
19 if you held the view Jack Straw said he held, make
20 a decision? Stay in or get out.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Alastair Campbell, confirming what
22 you have just said in some ways, said after discussions
23 on Iraq at 16 January, which is a couple of months
24 earlier, 16 January 2003 Cabinet, you did what he
25 described as a very passionate wind-up in support of the

1 Prime Minister. Did you see that as your role?

2 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think he refers to the fact
3 I played that part in that passionate role. I was
4 always very strong, and you have to remember the kind of
5 culture of the Labour Party. We had come through
6 a Government that had for many years split itself
7 constantly and we were desired to avoid that at any
8 cost. It was a very strong thing of Tony Blair.
9 I think that influenced the nature of Government we had,
10 because there was an attempt to avoid all the
11 complaints, divisions. I have often heard people say,
12 "Labour Governments back in the 60s used to meet in
13 Cabinet for about 12 hours or half a day".

14 Yes, because they were so bloody divided on,
15 happening that the IMF was closing down the economy
16 basically and forcing cuts. That is why they were long.
17 That was not the nature of a British Cabinet under Tony
18 Blair. We had a successful economy. We were all
19 increasing our resources in various places. There was
20 not that kind of difficult significance. There was
21 a desire to maintain the unity. Iraq could have split
22 it, I think, if the Cabinet said, "No, no, no", but
23 those who may have had those reservations, Robin was
24 clear:

25 "I have not got the second resolution. I am getting

1 out."

2 If others had genuine concern and expressed it to
3 you, as in the case of Jack Straw, the decision was
4 there. I assume he made the decision to keep the unity.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Going back to Alastair Campbell's
6 diaries and what he said he said in January 2003, he
7 said that you said:

8 "The briefings and the talking out of the side of
9 the mouth have to stop."

10 So does that give a sense that there was quite a lot
11 of uncertainty and anxiety and even division within the
12 Cabinet on this issue?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think the briefings and out
14 of the side of the mouth was more to do with Blair/Brown
15 and the kind of divisions we had in that context rather
16 than Iraq. I used to complain, "Why can't they speak
17 more openly about it?" Sometimes I thought Jack was
18 involved in it and had to personally say it to him.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that reference is not
20 specifically to Iraq but these things we have also been
21 reading about elsewhere?

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: In the reference I used that
23 talking out of the side of the mouth, talking to
24 journalists and saying, "Can I tell you this", or at
25 some dinner party in London where they felt the

1 Government and Blair was wrong about these things.
2 I think that was one of the consequences perhaps of
3 unity. You know, you keep unity so people have to
4 express it in a way they don't want to be open about it
5 so they talk out of the side of their mouth, much to the
6 delight of journalists, but actually it does lead to
7 a certain amount of discomfort within the Government.
8 That's the nature of the political game we are in.
9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that was a reference to a more
10 general problem than a specific problem?
11 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Not Iraq. To be fair, Clare
12 was quite open about how she disagreed with it, both in
13 the Cabinet and outside. That did lead to situations
14 where people had doubts, people who have given evidence,
15 like Jack Straw, who had doubt whether he could give the
16 detailed papers to the Cabinet in case there were leaks.
17 There were clear references in some cases they thought
18 it was Clare. Clare was not so much out of the side of
19 the mouth, she was direct out front. That was the
20 nature of Clare.
21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you share that concern?
22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Pardon?
23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you share the concern?
24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: In some cases I did share that.
25 That's what the Cabinet was about. I think if you are

1 recording it, unfortunately cabinet minutes don't record
2 individuals who say things. They just say, "A
3 conversation with X, Y, and Z."

4 Yes, I thought that was my chance, and I had a
5 privilege as well. I used to disagree with Tony Blair
6 on a number of political issues, but I would go in and
7 see him, have the argument with him, and in the main
8 I think we found agreement on issues, but that was prior
9 to Cabinet, and I saw my job in Cabinet was maintaining
10 the unity. Often where there was disunity was when we
11 came to Cabinet committees and Tony had moved away
12 from -- he didn't move too much into Cabinet committees
13 until later, and a lot of those disagreements were
14 sorted out in the Cabinet committee, but even there
15 I found when I went into Cabinet, if a particular
16 department had an issue it wanted to develop, it would
17 leak it to the press before we met. I think as the
18 Cabinet Secretary said to you, I used to get quite
19 excited when ministers did that. That's where some of
20 the opposition used to express itself out of the side of
21 the mouth.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you see your role of political
23 support extending to the Parliamentary Labour Party as
24 well? Were you playing an important role in making sure
25 the Parliamentary party supported --

1 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, I did. I did define the
2 job as I saw it as the Deputy Prime Minister, after all
3 I had been elected by the party as well, as being
4 supportive. There were some times I fundamentally
5 disagreed with him. There was one time he was going to
6 invite Paddy Ashdown into the Cabinet. I made it clear
7 I would be walking out the other door if he came in.

8 So there were times when he fully accepted that
9 view. There were sometimes I would go in thinking I had
10 a strong case and come out thinking, "Hell, what
11 happened? I have changed my mind", because he was
12 a very persuasive guy. But I did see my role, both in
13 Cabinet, the PLP and out in the country, of attempting
14 to keep the Labour Party together, because for 18 years
15 I had seen the disunity that had affected and denied
16 a Labour party a Labour Government.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So outside of the Cabinet did you
18 find this a particularly challenging exercise with
19 regard to Iraq?

20 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No. There were difficult
21 debates at conferences and places like that, but, you
22 know, you stood your ground and you made your case.
23 There was certainly a lot of, you know, validity in the
24 criticisms that were made and concerns that many of us
25 expressed but we are on a course of policy and we have

1 to argue our case.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In your New Statesman interview last
3 year you were quoted as saying:

4 "I do wonder, looking back now, having the privilege
5 of discussing with Tony about all this, how did I then
6 go along?"

7 So why did you go along?

8 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I did for the same reason
9 I have given you here. That, at the end of the day,
10 even afterwards, you say to yourself, "Look, we had gone
11 into this war. All the controversy about it, all the
12 difficulties of it, right, that pursued after the
13 military intervention, probably more so than the
14 military intervention, a kind of belief that Shock and
15 Awe would have a military resolution and democracy would
16 strike immediately. It didn't work that way and the
17 terrible circumstances and the people who died, you say
18 to yourself, "How did I do it?"

19 What I was trying to explain to that journalist was
20 that each stage was right. Then you get to the end
21 stage and you are faced with the reality. Are you going
22 to face action then? Then you are into argument about
23 legality.

24 So my justification I felt was: provided we go in
25 the UN route and hopefully that will be successful,

1 I could deal with that, because I didn't see that Iraq
2 was better than Saddam. I mean, that's the old
3 arguments of regime change. Tony called him an "evil
4 man". I think Bush went even further. He was not
5 a good man to his own people. He was a threat to the
6 stability in the area of peace and security, and to
7 those circumstances I was not a fan.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So in your book you say, looking
9 back at the Iraq invasion, you mention its tragic
10 effects:

11 "I would still do the same again."

12 That remains your position?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think so. That was the
14 conclusion I came to, because I -- as long as we are on
15 the UN route. If it was simply saying: America and the
16 UK are the policemen of the world therefore we have to
17 do it, I don't think I could have gone along with that.
18 I am sure we wouldn't, and I don't think you could have
19 got the party to go along with that. I mean, President
20 Bush was not the favourite candidate of the
21 Labour Party.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Thank you.

23 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. We would like to turn to the
24 post-conflict issues now. I will ask Sir Martin Gilbert
25 to pick this up.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned the post-intervention
2 period. You were Deputy Prime Minister for almost four
3 years during that period, during which Britain was under
4 UN 1284⁴ joint occupying power in Iraq with the United
5 States. How far were you involved in this period in
6 devising policy for Iraq?

7 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Outside listening to the
8 arguments inside the Cabinet, not actively. Military
9 intervention is much more serious than the
10 reconstruction. All the problems came with
11 reconstruction.

12 So in my mind in all the other jobs I was doing,
13 basically, I didn't give the same attention to that.
14 I knew there were difficulties. We heard them in the
15 Cabinet constantly, but I think we got the view that
16 largely it was the Americans that were controlling all
17 this. They were not party to looking at: how do you
18 deal with the peace? More concerned with the military
19 intervention and war, and that was a matter of arguing
20 the case, and Clare did it quite effectively, arguing
21 why are we not going enough for better water,
22 electricity, and all those things. But all those parts
23 of the reconstruction were affected by the feeling in
24 Iraq and the attitude perhaps to the occupying forces as
25 they were.

⁴ Secretariat note: UNSCR 1483 was meant

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1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you involved at all in looking at
2 the implementation of our post-conflict policy, about
3 how it was working or not working?

4 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, I fully agreed the policy
5 that we had was to try to get the Americans to be more
6 effective, and the people they put in -- was it Paul
7 Bremer, I think was one who had a very different view to
8 our administrators and our Government on how it should
9 be achieved. It looked as if the Americans were
10 dominating, it was their kind of area, so I didn't get
11 too involved in the detail being done by the ad hoc
12 committee and the reconstruction committee I think that
13 was set up with ministers. They just got on with that
14 job.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to look at one committee
16 of which you were a part, indeed it has been called the
17 War Cabinet, that the Prime Minister set up. You told
18 us that you, in fact, chaired three of its meetings.
19 Can you tell us what issues it was dealing with and what
20 your input was to those issues?

21 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well, there was a phase 1 and a
22 phase 2 really. The Cabinet committee, it wasn't the
23 first War Cabinet I had been involved in. I had been in
24 Sierra Leone and others. So we had the experience of
25 what you might call the military dimension to it. In

1 this case it met daily during the military situation.
2 After that I think it was reduced to once a week, and,
3 of course, it was going more and more to the ad hoc
4 and ministerial committees that were involved. I have
5 seen the papers that were coming basically to it but in
6 the War Cabinet it was more to do with the kind of
7 military aspect than the reconstruction. In the
8 Cabinet, of course, in discussions, it was about the
9 political framework. Who was the Prime Minister? Can
10 they help? How are we moving forward in the
11 political -- we used to get reports on that, but that
12 was more of a political aspect of the reconstruction
13 rather than the resources and: how do you deal with the
14 oil wells on fire? How do you deal with the Food for
15 Oil programme, which Clare was very critical about.

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In your book you write:

17 "Once the invasion got going the Cabinet stayed
18 united even when things began to go wrong and at times
19 it became very frightening."

20 Can you tell us what was particularly frightening
21 and what was being discussed in Cabinet by ministers to
22 make it less frightening?

23 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think the kind of view that
24 the thought of military intervention would be over in
25 48 hours, there was that Shock and Awe, how long would

1 it be? It went longer than that.

2 Then we began to see the implications of the
3 military intervention and whether we are going to win
4 the peace, because then there was a worry of how all
5 that was going to be handled.

6 So if it wasn't corrected, and there was a fear that
7 the Americans changing on reconstruction from a military
8 one to a civil administration, the break up of the
9 Ba'athist organisations, the military, the police, all
10 made it look very worrying indeed.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When the War Cabinet stopped meeting
12 the situation in Iraq deteriorated, and there was then
13 a growing insurgency which eventually affected our
14 substantial involvement in the south-east of Iraq, how
15 did you and Cabinet ministers keep abreast of the
16 situation once there was no more War Cabinet?

17 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Well you can see there were
18 regular discussions quite a lot inside the Cabinet about
19 Iraq both pre-military and after reconstruction. We
20 would get the report by the various ministers.

21 Then we have moved from the defence, largely, to
22 people like Clare and the aid programmes. I think in
23 a way we had moved from a military dimension, which was
24 the most worrying part of it, to reconstruction, and the
25 difficulties associated with that. So it was a feeling

1 of "Thank goodness the military part is over".

2 Then all of a sudden we began to see the insurgents
3 and people coming in and the difficulties of how we
4 would maintain it. I think there was a view that the
5 British forces, because they had been in
6 Northern Ireland, had the expertise to be able to run it
7 down in the south, friendly, berets, not helmets. There
8 was a kind of feeling it was a more superior way. It
9 turned out not necessarily to be so. We are beginning
10 to live with the realities.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: As Deputy Prime Minister, when the
12 situation worsened as it did, and we are looking now
13 through 2005/6, were you concerned at all about the
14 political implications, about the effect this was having
15 on Parliamentary Labour Party opinion or public opinion?

16 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Oh, yes, I think I was, because
17 people were concerned. People were dying in a situation
18 when they all thought it would finish after the military
19 intervention. That was having its effects. There was
20 the talk of the connection with terrorism. So all of
21 a sudden it comes home to you that whatever is happening
22 in Iraq, and you may have triggered it off by military
23 intervention, is also affecting domestically. As it has
24 been said the increase of terrorism and the association
25 were Iraq and possibly Afghanistan.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were these concerns you discussed with
2 the Prime Minister?

3 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. I mean, in a way -- yes,
4 they were discussed. I mean, in a way you could not
5 find as if there was an immediate solution to them. You
6 all wanted to say, "Let's bring in more work. Let's get
7 better administration". You hope that's going to work:
8 "Are the political groupings they are bringing in
9 together? Will the election make a difference? Is the
10 Prime Minister up to the job?"

11 All those kinds of things are a proper discussion,
12 but you couldn't get a conclusion to them, just
13 hopefully keep on pushing on. Many of the discussions
14 were that: What were the Americans doing? What were we
15 doing? Military, reconstruction. Can you move
16 an electric generator to another part of the country?
17 Do you need the military forces for that? All those
18 difficulties as they came as daily matters were
19 discussed.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My last question relates to that. We
21 have often been called, clearly rightly, the junior
22 partner. At the same time we were the joint occupying
23 power according to the United Nations and according also
24 to our presence in Iraq, not just in the south-east but
25 in Baghdad and elsewhere.

1 You write in your book:

2 "When things started to go wrong, we had no
3 alternative but to stick by America."

4 Was this the subject of discussion informally or
5 formally?

6 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think we all recognised --
7 sorry. I think we all recognised we were the junior
8 partner. I don't think there is any doubt about that.
9 Indeed part of that is: do you have more influence in
10 the alliance with America? I mean, that alliance,
11 I talked about Prime Ministers must make up their minds.
12 I doesn't think there any doubt about it. If we look at
13 the Falklands operation we could not have done that
14 without American intelligence, assets and assistance.
15 That's the reality for Prime Ministers who want to have
16 an effective international policy. A relationship with
17 America is an important aspect. You are always going to
18 be the junior partner but as Tony showed, he was able to
19 get the senior partner, if you like, to go along
20 a course of action that only the President could have
21 changed to go through the UN. That's the nature of it.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But in the post conflict period when as
23 you say things were going wrong, does this mean we had
24 no alternative but to stick by America, that we had no
25 influence?

1 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think you have gone into the
2 intervention, are you going to win the peace? Having
3 won perhaps the military solution, I don't think you are
4 left any other choice. If you just pulled out and said,
5 "We are not going to help restore and put it back on its
6 feet", remember this is about bringing in democracy.
7 Presumably we could not lead the peaceful argument and
8 say, "We are pulling out", without some great
9 consequences.

10 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was there debate about how we could use
11 our influence where we thought things were not going
12 well?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Constantly. This is why
14 Prime Ministers and Presidents are constantly talking
15 and having meetings. Manning spent a lot of time
16 talking to a lot of people as others did, hoping to
17 influence those decisions. But this division of view in
18 America was quite considerable. There was one you might
19 call the more peaceful kind, more in line with our
20 policy, and the others like Cheney and Rumsfeld were far
21 different.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In 2005/6 you were satisfied we were
23 having sufficient influence on America?

24 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, I am never satisfied we are
25 having sufficient influence. I think we were quite

1 pleased we got them to go along the UN route and
2 hopefully the Middle East peace thing, but in regard to
3 the reconstruction and the commercial activities that
4 followed from it, and the divisions about the political
5 framework in which it operates, which is difficult in
6 Iraq, I am sure we felt we did not have sufficient
7 influence about it and our military commanders were
8 telling us the same thing: How do you conduct
9 a peaceful operation? How do we keep stability in that
10 country? Can we re-arm or deal with the police and the
11 army? Very, very difficult problems. So there was
12 certainly no satisfaction.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: For our last set of questions I would ask
15 Sir Lawrence Freedman to pick it up. Lawrie?

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask you about one other
17 aspect of decision-making after the war? We have had
18 quite a lot of evidence about the support for our
19 servicemen and women and whether they had the right kit
20 and so on. Were you involved or aware of any of those
21 concerns?

22 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I certainly was aware, and
23 there were discussions in the cabinet about these real
24 matters as to whether our people had the best of
25 equipment. We were certainly reassured that was the

1 case, though in some cases like Landrover, there were
2 arguments about whether the ones were sufficient. They
3 were improved. Helicopters became another argument. We
4 would listen to the ministers tell us how far they are
5 going, whether they are changing. That's all you could
6 do. So there were quite considerable discussions inside
7 the Cabinet about it, because of the political
8 implications of people thinking we were not giving the
9 proper equipment. I think that was refuted often by the
10 Government, though it continued to be and I think is
11 still one of the issues of the debate about Iraq, and
12 continues so today. Mr Sir -- General Jackson you were
13 asking the same questions, or the Inquiry was, of him
14 there. Different commanders had different views.

15 I must say I was rather left with this impression --
16 I chance my arm in saying this -- that when you are
17 thinking about the equipment and the Chancellor told
18 you, Gordon Brown, said that when he was Chancellor he
19 gave what money was necessary for it. There are certain
20 problems about finances in the Ministry of Defence, not
21 least of all overspending on just about everything, but
22 one got the impression that the desire for European
23 fighters, carriers, Trident submarines, something the
24 Government is having to deal with now, rather left, it
25 looks as though the army wasn't getting a greater

1 priority in its expenditures, and that was because
2 presumably the Chiefs of Staff made those decisions and
3 we were living with some of the consequences.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed. My interest is only really
5 here, because one of the things we have suggested in
6 evidence is that there was a political push on such
7 issues as Snatch Landrovers, whether you felt this as
8 an important area where there was a broad political push
9 from Cabinet colleagues, and indeed Members of
10 Parliament, into the Ministry of Defence to deal with
11 this particular issue?

12 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Absolutely. The classic one
13 was probably -- a number of ones, but the helicopter is
14 another one, isn't it? Whereas the Americans had a lot
15 of helicopters, it reflected what kind of military
16 operation you had on the ground. We could all see the
17 need for the helicopter, and the Landrover one, and we
18 were being told, "Something is being developed and the
19 new one is coming shortly". All we can do is ask the
20 question and keep on pressing. I think it did have its
21 effect on improving the equipment, but in some cases
22 there were long-term decisions about newer helicopters,
23 as indeed the kind of new replacement for the Landrover,
24 which still in many ways is still under development
25 rather than achieved.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

2 That is an example of the way the Cabinet Government
3 might work. Now we have had quite a bit of discussion
4 about Cabinet Government this morning, and you have been
5 giving us your views about how it operated you have also
6 indicated that there were changes by the end of this
7 period?

8 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: More formality, maybe more Cabinet
10 committees. Was that a response in some ways to
11 dissatisfaction about how the Cabinet system had
12 worked --

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- up to the war?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. In fact, I felt that very
16 early on in the administration. We didn't have papers
17 to discuss the issue. Now and then there may be papers
18 or discussions. Cabinet meetings were short. Why?
19 Because most ministers were getting on with the job. We
20 were a Government and nobody had been in Government
21 before. So tackling your own department and getting the
22 priorities was quite important, and I think that
23 reflected on decisions in Cabinet.

24 Then I began to -- I said to Tony, "You know, we are
25 running a Cabinet like a Shadow Cabinet. Didn't you get

1 advice from the Cabinet Secretary how it should be run?
2 Shouldn't we be given all these papers, etc?" I said,
3 "I want to talk to Lord Butler". So I went to see Lord
4 Butler. I said, "Didn't you give any advice how
5 a Cabinet should be run?" He said, "I did, providing
6 all these kind of papers and everything". Tony had told
7 him, "I am not going to run it that way".

8 I think the influence of that had partly been that
9 the divisions that come, that they had tightened it down
10 in the Shadow Cabinet. What we did was move over to
11 a similar kind of process, and I thought -- I began to
12 feel that sofa government, where key ministers came to
13 an agreement with the Prime Minister and then sorted it
14 out in the Cabinet, knowing you have your Prime Minister
15 on side, was not a proper way to get into full
16 discussions about this.

17 So I did suggest to Tony, and he did adopt it, that
18 the Cabinet Committee should be much more actively
19 involved, and that's where the discussions could take
20 place, and indeed I went further and I got a further
21 change, where I said that every Secretary of State
22 should come to the Cabinet and explain what they are
23 doing and what the policy is, and then we would get
24 a large document about the department's responsibility.

25 That was another move I think towards getting

1 a better form of Cabinet Government. I listened to
2 Mr Wilson -- Lord Wilson and Butler giving their
3 evidence about whether a Cabinet Committee is supposed
4 to serve the Cabinet, the Cabinet Office, and then you
5 have your own staff for the Prime Minister.

6 What happened here I think was the Cabinet Office
7 really became the servant to the Cabinet -- to the
8 Prime Minister, who took initiatives of how to develop
9 policies.

10 I think that moved us on to what might be seen as
11 a more presidential style. My concern was to make sure
12 more of the discussion came in Cabinet Committees and
13 reports to the Cabinet, and I think your Permanent
14 Secretaries to the Cabinet have said that was one of the
15 ways I tried actively to bring about more Cabinet
16 involvement in discussions.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you discussed -- I mean, it was
18 Lord Turnbull I think from September 2002.

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. Lord Turnbull said that,
20 yes.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You discussed this actively with
22 Lord Turnbull?

23 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes. In fact, we got to one
24 stage, to be quite honest, whereas the present Cabinet
25 Secretary used to see me before the Cabinet and I would

1 get an indication of what were the kind of difficulties
2 that had been going on during that week. Then I would
3 have my own bilateral with the Prime Minister before
4 Cabinet.

5 So I was beginning to deal with some of the
6 sensitivities that were necessary to come into the
7 Cabinet, because what was happening, Secretaries of
8 State were feeling "If I have seen the Cabinet Office" --
9 I don't think this is unique to Tony Blair -- "if I have
10 a settlement with the Prime Minister, I just inform the
11 Cabinet what we are doing, knowing the Prime Minister
12 is on my side".

13 I didn't think that encouraged too much discussion.
14 I think it was something that began to change later, but
15 it is an important part, and I think it is partly
16 inevitable by the nature of international negotiations.

17 Presidents and Prime Ministers talk to each other by
18 videos. They come to agreements. They don't say, "Hang
19 on. I have to put it to the Cabinet Committee".

20 I mean, that's the nature of what was happening. So
21 unitary governments in a way tend to move more to a kind
22 of federal structure to a certain extent or to a kind
23 of more presidential.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask you another question
25 relating to Cabinet Government, which is implementation?

1 Part of Cabinet Government is decision-making, but then
2 there's a question of whether decisions taken are being
3 implemented in the way that people may have assumed.

4 This is obviously again a more general question than
5 Iraq, but particularly with regard to Iraq, what were
6 the arrangements for checking to see how things had
7 gone; a report back, if you like, on, "We took this
8 decision. How is it being followed through?"

9 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think there were report-backs
10 that we used to get in the Cabinet. My concern was we
11 were not really getting enough of the information. For
12 members who were involved in their departments and not
13 directly in one issue -- it is not just Iraq, but I mean
14 in that -- they needed to be more in the decision of
15 that, and it should be a collegiate decision-making. If
16 you didn't do that, there was a tendency to go outside
17 and express your dissatisfaction with the policy.

18 The second thing I think happened under Tony was
19 that Secretaries of State then began to feel, "I will do
20 a deal with the Prime Minister". Therefore they didn't
21 really need to convince the Cabinet of a great deal.

22 I felt that was a very dangerous process and needed
23 to be forcing them to come to Cabinet a bit more and
24 explain what they are doing. I don't think that's
25 unique to Tony Blair. I think we can go back to many

1 governments where we see that, and I was concerned about
2 it.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally on the Cabinet --

4 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: For example, I attended -- the
5 Cabinet was invited to attend the Cabinet in New
6 Zealand. The Prime Minister was a friend of mine. We
7 sat down. He had a big stack of papers like that.
8 I said, "What are all those for?" He said, "Well, we're
9 going to discuss a number of issues today". I said,
10 "Interesting!"

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You didn't normally have a
12 large stack of papers in front of you?

13 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Eventually we began to get all
14 the papers that came in.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I ask you one final question on
16 the Cabinet side? Do you think there is more that the
17 civil servants, Cabinet Secretaries could have done to
18 mitigate the tendencies you have described?

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think if you listen to what
20 Lord Butler was saying in the House of Lords when he was
21 discussing Cabinet Government, or listen to the
22 Permanent Secretaries who have given you evidence,
23 I think they get to feel that somehow they were not in
24 the decision-making process.

25 I think this started earlier. I think -- funnily

1 enough, Lord Bancroft I think, who was related to me
2 I find now from 200 years ago, was the head of
3 the Civil Service. It was Mrs Thatcher who decided to
4 scrap the Civil Service and bring it together under one
5 with a Cabinet Secretary. That was controversial at the
6 time and led to him being moved on, as I understand.

7 Then when you began to get very strong Ministers,
8 a Prime Minister, a Chancellor, all those others,
9 I think the Permanent Secretaries tended to feel that
10 somehow they were being left out of it and not being
11 able to be in the decision.

12 So when I hear their statements made in the House of
13 Lords, I think there is a bit of a Cabinet Secretary
14 revolt against what is the tradition -- what occurred
15 under our Government.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally, you have mentioned the
17 importance with Iraq of Parliament and gaining
18 Parliamentary approval --

19 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- for what happened. I am
21 interested in your views about: are there other means by
22 which Parliament can scrutinise a Government's actions
23 in a similar situation? Do you think -- the
24 Parliamentary vote came right at the end of a long
25 process. Do you think Parliament might have been

1 brought in earlier, for example?

2 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No, because -- I now realise --
3 whether it is from evidence given to the committee --
4 but, you know, first of all, there are many tens of
5 thousands of questions that have been asked over this
6 period in Parliament. There have been numerous debates.
7 There have been Select Committee Inquiries. There have
8 been statements by the Prime Ministers. The levels of
9 accountability over Iraq in Parliament were very, very
10 considerable.

11 It was only at the last moment, when Tony Blair had
12 always been insistent, and it was the Cabinet view,
13 that, in fact, there would have to be a democratic vote.
14 The Americans found it difficult to understand we would
15 have to go back to Parliament to do it, and I think
16 there was constant complaint, "Surely you don't have to
17 go back to that", but we did.

18 So that vote at the end of the day -- and what
19 I think was important to Tony's mind when you look at
20 that vote, because there was a quite a large revolt --
21 was it about 124 I think on that, something like that?
22 I think what was the concern of Tony, and from our point
23 the party view, that we were carrying the majority of
24 our Labour Party members.

25 I think politically if we had not been able to do

1 that -- and I think Tony was very worried about that,
2 and it looked as if we would get it because other
3 parties were supporting it, and so those debates and
4 those issues were an important part of it.

5 You cannot say there was not debates and
6 accountability of a democratic accountability in
7 Parliament. There was and it wasn't just that one vote.
8 Every time the Government won the vote.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You just mentioned then the American
10 view that this was an odd thing to be doing. How were
11 you aware of that? Was this something that the
12 Prime Minister said to you, that, "The Americans are
13 wondering why we are doing it"? Did you hear it that
14 way?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes, in the discussions you
16 would hear, because Tony used to make clear that, "At
17 the end of the day whatever happens here, it must be
18 endorsed by Parliament". It was his very firm view.

19 I think the American presidential system, they
20 thought this was rather quaint, because the President
21 has the powers to make these decisions. He had to point
22 out, "In a Parliamentary system that is not the case.
23 They can, in fact, remove us. They don't have to wait
24 for November, whenever, the election of the president.
25 That can happen in Parliament". Prime Ministers have to

1 be constantly aware of that.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then you just mentioned the concern

3 about having a majority of the Parliamentary

4 Labour Party.

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Yes.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What do you think would have

7 happened if you had failed to get a majority of the

8 Parliamentary Labour Party, though still been able to

9 get through on a Conservative vote?

10 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: Very difficult, but I think at

11 that stage we would have gone on. I mean, the troops

12 were in the field. Things were going. This is a vote

13 just before they happened. I mean, we would have to

14 live with that in reality. It wouldn't be a happy

15 situation. It wasn't happy with 124 against. We would

16 not like that, but, you know, we were going in. The

17 troops were there. You could not alter that fact,

18 though I have to admit if we had been defeated, then the

19 Government would have been defeated, and therefore we

20 would not have gone in. I mean, the vote did matter,

21 but for us politically it was important that we could

22 try to carry the majority of our own members.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

24 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I have one other question, if I may, on

25 the Parliamentary dimension before we finish. It is

1 really if in a future case, as now seems likely, any
2 Government would want to secure Parliamentary approval
3 before executing a decision to go to war, how is
4 Parliament to be advised and informed, particularly if,
5 as was the case with Iraq, there are both intricate
6 legal questions and also an intelligence part of the
7 case for war?

8 Is there some mechanism -- because clearly you can't
9 reveal the totality of intricate legal advice, nor
10 certainly the totality of intelligence material to the
11 whole of the House of Commons -- is there some mechanism
12 you can imagine to help Parliament feel it has enough
13 information to take that decision, as it were, properly
14 in a state of knowledge?

15 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I think in all the issues of
16 contention, whether it was in the Select Committee,
17 whether it was the Prime Minister, which is his
18 initiative, appeared before all the chairs of Select
19 Committees to be answerable, I think probably we could
20 claim there has been more democratic accountability and
21 checking on what we are doing than any other military
22 situation we may have been involved in.

23 So to that extent I don't know that you can improve
24 it any more, but I am still left with the major question
25 in my mind about this business about if you are on a UN

1 tack and you have military preparing where the logistic
2 timetable is a lot longer than the tail end of a UN one,
3 could you have given that three-option paper at the
4 stage when it was being developed to a Select Committee?

5 Would the argument have been, "Well, it is
6 intelligent, of course, to plan like this in case it
7 doesn't happen"? I suspect, given our press -- I am not
8 the greatest admirer of them -- given our press, they
9 would have actually said, "This is the evidence we are
10 going to war", and there were people in the Cabinet like
11 Clare who were saying basically this is what it was.

12 Even Robin, when he resigned, made it clear,
13 "Because I didn't get the second resolution, I feel
14 I have to resign". He didn't talk about the changing
15 containment and regime policy in that speech, but he did
16 talk about that.

17 So I don't know that you can do a great deal more
18 than was actually done, and I am quite proud that we did
19 try to give as much information to them, given a press
20 that -- you know, it is a quite vigorous press in our
21 situation. It also has its own ways of looking at and
22 interpretation of events. So politicians have to work
23 within that framework.

24 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I think that brings us to the
25 point where it would help us to have your sense of --

1 because we are a lessons learned Inquiry, what are the
2 most important lessons you can draw on from the Iraq
3 experience over all the years, and then any further
4 reflections you may have.

5 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: I have thought about that and
6 wondered, as I have just said in my last answer, could
7 we have done more? We would have liked to have avoided
8 it, but it didn't happen.

9 I think the answer I want to give myself, though, is
10 impressions at the end, if you give a witness
11 an opportunity to say something, Sir John.

12 Reading the evidence and listening to all the
13 arguments, I know it is quite fashionable to be critical
14 of Tony Blair inside and outside this Inquiry. We have
15 seen a few people gloss over their part of the history
16 and what happened, but let me say that no-one in
17 Government took this decision to go to war lightly. We
18 thought considerably about it.

19 I personally and privately witnessed the
20 Prime Minister agonise over each and every death over
21 Iraq, civilian and military, British and Iraqi.
22 I learned that true leadership is not about having the
23 benefit of hindsight. It is about having a gift of
24 vision, courage and compassion, and I believe that Tony
25 Blair had all those three.

1 If you want to see if his humanitarian
2 interventionism, which has been a discussion here,
3 succeeded, then go to Kosovo and go to Sierra Leone.
4 Hopefully we will soon be able to say the same for
5 Afghanistan and Iraq and finally welcome our brave
6 troops back home, confident of a job well done.

7 I think that's my conclusion, having worked with
8 Tony Blair, and witnessed it at close hand, and
9 privileged to do so. That's the point I want to make as
10 a lesson that people should take into account when they
11 are looking at this Iraq Inquiry.

12 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you very much, Lord Prescott.

13 Anything further you want to say?

14 RT. HON. THE LORD PRESCOTT: No.

15 CLOSING STATEMENT

16 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In that case I will close this part of
17 the session. I am going to shortly make a closing
18 statement to finish off our public sessions, but may
19 I thank our witness, Lord Prescott, former Deputy
20 Prime Minister, and those of you who have been in the
21 room today.

22 As we close this round of public hearings, my
23 colleagues and I believe this is an opportune moment to
24 set out what the Inquiry has done so far and what it
25 intends to do next.

1 It is now pretty much a year since we launched the
2 Iraq Inquiry. In this time we have held two rounds of
3 public hearings and a number of private hearings, in all
4 from over 140 witnesses.

5 Each of the public witness sessions can be seen and
6 the transcripts read on our website, where we have also
7 published the witness statements and a considerable
8 number of documents. It is a substantial archive of
9 evidence.

10 This is on top of the thousands of Government
11 documents that we hold and, taken together, they have
12 given us an emerging picture of the United Kingdom's
13 involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009.

14 Now this round of hearings has been extremely
15 useful. It has offered us the opportunity to hear new
16 perspectives on issues which we had previously only
17 covered in part. We have also taken evidence on new
18 subjects, such as building policing capacity in Iraq,
19 military personnel issues and the provision of military
20 equipment.

21 The public evidence sessions have demonstrated for
22 us the value of hearing at first-hand from those
23 directly involved in and responsible for policy
24 decisions and their implementation.

25 Outside these formal evidence sessions the Inquiry

1 is gathering information and insights from a wide range
2 of sources. We have talked informally to over 100
3 military personnel, civil servants and diplomats who
4 served on the ground in Iraq, and we hope to hear from
5 more of their colleagues later in the year.

6 We have spoken to foreign citizens who have insight
7 into the United Kingdom's involvement in Iraq between
8 2001 and 2009, and my colleagues and I are also mindful
9 of the issues raised with us last year by the bereaved
10 families of those British citizens and members of the
11 British armed forces who died in Iraq.

12 Over the coming months we will be analysing and
13 integrating all this evidence and information as we
14 begin to write our report. As we do this, we may find
15 conflicts or gaps within the evidence. If we do, we
16 will need to consider how best to get to the bottom of
17 what actually happened. This may be through seeking
18 additional written evidence or, where we wish to probe
19 more deeply, through holding further hearings, possibly
20 recalling witnesses from whom we have heard before. If,
21 and I stress the word if, we decide to do this, these
22 hearings will probably take place in the late autumn.

23 The Inquiry also hopes to visit Iraq. We want to
24 see for ourselves the consequences of UK involvement, to
25 hear Iraqi perspectives and to understand the prospects

1 for Iraq today.

2 For security both of the Inquiry team and those we
3 wish to meet we shall not publish any further details in
4 advance of a visit. If we are able to visit Iraq, we
5 shall provide a summary afterwards, as with all our
6 other overseas visits.

7 I said over the past year we have gathered a large
8 body of evidence for the Committee's report. It is
9 worth recalling what this report is and is not designed
10 to do.

11 We are here to establish a reliable account of the
12 UK's involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009 and to
13 identify lessons for British Governments facing critical
14 decisions or operations overseas of a similar kind in
15 the future. As we have said repeatedly, the Inquiry is
16 not a court of law. No-one is on trial.

17 Now we intend to report around the turn of the year.
18 The report will include that material which is necessary
19 to explain what happened and how and why we have reached
20 our conclusions.

21 If that involves classified or currently unpublished
22 material, we will seek declassification in accordance
23 with the published protocol we have agreed with the
24 Government.

25 I reiterate the commitment that our report will be

1 full, thorough, evidence-based and frank. Looking to
2 the future, we shall make recommendations about the way
3 such matters are handled in the future.

4 I would like to close this session by thanking those
5 who have assisted the Committee in carrying out this
6 round of public hearings. We are immensely grateful to
7 the QE2 for hosting us, to Bowtie for enabling our
8 proceedings to be broadcast on television and through
9 the web, and to Merrill Legal Solutions for their
10 continuous and rapid transcription.

11 I would also like to thank those members of the
12 public who have come to hear and observe our public
13 sessions. I thank them.

14 With that, I bring this hearing and these sessions
15 to a close. Thank you all very much indeed.

16 (11.45 am)

17 (Hearing concluded)

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CLOSING STATEMENT101

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