

1 Tuesday, 25th January 2011

2 (10.00 am)

3 Evidence of LORD WILSON OF DINTON

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, good morning, everyone. This
5 morning we welcome Lord Wilson of Dinton, who was
6 Cabinet Secretary from 1998 until September 2002. His
7 term of office thus covers early discussions within
8 government on potential military action in Iraq but not
9 the final decision to invade, nor the conflict itself.

10 Now we recognise, and I say this on each occasion,
11 that witnesses give evidence based on their recollection
12 of events and we, of course, check what we hear against
13 the papers to which we have access and which are still
14 coming in.

15 I remind each witness on each occasion he will later
16 be asked to sign a transcript of evidence to the effect
17 that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

18 With those preliminaries, I will turn to Baroness
19 Prashar to start the questions.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman. Lord Wilson,
21 can we begin by looking at your role
22 and responsibilities? The first thing I would like to
23 know is what did you see as your personal responsibility
24 as Cabinet Secretary in relation to policy on Iraq.

25 LORD WILSON: My responsibility as Cabinet Secretary in

1 relation to Iraq was the same as in relation to any
2 government business, which is that I oversaw the running
3 of the Cabinet Committee system in support of
4 Cabinet Ministers collectively and the Prime Minister as
5 Chairman of the Cabinet and that's the same across the
6 board.

7 In addition because Number 10's approach to running
8 government was a little different, and I hope you will
9 give me a chance to talk about this, from the normal
10 collective system, I regarded it as my job to try and
11 bridge those two different concepts of how government
12 should be run.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can you describe how you did that in
14 terms of how you do the bridging?

15 LORD WILSON: What would help me is if I can begin by
16 telling you how I did the traditional Cabinet Secretary
17 job and then build on that. Would that be helpful?

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That would be extremely helpful.

19 LORD WILSON: First point.

20 Collective Cabinet
21 Committee government was very lively in the Blair years,
22 which is not the normal image. There were twice as many
23 Cabinet Committees, I think something like 38 in
24 November 2001 compared to 19 in 1995. They were popular
25 with Ministers. Indeed, when we revised the

1 list in 2001, after the election, I had more complaints
2 than you would expect from people who felt they had been
3 left out of things they wanted to be in on.

4 Every week on Thursday I would meet with my senior
5 heads of Secretariat, people from Number 10, Jeremy
6 Heywood, Jonathan Powell and other key people in the
7 Cabinet Office, and this was a practice that had been
8 followed to my knowledge as far back as Robert
9 Armstrong. We would have before us two documents. One
10 would be a business note, which would look at the
11 forward business over the next three weeks in Cabinet
12 Committees. And there would usually be 15 to 20 Cabinet
13 Committee meetings with various items.

14 In addition -- this is part of the answer to
15 your question -- I would write a note on current issues
16 from me to the Prime Minister, which was not about
17 Cabinet Committees, which was about the issues across
18 government at that time which I thought he should be
19 aware of. There would be 15 to 20. Then I would put
20 those notes forward on a Friday and then on the Monday
21 at 10 o'clock I would go and see him. I would discuss
22 anything in either of those notes that he wanted to talk
23 about or anything else that was on his mind or on my
24 mind.

25 In addition on top of that every quarter -- and I

1 have refreshed my memory of this by consulting my
2 Private Office -- we would do a forward look, a tome of
3 some 30 pages in two parts, which was based on a trawl
4 across all government departments, and at the back
5 would be a table which would list every issue that every
6 government department wanted to bring forward. It would
7 describe the issue, what Cabinet Committee it should go
8 to, whether the Prime Minister might be interested, the
9 timescale, those sort of things. Then on the front
10 I would have my own cover note which would select some
11 of the issues that I thought I particularly wanted to
12 pick out for him.

13 If you put to one side Number 10,
14 the collective committee system was alive and
15 kicking and quite popular and a lot of decisions took
16 place through it through the Blair years.

17 Number 10 had a different view of how the Prime
18 Minister should do his role and the way the government
19 should be run. It is all entirely public. You have
20 heard bits of it. If you want me to talk about it,
21 I would be happy to?

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, please.

23 LORD WILSON: One of the points

24 I want to make to this committee is I think you need to
25 listen to the evidence you have been hearing through

1 the prism of two different approaches to how to run
2 a government.

3 The view I think in New Labour, who
4 were a relatively small group who took control of the
5 Labour Party and then the government machine, was that
6 you should build up a strong centre in Number 10. There
7 is a very interesting description of it -- we were
8 warned -- a very accurate interesting description of it
9 in Peter Mandelson's book¹, chapter 10, where he
10 describes what their approach to running government
11 would be. They saw collective government as a sign of
12 weakness, and I am quoting now:

13 "By behaving as if he is one among equals in his
14 Cabinet, Major shows a lack of authority and drive --
15 a lesson for Tony Blair."

16 They had studied the Major years. They had thought
17 that they were a period of weakness and they attributed
18 that to the concept of the Prime Minister being first
19 among equals. It is very important for what you are
20 looking at to understand that and when you ask questions
21 about Cabinet discussions, as you no doubt will, it is
22 very important to understand that.

23 Their view of the role of Cabinet was again
24 different. They saw Cabinet as the place where the
25 Prime Minister was meeting the people who reported to

¹ Witness's footnote: *The Blair Revolution*, 1996

1 him. The words are in the Mandelson book, and I am
2 quoting:

3 "The Cabinet is a rather inflexible body: a flat
4 structure of more than 20 roughly equal individuals, all
5 of whom report directly to one person, the Prime
6 Minister."

7 It is impossible to imagine a commercial
8 organisation operating so inefficiently through a large
9 number of executive directors reporting to one Chief
10 Executive."

11 If you look at your evidence you will find
12 interesting echoes of that language.

13 For instance -- I have not got it in front of me --
14 if you look at Gordon Brown he says words to the effect
15 that the purpose of Cabinet is that people may report
16 issues, and I think -- who else -- Paul Boateng gives
17 an interesting description of his role sitting alongside
18 the Prime Minister, with Secretaries of State being
19 accountable to the Prime Minister for their performance
20 against targets and objectives.

21 So you have a concept of people in the Cabinet
22 reporting to the Prime Minister, which is I think subtly
23 different from a collective.

24 Thirdly, they saw the Prime Minister's job as being
25 to devise and impose strategy. Those are important

1 words, devise strategy and impose it. I am quoting
2 again:

3 "A Prime Minister needs support in -- imposing a clear
4 strategy on the government, and this support has to be
5 found among the Prime Minister's personal advisers in
6 Number 10."

7 A short sentence but quite pregnant for what we are
8 talking about. So what it needed was a strong centre in
9 Number 10. "The answer lies in a more formalised
10 strengthening of the centre of government, which should
11 -- provide the means of formulating and driving forward
12 strategy for the government as a whole".

13 So you have a conception of the Prime Minister
14 devising and imposing strategy and the Cabinet reporting
15 to him on what they were doing within it.

16 Finally, they took Mrs Thatcher as their model.
17 I should say, having worked for three years as head of one of
18 Mrs Thatcher's secretariats I don't accept their
19 analysis of how she did business. If you want me to
20 talk to you about that, I can.

21 This is the bit I really want to read to you:

22 "To get Ministers to act as an integral part of the
23 government and not simply as heads of sections within
24 it, Blair should emulate some of Mrs Thatcher's
25 practices -- while behaving differently in other respects.

1 Mrs Thatcher conducted a lot of government business
2 through bilateral meetings with Ministers and through ad
3 hoc, relatively informal, Ministerial groups meeting under
4 her leadership to agree policies and resolve
5 differences. -- Bilateral and ad hoc meetings, serviced by
6 Number 10 staff", another significant little phrase,
7 "are a good idea."

8 So Mr Thatcher² (sic) should emulate that model, ie
9 ad hoc meetings. So the answer was you had that
10 concept, and that was the concept I think in my time ran
11 through, that was the concept of how the Prime Minister
12 should do his job against the concept of Cabinet
13 Committee decision-making.

14 I should like to put my cards on the table, if I
15 may. I support collective government and the Cabinet
16 Committee system. I think it introduces good order and
17 discipline into decision-making in a very complex world.
18 It gives you the best chance of a good decision, though
19 it doesn't guarantee it. It underpins collective
20 responsibility. Cabinet collective decision-making
21 binds people in. It is a check on the exercise of power
22 by too few people at the centre.

23 That last point is one which I will make regularly
24 to you through my evidence. I think that it's central to
25 the issues that you are talking about.

² Witness's footnote: for 'Thatcher' read 'Blair'

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you for that comprehensive
2 answer, but could you briefly describe how did
3 Mrs Thatcher work, very briefly and very helpfully to
4 us.

5 LORD WILSON: Again I am not sure I know it completely
6 because I only saw the secretariat side. Mrs Thatcher
7 did not take the Cabinet Committee system in any way for
8 granted and she chaired a lot of Cabinet Committees.
9 I don't have figures. I haven't got my notebooks, alas
10 I think they have been destroyed.

11 Mrs Thatcher would no doubt have discussions on the
12 sofa but any discussion would go through the Cabinet
13 Committee system. If you said to Mrs Thatcher "I think
14 this needs to go to a Cabinet Committee" she would take
15 that advice immediately.

16 I was there at a time when huge change was going through
17 in the NHS, local government, education, across the
18 field, and every week there would be two or three
19 meetings typically at which important decisions would be
20 taken.

21 She didn't take her colleagues for granted. I can
22 remember occasions when she thought that people might
23 disagree with what she wanted to get through and she
24 would ask for a list of the speakers so that anyone who
25 we thought, having done a ring round, was going to

1 disagree or cause trouble would be sandwiched between
2 two heavy hitters.

3 Now that's a way of running the system but the
4 significant point is she did accept the need for the
5 system and for collective decision taking and for things
6 to be properly minuted in a form and for papers before
7 the meeting in a form which I think anyone familiar with
8 the collective system recognises.

9 The issues which
10 I am talking about are ones that I have wrestled with
11 over a number of years. This is not new -- this is stuff
12 that I have been through often. Any idea that Mr Blair
13 was emulating Mrs Thatcher is one that I do dispute --

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on --

15 LORD WILSON: -- although it appears often in what people
16 write.

17 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to ask specific
18 questions in relation to Iraq, because what I would like
19 to know is how in your time did the Cabinet Office
20 provide support to the Prime Minister, other Ministers
21 and yourself in relation to policy on Iraq?

22 LORD WILSON: I have been trying to
23 think how I could give you most helpfully -- let me just
24 find my right page -- how I could most helpfully
25 approach this subject. Would that be useful to you? It

1 may sound strange but I am making a point.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: If you are we will pull you back.

3 LORD WILSON: Hang in there. My main involvement in Iraq
4 was in my first year, 1998, in Desert Fox. In that
5 first year between January 1998 and January 1999
6 I attended and noted 21 Ministerial discussions on Iraq,
7 21, of which ten were in Cabinet and seven had some
8 substance to them. Five were in DOP Cabinet Committee
9 and six were ad hoc, including one JIC briefing.

10 So there was a mix of meetings.

11 Afghanistan post-9/11 -- I should say 9/11 was
12 a tremendous shock to the system but discussions
13 immediately afterward it covered a huge number of topics
14 where people were trying to come to terms with the
15 implications of it. So to call it Afghanistan is a
16 slightly inaccurate label. On Afghanistan between 9/11 and
17 the middle of January 2002, I attended and took notes of 46
18 Ministerial discussions of which 13 were in Cabinet,
19 four being very short, 12 were in Cabinet Committees --
20 a committee called DOP(IT), which we set up as a kind
21 of War Cabinet -- and 21 were ad hoc. Approximately just
22 under half were, using the phrase, on the sofa.
23 Actually they were not always on the sofa. Sometimes
24 they were round the Cabinet table and there were a lot of
25 people there, but they were not a formal Cabinet

1 Committee.

2 This analysis is one I have done, it is a crude
3 analysis. I may well have missed things out, so take it
4 as approximate. I used to note at the top of my
5 notebooks what the meetings were and I have derived it
6 from that and I have done it rather fast.

7 On Iraq as such I attended and noted five
8 discussions of varying length, which I hope you will let
9 me talk about, in Cabinet, and one ad hoc meeting on
10 23rd July and nothing else. I am not sure whether that
11 answers your question?

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Within what period the Iraq ones?

13 LORD WILSON: This period:

14 the period up to the end of July 2002. One of my very
15 last meetings I attended was 23rd July.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And --

17 LORD WILSON: I want to -- can I talk a bit more?

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, of course you can.

19 LORD WILSON: About those meetings? The interesting thing
20 about those meetings, if I just talk about how
21 Afghanistan grew in my time, immediately after 9/11 --
22 and this is my memory; it is not from any meetings -- my
23 memory is there was a real concern about how the
24 administration, the US administration, would react. Up
25 until 9/11 we had got rather relaxed on Iraq. The main

1 issue was containment and smart sanctions.

2 My 'Forward Look' at the end of July dropped Iraq from
3 the covering note. It just had it as one of --

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: July 2 ...

5 LORD WILSON: 2001. Sorry. I must give the dates. It
6 dropped Iraq from the covering note. It just had it as
7 a bit of routine business, smart sanctions. That was
8 the policy. We knew where we were. It was being worked
9 on. The Prime Minister knew about it
10 and it wasn't an issue that I wanted to bring out to him.

11 After 9/11 the concern was that the Americans who
12 had been reasonably -- after the initial flurry we were
13 not worried about what they were going to do on
14 Iraq. Mr Blair played I think an important part in
15 dissuading them from any thoughts that 9/11 was
16 connected with Iraq and dissuading them from taking any
17 action against Iraq. There are the odd references to
18 this. The Secretary of State for Defence remarked at
19 one point that Iraq kept bubbling up and he kept pushing
20 it down, but the general view was that that was not
21 an immediate issue.

22 There were some interesting moments. Some time in
23 early October the Foreign Secretary reported that we had
24 put in our letter to the United Nations -- this is
25 procedural stuff I don't know -- about the action we

1 were taking in Afghanistan and the Americans had done
2 the same to explain what they were doing and why, but
3 the Americans had couched their letter in terms which
4 allowed them to take action against other countries
5 besides Afghanistan, and Mr Blair I think -- I think
6 that was around that time -- made a remark to the effect
7 "The Americans have always said from the beginning that
8 this was Phase One and that they would move on to the
9 wider world in Phase Two later on". That's just -- so
10 you have that kind of remark, but Iraq is not
11 necessarily in there.

12 Then through most of the time when I was -- all
13 these meetings which I described to you on Afghanistan,
14 Iraq doesn't appear. The only time when it specifically
15 appears is around the end of November, and those
16 last four or five days of November and the early days of
17 December when there was -- I don't think you need to
18 have your finger on the button -- there was a lot of
19 Washington watching going on, a lot of speculation.
20 Things swirl around, different rumours, lots of reports
21 coming in.

22 Mr Blair said a propos of nothing much, Phase Two --
23 where would they go on Phase Two is another issue and
24 all sorts of ideas were around. Mr Blair asked "Is
25 there any risk that they will bomb Iraq?" The view is

1 there is no sign of it and so we went on.

2 That's a little spike. You can see, this is in many
3 tens of pages of notes, this is just a couple of lines.
4 Similarly in early December he remarks suddenly "I think
5 we need a strategy on Iraq", but nothing more than that.
6 Those are things I only noticed frankly in retrospect.

7 Then after that -- so Iraq was not at the top of the
8 agenda in any way in that period other than smart
9 sanctions, which was going ahead.

10 The next twist of the screw was at the end
11 of January when you had the Axis of Evil speech, which
12 made everyone sit up, because we knew the Americans had
13 been reviewing their options. This is the first signal.
14 It moved us into we don't know what's going on, but we
15 had better do some contingency planning which is
16 where -- I am allowed to talk about the options paper
17 because I know a version has appeared on the Internet --
18 which is where we came into doing the options paper.

19 I had one of my Thursday meetings. I can remember
20 Tom McKane -- we talked about this and we agreed it
21 would be a good idea to prepare for Ministers a note
22 about where we were on Iraq and what the options were,
23 just as a contingency. Contingency planning was the
24 flavour.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This was your initiative to prepare

1 an options paper?

2 LORD WILSON: I think it was an initiative probably of the
3 Secretariat. We went around the business, I can't
4 remember the discussion. This is nine years ago.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I understand.

6 LORD WILSON: I do remember we discussed it, because one of
7 the things when I was asked to give evidence
8 I remembered immediately was the options paper, which
9 I had thought was -- anyway I remembered it.

10 Then after that the next event -- there's a lot in
11 the press about Iraq. I was quite surprised as was
12 Eliza Manningham-Buller that she had put her note into
13 the Home Office which I had not seen before. It was
14 quite interesting she did that. I think it was in
15 response to a lot of press concern.

16 Then you have the meeting of 23rd March. I can
17 describe that to you. I should give you more chance to
18 ask questions.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I think -- I mean, we will cover
20 some of that later. I now want to come back to really
21 in relation to the options paper. I mean was there any
22 indication of what was the Cabinet Office's role and the
23 responsibility of the department? You know, what was
24 the line of division of work and how the coordination
25 was done?

1 LORD WILSON: Yes. Cabinet Office was a kind of node point,
2 a central point, as it should be, in pulling together
3 the views both on intelligence, which is one network,
4 JIC, and on policy. I have always thought it was the
5 role of the Cabinet Office to look at issues before they
6 become hot and get Ministers thinking about them and
7 addressing the options and doing, you know, proper
8 analysis of them.

9 Tom McKane, who is I think an outstandingly good
10 official, and his team pulled together the views of
11 departments and put them together in that note. That's
12 what I think they should be doing.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I just move on to the autumn of
14 2001, when the post of the head of the Overseas Defence
15 Secretariat and the Prime Minister's foreign policy
16 advisor were amalgamated?

17 LORD WILSON: Oh, yes.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This was shortly before you retired,
19 a new post of the intelligence coordinator was set up.

20 LORD WILSON: Sorry?

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Two things happened?

22 LORD WILSON: Those are two separate things, aren't they?

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Two separate things. What I want to
24 know is how far were you involved with the planning of
25 those changes. Two things happened. One was the post

1 of the head of the Overseas Defence Secretariat and the
2 Prime Minister's Foreign Office advisor amalgamated and
3 then the post of the intelligence coordinator was set up
4 just before you retired. What I want to establish is
5 how far were you involved with these changes?

6 LORD WILSON: Quite a lot. In fact, as you will hear,
7 deeply in one respect.

8 Taking the -- the head of the OD Secretariat had
9 also been Chairman of the JIC when I arrived at the
10 Cabinet Office. I had worked on the assessments staff
11 in the early '70s and I had views, right or wrong, that
12 policy and intelligence should be kept separate.

13 I can't give you the timing on when we did it. I would
14 have thought it was earlier than when I retired. Have
15 you got -- I don't know the date.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The amalgamation of the head of the
17 --

18 LORD WILSON: No, this is separation of the Chairman of JIC.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: September 2001.

20 LORD WILSON: Okay. That was one of the changes which
21 I wanted to make and I think was a right change to make.
22 I separated those out.

23 Now the change of -- the first change you mentioned,
24 which is the head of the OD Secretariat being in
25 Number 10 and also the Prime Minister's foreign policy

1 advisor.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's right.

3 LORD WILSON: Has some history. It was actually decided in

4 March 2001, though it was announced -- and this is

5 memory.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In the autumn.

7 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In September.

8 LORD WILSON: It was in September, was it? I would have

9 thought it was earlier than that, but it doesn't matter.

10 It was probably announced because David Manning took it

11 up in September. Right. It doesn't matter terribly.

12 The history of that goes back to this issue which

13 I deliberately led with, of the strong centre. In March

14 '01 we were doing a lot of machinery government changes,

15 an astonishing raft of changes across Whitehall. Part

16 of that was the creation of -- the Prime Minister wanted

17 a stronger centre in Number 10. All sorts of options

18 were canvassed up to and including merger of the Cabinet

19 Office and Number 10.

20 I can remember the Principal Private Secretary

21 coming to my room -- and I have checked this with my

22 Private Office -- and proposing to me -- putting to me

23 a proposal that we should amalgamate both organisations

24 with me at the top and everyone working to me and the

25 Prime Minister -- all serving the Prime Minister.

1 This comes back to what I was saying earlier that
2 government was seen as one unified corporate entity with
3 all the Permanent Secretaries working to me and the
4 Secretaries of State working to the Prime Minister, and
5 me being the line manager of 30 Permanent Secretaries,
6 which I did not accept. I rejected the proposal
7 immediately out of hand. They said "You may want to
8 think about it". I didn't want to think about it.
9 I knew what I thought, which is it was wholly
10 inconsistent with my own view of the role of the Cabinet
11 Office. I feel quite strongly about this. My own view
12 of the Cabinet Office was supporting the collective.
13 Part of my ambition and aim was to preserve the concept
14 of collective Government within the machinery.

15 There was a morning, and I can't give you a date,
16 but I remember it vividly, when I went to the Prime
17 Minister in his flat with all the proposals for change
18 but this was the main issue that was under discussion.
19 He put to me a very strong plea and a very persuasive
20 one, he is amazingly persuasive. I don't want to go
21 into it too much, the point I want to make is
22 I persuaded him not to follow it.

23 Then a day or two later one of the other options
24 which had been raised and dismissed in discussion, which
25 I had argued against, which is the one that happened,

1 the dual hatting, the Prime Minister wrote to -- Jeremy
2 Heywood wrote me a minute saying "The Prime Minister has
3 accepted your advice on the main issue but he has
4 decided the head of the OD Secretariat should also have
5 a dual role and be his foreign policy advisor in
6 Number 10." My Private Office tell me I was sore but in
7 the end I accepted reluctantly because I thought this
8 was a lesser evil than the main issue.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What in your view was the impact on
10 that particular change?

11 LORD WILSON: The Prime Minister wanted around him senior
12 people. He got in Stephen Wall and David Manning,
13 superb, absolutely top class people at his disposal.

14 The main change -- I mean from my point of view --
15 David Manning would come or Tom McKane. It would be
16 quite often Tom McKane, but David Manning would
17 sometimes come to my meetings on Thursdays. He would
18 come and talk to me occasionally if there was a problem.
19 But he worked in Number 10. His office -- he had
20 an office in the Cabinet Office, but his main weight was
21 there. What really happened was the Prime Minister had
22 a stronger centre around him and he really after 9/11
23 had around him -- he developed a very close team on
24 Iraq, which would be Jonathan Powell, David Manning, C
25 and so on. He had his own team. That is, to be honest,

1 how he liked to work.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So basically it conveyed the

3 responsibility more towards the Prime Minister rather

4 than the Cabinet?

5 LORD WILSON: Correct.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to looking at the

7 purpose of the new post of intelligence coordinator?

8 I mean, what was the purpose of that new post?

9 LORD WILSON: Oh, the post of intelligence coordinator was

10 one that goes back, has deep, deep roots. I find myself

11 thinking of Dick White, but this is not relevant. There is

12 a root that there is one person who is in charge of

13 overseeing all the intelligence -- because there

14 are quite a lot of intelligence operations across

15 Government, you have got the MOD, you have got the SIS,

16 you have bits coming in elsewhere -- overseeing the smooth

17 running of it, overseeing the budgets and helping me on

18 the budgets. You must remember I was the accounting

19 officer for the three agencies, and a kind of

20 quality control and steering. It was a kind of key

21 point for overseeing the interface of all the different

22 departments dealing with intelligence and the interface

23 with policy.

24 Again John Scarlett who again I would see regularly,

25 would need to keep in touch with Tom McKane and there

1 would be regular discussions between them. I was
2 satisfied that was working.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: From your point of view?

4 LORD WILSON: From my point of view.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was actually working?

6 LORD WILSON: Yes.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You think the impact wasn't negative
8 or in any way reduced the capacity of the Cabinet to be
9 served or did it weigh more towards --

10 LORD WILSON: Honestly, I am doing recollections. I didn't
11 feel in any way -- I had a concern that Number 10 should
12 not be involved. This again -- none of this is about
13 criticism.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It is explanation.

15 LORD WILSON: It is explanation of genuinely held, honestly
16 held different views on how to run Government. I had
17 a view that intelligence should be -- that Number 10 should
18 be a customer for intelligence but not involved in its
19 preparation. This is tales out of school really, but
20 there had been an episode in the Kosovo war, military
21 action, where they came -- I can't remember who it was --
22 someone came to me -- it was either -- I don't know who
23 it was -- and said they were worried that Number 10 were
24 going to use intelligence to brief the press. This was
25 at a time when we were desperate -- the government was

1 desperate really for some sign that military action was
2 working. I think I can talk about this. There were
3 a couple of stray reports -- that's all I am going to
4 say -- which indicated, jolly tangential, that it might
5 be. There is a terrific amount of interpretation which
6 goes on when you are dealing with assessments, but Number 10
7 wanted to use it. I was -- I went round immediately and
8 said "This is not acceptable. This must not happen,"
9 and I won. I had this clear view that you should
10 have -- they should use it -- they should be at the
11 receiving end of it but they shouldn't be involved in
12 it.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I have one last question before
14 we move on? Do you think that the Cabinet Office
15 machinery was sufficiently robust for the weight that
16 was subsequently put upon it with all the changes that
17 you described?

18 LORD WILSON: In my time I think it was, yes. I think --
19 I mean, they worked hard. Part of what I want to say is
20 that in my year -- my months in the lead-up to Iraq if
21 you'd asked me at the time, my impression was this was
22 not a top priority. I remember saying to the Prime
23 Minister -- again I can't time it -- "Iraq is not in my
24 top three priorities for that part of the world".
25 I mean, India, Pakistan, a great deal more important,

1 scary and I actually had meetings on India, Pakistan.
2 That worried me very much indeed and still does. The
3 Middle East Peace Process was bubbling over. It really
4 was. The Middle East was hugely worrying.

5 So there were all sorts of issues. On Iraq really
6 the issue was the smarter sanctions or smart sanctions
7 which were going through and a bit of support to
8 Ministers on thinking forward, and for that purpose it was
9 well equipped and was doing its job.

10 I mustn't run on.

11 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much.

12 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will turn to Sir Roderic Lyne in
13 a moment. Can I ask one supplementary? It is to ask,
14 you having described two different concepts of
15 government, whether can one call it the New Labour
16 concept, does that allow enough or any role for the
17 exercise of political judgment by senior but
18 non-involved departmental Ministers?

19 LORD WILSON: Only very occasionally I think is the honest
20 answer on Iraq. Can I give you -- I mean, the Prime
21 Minister would listen to the views expressed and
22 he reads people and groups extraordinarily.
23 I should just momentarily say, I endorse what Stephen
24 Wall said about Mr Blair. He is a very nice man and a very
25 good-natured man to work for. He has some extraordinary

1 capacities. One of them is to read people. He knows
2 where trouble is. He can see where people are coming
3 from. He would listen, he would read it and then go
4 back to where he was.

5 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Is there perhaps a distinction between
6 trouble, someone holding a strong contrary view on
7 an issue and allowing people to bring their own
8 political judgment from perhaps a fairly objective
9 standpoint to a big issue or decision?

10 LORD WILSON: Yes, there is a difference, and in terms --
11 this is really bringing me on to discuss
12 the Cabinet meetings and the 23rd July meeting. Is that
13 relevant?

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, I think we will pick this up.

15 LORD WILSON: The answer to your question is yes.

16 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think this will come out when
17 Sir Roderic picks up the questions. Rod.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have made a lot of very interesting
19 points about the way the Cabinet operated and leaping
20 out from that is the question as to how it was that this
21 very lively Cabinet Committee system operating elsewhere
22 and which had addressed Desert Fox and Afghanistan
23 didn't operate in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, but
24 that's something that Sir Martin Gilbert and I would
25 like to come back to, if I can just park that for the

1 moment -- at a slightly later stage.

2 What I would like to do now really is look at some
3 of the way up to the time you have left that job and
4 retired decisions were taken.

5 Before I do that there is one point you have just
6 made I would like to just ask you a question about.

7 You identified the Prime Minister's close team of
8 advisors on Iraq as Jonathan Powell, David Manning and
9 C, by whom you mean Sir Richard Dearlove?

10 LORD WILSON: Sir Richard Dearlove.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: From whom we have had evidence in
12 a private hearing, the transcript of which has been
13 published with some redactions.

14 Was it unusual for the head of the Secret
15 Intelligence Service to be playing a role in a close
16 team of policy advisers to the Prime Minister?

17 LORD WILSON: Yes. Of course the head of both -- all the
18 agencies should be available to talk to the Prime
19 Minister. I can remember that the head of the Security
20 Service, Stella Rimington, used to go and talk to John
21 Major when he was Prime Minister, from time to time. So
22 it is not unusual for them to have access to the Prime
23 Minister. What's striking in the case of my time as
24 Cabinet Secretary was that -- I have not researched
25 this, but it is my memory, and memory is not wholly

1 reliable, but my recollection is that before 9/11 the
2 Prime Minister did not see them. I was trying to get
3 him to know the agencies, because I thought he ought to
4 be aware of the contribution they could make, and I used
5 to ask whether they could have a slot in the diary. I
6 have a feeling that I got one slot in the diary, and he
7 liked their product sometimes, but I don't think he saw
8 them much before 9/11.

9 After 9/11 Sir Richard Dearlove and to a much lesser
10 extent Sir Stephen Lander swam into his field of vision
11 seriously. The period of October 2001 was
12 an extraordinary period. The Prime Minister was in the
13 air a great deal of the time going round the world. At
14 least that's what it felt like sitting at home. He had
15 Sir Richard Dearlove with him. Richard Dearlove, who
16 had previously, as it were, not had contact really with
17 Number 10, seized his chance, quite understandably, and
18 got to know the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister
19 got to know him. That's really what happened. After
20 that the Prime Minister at every meeting, as it were,
21 on Afghanistan would begin with -- including ad hoc
22 meetings -- a review of what we had got from
23 intelligence. You needed to have them there. It was
24 absolutely proper. John Scarlett would give a report,
25 and maybe Sir Richard Dearlove and sometimes Stephen

1 Lander, if it was domestic aspect, would add their
2 advice -- not advice, their insights.

3 So it was a very peculiar period on Afghanistan.
4 I think the Afghanistan period, the post-9/11 period was
5 a period when intelligence was peculiarly important.

6 Remember on Iraq we knew astonishingly little about
7 what was really going on in Iraq. You don't need me to
8 tell you that. The view at that time from my
9 recollection was that we -- this is the view the
10 Americans shared -- had better access to human
11 intelligence in Iraq than the Americans did. So there's
12 a sense in which SIS was a kind of an asset in our
13 dealings with the United States. So that's another
14 reason.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Self-evidently the Prime Minister and
16 other Ministers looking at the question, receiving
17 briefing on the intelligence is essential. The
18 question if you locate the head of SIS in a circle of
19 the three top advisers to the Prime Minister on this
20 specific issue is whether the role being played is
21 simply bringing intelligence to the Prime Minister or is
22 going into an area that perhaps wasn't traditional for
23 the holder of that post of actually involvement in
24 making the policy?

25 LORD WILSON: I'm not conscious of Sir Richard Dearlove

1 doing that. I only saw him in operation significantly
2 on Afghanistan. I don't want to give you the impression
3 that there were only three other people in the room. You
4 have to understand the way that Number 10 worked, and
5 I think it is probably true quite often, but it was more
6 so with Mr Blair. You have to see it as a series of
7 concentric circles. I see it as a kind of Mediaeval vision of
8 Heaven or Hell. You have the Prime
9 Minister in the middle. You have a few people around
10 him who have close access. Then you have other people
11 around. Of course Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon were
12 very closely in there. I was talking about officials.
13 Alastair Campbell was in and out, I would say not as
14 closely involved, but he was kept in the picture. So
15 they were all -- and, you know, the Foreign Office
16 officials and Tom McKane were in. So there were
17 meetings with lots of people. I don't want to give the
18 impression this was all done in a little huddle. What I
19 am talking about is the people who had really the most
20 regular contact,
21 the most contact. As far as I am
22 concerned on Afghanistan, which was a military operation,
23 we would have a military report, an intelligence report
24 and then there'd be discussion, in a lot of these ad
25 hoc groups or in DOP(IT), and that's a perfectly proper

1 role to play. I can't talk for Iraq because I didn't go
2 to any of the ad hoc groups, as becomes -- as should be
3 clear to you.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I now want to ask some very specific
5 questions about how the decisions did build up over
6 Iraq.

7 You said earlier on that in early December you
8 recalled the Prime Minister remarking, "I think we need
9 a strategy on Iraq". I don't know if you have had
10 a chance to familiarise yourself with the evidence that
11 we had from Mr Blair on Friday, but in the course of
12 that evidence we heard how he had had a telephone
13 conversation with President Bush on 3rd December 2001
14 and had then sent a paper to President Bush by hand of
15 Sir David Manning, a paper dated 4th, delivered on 5th,
16 and while these records have not been declassified, from
17 the evidence it emerged that this discussion was about
18 whether or not Iraq would be part of Phase Two of the
19 war against terror and about whether or not we were at
20 the beginning of a process -- indeed effectively I think
21 it was described in his evidence as a track, was the
22 word Mr Blair used, a track that led eventually towards
23 March 2003, building up a strategy of regime change.

24 Now were you aware of those events on the 3rd, 4th,
25 5th December 2001?

1 LORD WILSON: Not at all.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you see the evidence that we were
3 given the other day?

4 LORD WILSON: Frankly I skimmed it mainly looking at bits
5 about how the Cabinet operated.

6 In terms of those dates all I -- all I can remember
7 was a blip, an Iraq blip on the radar, a small blip
8 around the end of November. I was not aware of the
9 communications with the President or the paper, full
10 stop.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is perhaps unfair to ask whether you
12 can recall from nine years ago whether you knew that
13 Sir David Manning and Sir Richard Dearlove had gone
14 together to Washington for talks on 5th December 2001?

15 LORD WILSON: I can't remember.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would you have expected to have been
17 briefed on this as Cabinet Secretary?

18 LORD WILSON: No, I wouldn't, unless it was something which
19 I needed to know about. I was covering -- I was half my
20 time Cabinet Secretary, half my time on civil service
21 reform as head of the Civil Service. That's a big front
22 to cover. A lot of diplomacy -- forgive me,
23 Sir Roderic, I don't want to cause any offence -- is
24 a lot of toing and froing which on the whole you don't
25 need to know about.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Tell me about it.

2 LORD WILSON: So my approach on a lot of it was to listen
3 for the big stories, for the things which required
4 attention and to let the rest just go on. If Richard
5 Dearlove and David Manning were going to see their
6 opposite numbers, they were going to see their opposite
7 numbers. This was the sort of thing going on all the
8 time. Diplomats, you couldn't keep them at home.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had we been talking opening talks with
10 the White House about a strategy, building up towards
11 regime change in Iraq, that would have been a big issue,
12 not just a bit of toing and froing?

13 LORD WILSON: Absolutely. We were worried about what the
14 American administration -- we were concerned about what
15 the American --

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would you have expected at this point to
17 be restraining the Americans or actually taking a rather
18 forward position on the subject?

19 LORD WILSON: I would have expected us at this point to try
20 to find out what they were up to and what their thinking
21 was. That's what I thought was going on at Crawford, by
22 the way.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not putting ideas into their head?

24 LORD WILSON: No, not at all. Honestly if you had asked me
25 at the time, for me Iraq was pretty much not asleep but

1 was a pretty low level issue compared to the other
2 things that were going on. I mean, from my point of
3 view the government machine had been hugely dislocated
4 by 9/11. We had scarcely any meetings with the Prime
5 Minister -- we had some but not many -- on anything that was
6 not directly connected or indirectly connected to 9/11.
7 There was an awful lot of other business that one way or
8 another you had to get done -- I mean, you know,
9 business goes on. If you don't have meetings on them,
10 then you have to find some other way of dealing with
11 them. So there was a lot going on. This is not -- Iraq
12 wasn't in my book a major issue. Sorry.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: My question is if we had been having
14 discussions of that kind with the Americans, would it
15 not have been a major issue?

16 LORD WILSON: Yes.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And you were completely unaware of this?

18 LORD WILSON: I was completely unaware. I still am in
19 a way.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I want to move on to my next question, if
21 I may. I suggest you read that evidence. You might
22 find it interesting.

23 You were in that post until August of 2002?

24 LORD WILSON: Can I just give you some dates, because I have
25 researched this?

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

2 LORD WILSON: Because the dates are quite poignant

3 in a way. I had my -- the Blairs very generously gave

4 me and my family and all my Private Offices over the

5 years a dinner on the evening of 22nd July. I had my

6 farewell party in this building on 24th July. I had my

7 last Cabinet on 25th July and my last day in the office

8 was the 31st, I think -- I am not obviously sure of this --

9 but it was towards the end of that week. I think it was

10 the 31st of that week, the Friday.

11 That fortnight for me was a period of a great deal

12 of farewells, seeing people. People were very generous

13 in terms of wanting to entertain me, and that's it.

14 Now in August I was on duty. I took papers.

15 I can recall none on Iraq. I can recall that

16 I promoted two people to be Second Permanent Secretary

17 in that month, but Iraq didn't feature. I think my last

18 day as Cabinet Secretary was the first Sunday in

19 September, which I think would have been the 1st of September.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At what point -- was there a point before

21 your retirement when you felt that the government had

22 a settled strategy on Iraq that in all probability was

23 leading towards or was leading towards a high

24 probability of military action to invade Iraq?

25 LORD WILSON: At no point. I would say to you I don't think

1 that they did in that time to my knowledge. I am
2 giving you my recollections. I have very carefully
3 asked not to see anything that I wouldn't have seen at
4 the time. I would say to you they didn't. If you had
5 asked me I would have said I was very startled by the
6 meeting on 23rd July, which you know about, a version of
7 which has appeared on the Internet, and I was taken
8 aback. I remember I used my last farewell meeting with
9 Mr Blair, which I must protect to some measure, because
10 it was a private conversation, but I used it to say that
11 I was worried that he was getting into a position which
12 could be dangerous, that there were dangers in what was
13 going on, and I thought it was crucial -- I reminded him
14 of the legal position, because that has -- I mean,
15 I should say on Iraq the legal position has always been
16 in my mind a substantial and key brake on any
17 government military activity.

18 Can I -- sorry. I will shut up.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We shall want to the ask about the legal
20 dimension.

21 LORD WILSON: Okay. I will not spoil it.

22 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In a few minutes.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just on the meeting of 23rd July --

24 LORD WILSON: Yes.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- from what you say you did not -- you

1 were startled by that meeting, but you didn't feel that
2 it had decided on a settled strategy that was likely to
3 lead us towards military action. What did it decide on?
4 Did it decide on anything?

5 LORD WILSON: I don't think it decided on much. It was
6 a taking stock meeting, but what struck me was that some
7 of the language used implied that we were closer to
8 military action than I had imagined that we were.

9 Now there are two things in that meeting which stand
10 out in my memory, which I should I think -- it might be
11 helpful to tell you.

12 One was an underlying tension I thought between the
13 Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary. His Foreign
14 Secretary was very much in the business of saying "The
15 crucial thing is to get all this to the United Nations.
16 That's the way we are going to play it. We are nowhere
17 near military action at the minute. All the military
18 things the military are saying need to be seen in the
19 political context". I mean, the Ministry of Defence --
20 again I don't want to be rude about the Ministry of
21 Defence -- but if you give people in the Ministry of
22 Defence sort of -- they like a clear objective. They
23 will miss out the political nuances. Jack Straw was
24 pleading quite strongly for the political nuances.

25 I would have said to you if we were gossiping in

1 the corridor, as it were, "I think Jack Straw is working
2 very hard to keep the Prime Minister, as it were,
3 focused on the United Nations and away from getting
4 too", can I use that word - "gung ho about military
5 action".

6 The second thing which I remember quite vividly was
7 the Attorney-General gave his legal advice, which was --
8 you know the analysis -- which was you would need the
9 authorisation of a United Nations Security Council
10 Resolution if you were going to specifically undertake
11 military action and if you didn't do that, his strong
12 advice was that it was illegal to take military action.
13 The Prime Minister simply said "Well ..." and that's it.
14 I remember thinking "There is an unresolved issue
15 there".

16 If you had asked me I would have said to you they
17 are in the thick of it. This was a major issue but they
18 have not taken decisions. There is quite a lot of
19 underlying tension and debate still to be had when they
20 come back from their holidays about where all this is
21 going.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: By the time of this meeting military
23 planning had been underway in the Ministry of Defence
24 for quite some time. Three packages, three options for
25 military involvement in an invasion were being looked

1 at, the largest of which would have involved, as it did,
2 eventually ground troops. Your successor, Lord
3 Turnbull, his recollection in evidence to us was that by
4 the end of July he felt it was pretty clear we were
5 going to go for the largest of these three packages.

6 Do you recall the July meeting looking at these
7 packages, the ways in which we might deploy our military
8 in an invasion?

9 LORD WILSON: You are asking -- you are stretching me now.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. It doesn't register.

11 LORD WILSON: It doesn't really register.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Two points did register with you but that
13 one didn't?

14 LORD WILSON: That one didn't, no.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's not spend time on that.

16 Was the 23rd July meeting the only meeting involving
17 Ministers looking at Iraq other than sort of brief
18 discussions in the Cabinet that you attended in the
19 course of 2002?

20 LORD WILSON: Can I just give you a very quick summary?

21 There was a full discussion, and I can talk more about
22 it, if you want, on 7th March. That was not at the
23 initiative --

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This is in Cabinet?

25 LORD WILSON: In Cabinet. That was not at the initiative of

1 Number 10. It was prompted by two members of the
2 Cabinet who pressed to have it. There were no papers
3 before it. I think I have read somewhere you asked
4 whether the options paper was before it. The options
5 paper was not before it.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although it existed at that point. It
7 had just been produced.

8 LORD WILSON: It was around at the time. I have some
9 difficulty dating it, I thought the options paper was
10 the 8th. Number 10 would probably have seen it by that
11 time I think. The options paper, let me be crystal
12 clear, was not before Cabinet on 7th March. It was
13 a discussion prompted by two Cabinet Ministers.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Who were?

15 LORD WILSON: David Blunkett supported by Robin Cook.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why did --

17 LORD WILSON: I think you will find that -- sorry.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why did they prompt that discussion?

19 LORD WILSON: I have asked myself that. I don't know the
20 answer. I would guess it was because the newspapers
21 were full of stories.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was I right in understanding when you
23 were talking about the options paper earlier that this
24 was an idea -- it was not that the paper was called for
25 by Number 10 or the Prime Minister. It was that the

1 Secretariat and the Cabinet Office thought it would be
2 a good idea to produce a contingency paper at that time?

3 LORD WILSON: I would guess that they -- this is memory;
4 I can't quite do this -- it may have been that John
5 Sawers was at my Thursday weekly meeting, I am afraid
6 I can't remember now. All I can tell you now is that
7 the idea of this paper was raised in the meeting and
8 I thought it was a good idea and I thought it was timely
9 at the Cabinet Office. We had not been looking at Iraq
10 for a while. We used to do regular reviews of policy on
11 Iraq and I thought it was about time we did another. It
12 was very timely. I gave them encouragement to do it.
13 I am sure Number 10 -- I am not sure if Number 10 knew
14 or not to be honest.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I finally before we move on ask you
16 about two other bits of evidence we have had pointing in
17 slightly different directions?

18 Tom McKane, whom you have already referred to, told
19 us in evidence last week that containment continued to
20 be the official policy of the government, at least until
21 September of 2002. Does that accord with your
22 recollection?

23 LORD WILSON: Absolutely. I think it's a factual statement.
24 That was the policy.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But Andrew Turnbull when we heard him --

1 of course we are going to hear him again this
2 afternoon -- when we heard him last year he told us when
3 he came into your job as your successor in September
4 2002 that he felt that the government's strategy on Iraq
5 had coalesced by that time.

6 From what you have said up to this point you have
7 a different recollection?

8 LORD WILSON: Yes.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't feel it had coalesced?

10 LORD WILSON: I thought they were in the thick of it.

11 I think this is where my two prisms come into play. If
12 you asked me whether as a matter of proper Cabinet
13 government the Cabinet had endorsed a course that was
14 likely to lead to military action, I would tell you
15 emphatically not, and I can elaborate -- I am poised to
16 elaborate on that.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back to Cabinet endorsement
18 later on.

19 LORD WILSON: I know you will come back. Can I just finish?

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

21 LORD WILSON: If you had said to me "Is the Prime Minister
22 as the man who devises and drives through strategy
23 serious about military action?" I would have said "There
24 is a gleam in his eye which worries me." I think I used
25 that phrase at the time.

1 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Was there a sense that the policy of
2 containment was still that of the government, albeit
3 diminishing in terms of its credibility?

4 LORD WILSON: Containment was the policy for years.
5 I can't remember when it began, but it probably goes
6 back to the ' 90s. Anyway let's not --

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It goes back to the end of the Gulf War,
8 1991.

9 LORD WILSON: Exactly. Containment was the status quo. Of
10 the five Cabinet discussions which I noted in 2002, two
11 were reporting the successful passage of the UN
12 resolution on smart sanctions. No-one questioned it.
13 No-one said, "Let's admit it that's all failing, isn't
14 it?" No one said "Let's discontinue that as a policy."
15 It was noted as a success and it was also noted, though
16 I am afraid it wasn't in the minutes -- if I had known
17 you were all going to look at the minutes so closely
18 I would have looked at them more carefully at the
19 time -- actually it was noted, though it wasn't
20 recorded, with satisfaction that the passage of the
21 resolution had required the active engagement of the
22 United States.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But this was a very important point,
24 because --

25 LORD WILSON: I am just making the point. After that there

1 was no further discussion of containment. So in
2 terms -- for it to end you would need to have
3 a discussion about it. There was no discussion about
4 it.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On the smart sanctions resolution
6 Mr Blair told us in evidence, and he also sets this
7 point out fully in his book, that he felt that smart
8 sanctions without effective measures for border
9 monitoring of Iraq and the proposed measures on that had
10 been dropped as a concession to the Russians in March?

11 LORD WILSON: Correct. Was it March?

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, in March, in the negotiations, but
13 the negotiations came to a head in May, but it was in
14 March that the Russians changed their position, agreed
15 to support a resolution in return for the drop of border
16 monitoring.

17 Now the British Government continued to lead the
18 drive for a resolution, which was achieved in May, but
19 Mr Blair has argued that effectively that resolution
20 wasn't going to work, the policy wasn't going to work
21 without the border monitoring, and one can understand
22 that argument.

23 Is that not an argument that he made at the time,
24 that the government had actually achieved something that
25 in his view was not going to work, because a vital

1 element was missing from it when the Cabinet noted this?

2 LORD WILSON: In those two discussions -- heavens! You are
3 testing me on nine years ago. I knew that Mr Blair was
4 disappointed and regarded it as a significant weakness.
5 As you say, it is perfectly -- I think there is a good
6 case for saying it is right that that concession had
7 been made, but here again can I just put it to you that
8 the only way of understanding this is to look at it
9 through my two prisms.

10 In terms of Cabinet collective government, and
11 looking at the record, which is where I go from,
12 containment continued to be the policy, and I support
13 Tom McKane, and I would have done so at the time. The
14 policy continues until you have a discussion and decide
15 that it is not the policy and you have got another policy.

16 In terms of Number 10 I am sure -- and I think
17 I knew -- that for years people had been
18 grumbling about the way that the sanctions regime was
19 eroding, about the damage and suffering that it was
20 causing to the civilian population and so on,
21 humanitarian reasons, and I knew there was
22 concern about it. But that wasn't a decision to let up.
23 So there was no formal decision to let up. But in the
24 minds of Number 10 I should think they had, as it were,
25 taken their own view as part of the strategy which they

1 were devising and driving through.

2 The two statements are compatible if you accept my
3 analysis.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On what you describe as the gleam in the
5 Prime Minister's eye, that gleam found expression in
6 quite a loft of correspondence with President Bush
7 between December of 2001 and the end of July 2002 and
8 continuing beyond.

9 Did you see that correspondence?

10 LORD WILSON: No.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Are you surprised you didn't see that
12 correspondence?

13 LORD WILSON: Not necessarily. The Prime Minister spent
14 a lot of time on the phone to his opposite numbers in
15 other countries. It was one of the revelations to me
16 about the life of a Prime Minister. I had no idea how
17 much time, when I became Cabinet Secretary, how much
18 time they spend talking to people in other countries.
19 My history is as a domestic civil servant, so it is
20 a side of life which on the whole I had not seen.

21 So I would not have necessarily expected to see all
22 the letters unless they were really important. I saw
23 one --

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's an important qualification. Some
25 opposite numbers are rather more important than others?

1 LORD WILSON: For instance, I did see the letter that
2 Mr Blair wrote to President Bush, I think it was the day
3 after 9/11, but it may have been the 13th, because
4 I remember it came round. We all knew there was going
5 to be a phone call. It was a hugely tense time. We all
6 knew there was going to be a phone call. We had been
7 up all hours on this, and a copy of
8 a record of the discussion came round to me and
9 I read it and it said at the end the Prime Minister
10 promised Mr Bush a note or paper or a letter which
11 he promised to write giving him his views.
12 So I went instantly round to Number 10 and I said
13 "Do you want a draft?", which is a good bureaucratic
14 response, and Jonathan Powell said "No need, he's done
15 it". And he showed it to me and indeed he
16 had done it and it was recognisably his drafting,
17 because I know his style.
18 So at that time I saw the transcript -- not the
19 transcript -- the record of the discussion and I saw the
20 paper which he sent. I think that was the last time
21 I saw any such document.
22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Thank you.
23 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. I will turn now to Sir Lawrence
24 Freedman. Lawrie.
25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just following up on the past

1 discussion, can I ask you two questions? First, in the
2 March Cabinet meeting that you describe --

3 LORD WILSON: Mmm.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- this was, as you say, a response
5 to concerns of two Cabinet members, including the former
6 Foreign Secretary. What role did the Foreign Secretary
7 himself play in all of this? Was this still the Foreign
8 Office's policy?

9 LORD WILSON: The Prime Minister was clearly deeply
10 involved. The Prime Minister was -- what really
11 interested him in the job -- I mean, one of the things
12 that really interested him was foreign affairs. If
13 you -- can I make a general mark? If you look at the
14 Prime Minister's career he is someone who moves from big
15 challenge to big challenge: changing the Labour Party,
16 winning an election, Northern Ireland, Desert Fox,
17 Kosovo, which is a kind of Balkan Northern Ireland,
18 Sierra Leone, Afghanistan. He confronts himself with
19 huge challenges and has an indomitable will. He is a man
20 who is and genuinely is good-natured, very nice to deal
21 with, very easy going, but there are other sides of him
22 that co-exist with that. One of them is that he really
23 is at ease more in his own head and in himself on
24 a world stage than anyone else I have ever met. He
25 knows how to perform on it. It engages all his energy.

1 David Manning used a phrase in his evidence to you
2 which I recognise. He said his approach to foreign
3 policy can become muscular at times.

4 I want to come back to your comment on what Lord
5 Turnbull said in his evidence to you. I can easily
6 believe -- because I think Prime Minister was torn over
7 Iraq. This is guesswork please. I am not giving you
8 recollections; I am giving you guesswork. I can easily
9 believe he was torn on Iraq. Torn between all his
10 instincts which were to be alongside the Americans,
11 whatever that means, on the one hand, and his knowledge
12 that a lot of people in his Cabinet and in public
13 opinion and people in Parliament would be unhappy with
14 that. I would guess, please, a guess, that in the
15 summer holidays in August he resolved it. The only
16 evidence I can offer you on that is Alastair Campbell's
17 diaries where he said the Prime Minister returned from
18 holiday with much more confidence and certainty.
19 I think that's almost certainly the case.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In your role under the discussions
21 with Andrew Turnbull did you convey your views about
22 where Iraq was?

23 LORD WILSON: I can't remember. You could ask Andrew
24 Turnbull. But just to be clear about that, we aimed for,
25 Andrew and I, a seamless transition. Andrew's

1 appointment as Cabinet Secretary was announced on
2 I think -- I am not certain of this -- around 19th
3 April. I think he was then asked by the Prime Minister
4 to provide by the end of May his plans for Civil Service
5 reform. He moved into a room under mine, what is known
6 as the John Major room in the Cabinet Office under mine,
7 I don't remember when, but it was either June or early
8 July. And he drew up plans for reorganising the Cabinet
9 Office to implement what Number 10 had asked him to do
10 on Civil Service reform. He announced his plans for
11 reorganisation.

12 My Private Office told me he got all the papers. He
13 saw all the papers that came into me. I didn't have
14 secrets. I mean, he could see whatever, because it was
15 part of the handover, the seamless handover, that he
16 should share my box, and he brought his own new Private
17 Secretary in with him, Ian Fletcher. So if you see
18 on minutes something is going to Ian Fletcher, it was
19 going to Andrew Turnbull's Private Secretary rather than
20 mine.

21 So there was a kind of seamless transition. Now
22 Andrew and I had lots of discussions in that period.
23 Just as I cannot for the life of me -- I wish I could --
24 remember my handover discussions with Robin Butler,
25 I can't remember my handover discussion with Andrew

1 Turnbull. As Cabinet Secretary there are all sorts of
2 things you need to confide to your successor, which
3 would not be appropriate for this gathering.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. I wanted to talk about
5 intelligence and the presentation of it. You mentioned
6 earlier your view that policy and intelligence should be
7 kept separate?

8 LORD WILSON: Yes.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now when there was discussion in
10 February, say, 2002 about an options paper, there was also
11 discussion then about the value of some document that
12 had been made public at the time looking at four
13 countries that were of concern with weapons of mass
14 destruction?

15 LORD WILSON: Correct.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you remember that in those
17 discussions?

18 LORD WILSON: I can remember dimly, because we had done
19 a paper after 9/11 on Al Qaeda not being involved in
20 Iraq. Anyway, who was responsible for 9/11. That had
21 gone out. It was a modest but useful contribution to
22 public education and that's it.

23 One of the chilling developments in my time, and
24 I can't date this, but I know I can talk about it
25 because it is in the Butler report, was AQ Khan. Truly,

1 truly chilling and hugely worrying. The idea we should
2 have some document which began public education on the
3 threat of this kind of proliferation was, it seemed to
4 me, a modest but sensible, useful contribution to public
5 debate and public understanding. I have -- sometimes
6 when you try to remember the past you stare at it until
7 you can't see it. I am afraid this is one of those
8 issues. I can certainly remember the document with the
9 four countries being proposed. I think my impression is
10 that the Foreign Office would lead on it but the JIC
11 contribution, suitably modified and obscured, would be
12 an important part of it, because some of what we knew
13 was only obtained from intelligence. So there was
14 a little headache as to how you drew on that, but I was
15 happy the people concerned would be able to deal with
16 that or if they wouldn't they would come to me on it and
17 they didn't.

18 What I can't remember is when Iraq was separated
19 out. That happened and I honestly can't remember that
20 happening. This was not a major event in my life.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I am sure.

22 LORD WILSON: I can remember -- and I think

23 Lord Turnbull has drawn attention to the fact that
24 I commented -- John Scarlett put to me a draft on Iraq,
25 and my reaction was that I was surprised that they could

1 draw on so much intelligence, it seemed to me. I had
2 thought this would be drawn from public sources, one of
3 those sort of documents, and I recognised more
4 intelligence in it than I had expected.

5 However, if the JIC's proper processes had been gone
6 through and they were happy with it, so be it. But this
7 was something which should go out from the Foreign
8 Office and the only question was who would do the
9 foreword. The idea of the Prime Minister doing the
10 foreword wasn't around. I think the idea was the --
11 whether it should have a foreword from the Foreign
12 Secretary was the issue.

13 Then I can remember David Manning saying to me some
14 time in the summer "All this has been put on ice" and my
15 saying "Fine, I am not bothered by that".

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you remember anybody from the
17 agencies, for example, coming to you and expressing
18 concern about the use of secret intelligence in
19 a document of this sort?

20 LORD WILSON: No, not at all. The starting point was that
21 this would be a document which came out from the Foreign
22 Office. It wouldn't ostensibly be an intelligence-based
23 document. It would be a public education document, but
24 as in October it would, as it were, privately draw on
25 information which we got from secret sources, but which

1 a reader wouldn't know what was secret in it. Does that
2 make sense?

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You weren't involved in the decision
4 to separate out Iraq from the four countries?

5 LORD WILSON: No, I don't think I was.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the decision earlier than July,
7 in April, to put -- to delay publication, were you
8 involved in that?

9 LORD WILSON: I don't think I was involved in that. This is
10 one of the many things bubbling along around you which
11 you just keep in your head but you don't intervene in
12 unless there is something that needs you to intervene
13 in. It is the only way to do the job.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The July options paper prepared by
15 the Cabinet Office --

16 LORD WILSON: Do you mean the July options paper or the
17 March one?

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean the July, 23rd meeting.
19 A version of this is in the public domain -- recommended
20 the establishment of an ad hoc group of officials under
21 the Cabinet Office chairmanship to consider the
22 development of an information campaign to be agreed with
23 the US.

24 Tom McKane told us in his evidence that this was not
25 connected to the dossier and that work had not really

1 started when he handed -- you left the Cabinet Office. Do
2 you have any understanding of this ad hoc group?

3 LORD WILSON: I think Tom McKane would be right. If you
4 remember -- you don't remember, because I have not told
5 you -- this is memory -- after the Crawford
6 meeting my memory is that David Manning
7 sent me a minute. It has not been found on the file,
8 so it is perfectly possible it is a figment. But I can
9 see page 2 in my mind. And it simply said --
10 my understanding of Crawford, which you have very kindly
11 not asked me about -- my understanding of Crawford,
12 which is another twist in the story, was that we came
13 back realising -- because the purpose of Crawford was to
14 find out what the Americans were thinking, what Bush
15 himself was thinking, because there were all sorts of
16 people around him thinking all sorts of things, where
17 was Bush on this -- was that he was more serious about
18 regime change and about the possibility, if necessary,
19 of military action than we had grasped. The Prime
20 Minister had asked for further work to be done on three
21 areas, and this is relevant to the answer to your
22 question. One of those areas was building up opinion
23 both in this country and overseas for United Nations
24 action on Iraq.

25 My understanding of the group that was being set up

1 on 23rd July was that was about this process of building
2 up a campaign of public understanding in this country
3 and overseas. I think Tom McKane's evidence is right.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Is there anything else you would
5 like to tell us about Crawford?

6 LORD WILSON: No, other than I would quite like to know what
7 happened to Crawford.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: All will be revealed.

9 Just finally, and I think I can guess the answer to
10 this, were you aware of the Prime Minister's decision in
11 early September to revive the dossier?

12 LORD WILSON: No. Absolutely not.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's all.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we will take a short break in
15 a moment. Just before we do can I ask you one question
16 going back to what you were describing as the role of
17 the Cabinet Secretary in relation to intelligence
18 matters generally? We understand the accounting officer
19 role, if you like, the appointment of -- appointment's
20 responsibility, but do you see any difference between
21 the role that was exercised by your two predecessors,
22 Lord Armstrong, as he now is, and Lord Butler and the
23 role in your own time as it evolved with the appointment
24 of a more senior intelligence coordinator than had
25 previously been the recent practice?

1 LORD WILSON: Not really, no. I mean, I think you can
2 debate what the structural issues are until the cows
3 come home. I just had a view about the role. I admit
4 it went back to my own time on the assessment staff
5 where I had views about their role and the need for
6 better leadership from someone who understood what they
7 were doing. But I don't think -- in terms -- I mean, I
8 was the accounting officer. I would see the heads of
9 the agencies regularly and they would have various
10 problems and I would talk to them about the problems.
11 For instance, Francis Richard was building this doughnut
12 in Cheltenham and the costs were escalating. That sort
13 of problem. I would see a lot of intelligence, some of
14 it raw. They would give me an interesting report if
15 they thought it was relevant. I would see all the JIC
16 assessments and I would keep in touch with John Scarlett
17 because he was new in the job and I think it was quite
18 sort of -- not overwhelming, but it was quite
19 a challenge for him, and I offered him my support and
20 talked to him if he wanted it.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Would the Prime Minister have regarded
22 you as Cabinet Secretary as being generally au fait with
23 the intelligence agenda?

24 LORD WILSON: In the early days I think they regarded my
25 interest in the intelligence agencies as a slight

1 eccentricity. That's attributing to them a view. I used
2 to try to get support from Number 10 in battles with the
3 Treasury over resources. The Treasury at one point -- I
4 am going to tell you this -- were trying to introduce
5 a customer relationship between the agencies and their
6 departments in which the departments would pay for bits
7 of intelligence they had. I fought a furious battle to
8 resist that, a battle I am pleased to say I won.
9 However, I asked Number 10 for help in this and they
10 simply let me get on with it really. Similarly when it came to
11 the negotiations in PES and CSR or whatever they were called,
12 because the agencies were quite hard pressed in those early
13 years and I wanted support but Number 10 had other
14 priorities. They were negotiating with the Chancellor
15 on bigger issues than mine and that was for me. I can
16 remember settling once with the Chief Secretary in the
17 lobby outside the Cabinet Room, we did a deal.

18 So the answer is I think I did my role in the way
19 that it had previously been done, but I don't know how they
20 did it, so it is quite hard to answer.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you very much. We will take
22 a short break now.

23 (Short break)

24 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, let's restart. I will ask
25 Sir Martin Gilbert to take up the questions. Martin.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I'd like to ask a few questions about
2 the role involving the Attorney General. My first
3 question is we have seen correspondence which shows that
4 Lord Goldsmith's office contacted the Cabinet Office in
5 March 2002 asking for him to be involved in Ministerial
6 thinking about Iraq as policy was being formulated
7 rather than being consulted formally only after the
8 last minute -- at the last minute. His office expressed
9 concern again in July 2002. Were you aware of the
10 Attorney General's concerns at this time?

11 LORD WILSON: No, not at all. For me the legal position was
12 crucial, one of the crucial elements in any discussion
13 about military action. I had been through this endless
14 chain of Desert Fox, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and
15 Afghanistan. I had learned the importance of the Law
16 Office's advice, and if it had come to military action
17 in my time I thought it was obviously critical to engage
18 the Attorney General. I had no knowledge of the
19 approach he made. He didn't make it to me I don't
20 think, did he? No, he didn't.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you aware of the subsequent
22 discussions between March and July between the Attorney
23 General and the Cabinet Office which Tom McKane has told
24 us about?

25 LORD WILSON: No, I don't know about them at all. To be

1 fair, nor would I particularly, because we weren't in
2 the business of military action at that time. At least
3 I don't think we were, but you no doubt know better.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The Ministerial code requires Law
5 Offices to be consulted in good time before the
6 government has committed to critical decisions involving
7 any legal decisions?

8 LORD WILSON: Absolutely.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yet despite his own request Lord
10 Goldsmith's first involvement in Iraq came at the
11 23rd July meeting?

12 LORD WILSON: Yes.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Do you think given that there had been
14 so much going on before 23rd July in terms of general
15 discussions and all the post-Crawford discussions, that
16 July was sufficiently early for him to be brought in?

17 LORD WILSON: I can't say this to you enough. In those
18 months Iraq disappeared out of sight, except
19 for the smart sanctions which were reported to Cabinet.
20 I think if I had been a member of Cabinet I would have
21 thought it was being handled. The Prime Minister was
22 doing his thing with President Bush; and so no doubt were
23 the military, because the military are always in
24 Washington, the military were keeping an eye on what was
25 going on in Washington. But those are not things which

1 require the Attorney General's involvement.

2 The main things in April, May, into June I suspect --

3 I can't honestly remember -- was India, Pakistan.

4 Can I impress on this committee that was far more

5 important than Iraq. The Middle East Peace Process was far

6 more important than Iraq. It must be tempting when you

7 stare at something for 18 months to think it was the

8 major thing. Iraq was not the major thing in those

9 months. If you had asked me I would have reeled off lots of

10 other things. I mean, the Queen Mother had died; Alastair

11 Campbell was involved in a row with whoever it was,

12 Black Rod; street crime; and there was a leak I think of

13 a White Paper. There were all sorts of issues around

14 which engaged attention. If you had said to me "Where

15 are we on Iraq?" I would have said "Things are going on,

16 Number 10 has started talking to Washington." But nothing

17 major. So why should the Attorney General be involved?

18 You don't bother him without a cause.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So why was he concerned?

20 LORD WILSON: That is what I would like to know. I should

21 think because previous incidents had taught him the

22 importance, the difficulty of the issues involved in

23 military action and the importance of being involved

24 early and he would have known probably through gossip

25 that the Cabinet on March 7th had had a long discussion

1 about Iraq and someone would have said to him, "Military
2 action -- you know, they are talking". It is in the
3 papers. I have not checked the press, but there must
4 have been a lot of press comment on it. So he would
5 have said -- this is kind of routine -- "You will tell me,
6 won't you?" I think that's what happened, isn't it?

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My next question really is a question
8 of process, and from your experience as Cabinet
9 Secretary and going back over previous conflicts such as
10 Kosovo, he felt he had been discouraged from giving
11 advice.

12 So my question is really what was the process
13 whereby an Attorney General could give advice as seen
14 from your perspective and why would he feel discouraged
15 if it wasn't necessary for him to do anything?

16 LORD WILSON: The department concerned, in this case the
17 Foreign Office, presumably with the Ministry of Defence,
18 would write to the Law Officers setting out the position
19 and setting out the points on which they wished to have
20 legal advice. They would do it through a draft
21 from their own departmental solicitor -- the terms may be
22 different in each department -- but they would put
23 a case forward like you would, they would act like
24 a solicitor going to a barrister. They would put
25 forward a case and the Attorney General would opine and

1 that would bind the government. That's the normal
2 process.

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In none of those did he seek your
4 advice?

5 LORD WILSON: He never came anywhere near me that I recall.
6 If he did and I have forgotten it, I apologise, but I
7 don't remember him coming anywhere near me.

8 I wonder if I could make a general point. This is a rather
9 delicate point. Some of my replies may sound
10 iconoclastic or surprising, I sense from your mood.

11 I was in my last months. In March, while all of
12 this pre-Crawford was happening, I had had two incidents
13 with Number 10, which may have left them a little
14 bruised.

15 One of them, which Jonathan Powell has rather
16 ungraciously written about, and I don't accept his
17 description of it, but it is true that in the process of
18 selecting my successor, a process in which I should declare
19 Baroness Prashar was involved on the selection panel,
20 I had had to be frank with Number 10 about the reasons
21 why I thought my successor should come from within the
22 Civil Service. That's now in the open. I have never
23 talked about it, but I will now acknowledge that I --
24 and in the process of that -- the fact they write about
25 it still with a certain venom suggests to me that it

1 still rankles, but nonetheless I had said that.

2 Secondly, on 26th March I had made a speech to
3 an invited audience, in which I had called publicly for
4 legislation on the Civil Service, which included -- and
5 I spent some time on this -- regulation of the position
6 of Special Advisers in law. The Prime Minister give me
7 permission to make that, but I think Number 10 would
8 much have preferred me not to do it.

9 After that second speech The Times published
10 a cartoon which showed Mr Blair waving me goodbye and
11 Jonathan Powell standing behind Number 10 door saying to
12 Alastair Campbell, "Has he gone yet?"

13 I say that, because I think it may explain why
14 I may have been a bit further away from the inner circle
15 than I may have been in previous years. I think I have
16 to declare that.

17 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I think before we move on I'd
18 like to ask one other question regarding the role of the
19 Attorney General.

20 LORD WILSON: Yes.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: This centres, if you like, on a time long
22 after you had left the Cabinet Office. When Lord
23 Goldsmith gave his long advice on 7th March 2003, he
24 addressed it to the Prime Minister and it was shown only
25 to the Foreign and Defence Secretaries. It was not

1 shown to the Cabinet as a whole.

2 When Sir Roderic Lyne was asking a question of Lord
3 Goldsmith in the course of this Inquiry, Roderic asked,
4 "Who was the client in the case?", to which Lord
5 Goldsmith said, "Ultimately it was the Prime Minister".

6 Now this goes back to the constitutional
7 relationship.

8 LORD WILSON: Sorry. Whose reply was that?

9 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: That was Lord Goldsmith. He saw his
10 client ultimately as being the Prime Minister, not, for
11 example, the government, the Cabinet, the Foreign and
12 Defence Secretaries.

13 Are there any observations you would like to offer
14 against that background, although admittedly it is
15 mainly after your time, about the constitutional
16 relationship between the law officers and the Cabinet as
17 a whole as against the Prime Minister?

18 LORD WILSON: Well, I wasn't in position at the time and
19 I haven't addressed the issue. I make it a point not to
20 judge the actions of my successors.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: This is a general constitutional question
22 and it stems partly from the Ministerial code provision.

23 LORD WILSON: Which I have not read lately. The Prime
24 Minister I would have said would expect the client
25 department to seek advice from the law officers and to

1 report to him and the Cabinet on the advice he'd
2 received. It would be an integral part of the
3 discussion.

4 It's the lead player: you can debate whether it is
5 the Foreign Secretary or Secretary of State for Defence,
6 and you could argue they might put a joint case on it,
7 they might jointly be clients I think. But in my
8 collective government prism -- sorry; I am going to go
9 back to my prisms -- I would expect them to be the
10 clients.

11 The Prime Minister has no executive power. The
12 Prime Minister only has the power to advise the Queen on
13 appointing and dismissing people and summing up
14 discussions. So he is not the main actor in my book.
15 It is the Secretaries of State concerned. It might be
16 one or both. You can argue that. I have not thought
17 about that. Then the Cabinet will want to know what the
18 legal position is, but it will be the responsibility of
19 the Foreign Secretary or the responsible Secretary of
20 State to inform the Cabinet about the advice he or she
21 has received.

22 If you look through the other prism, in which it's
23 the role of the Prime Minister to devise and impose
24 strategy, I can see that you move into a different view
25 that it is the Prime Minister who asks for the advice.

1 This is one of the many examples when you look at
2 your evidence you have to ask: whose prism are we
3 looking through?

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Back to Sir Martin.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I'd like to turn back to the old
6 question of Cabinet governance and process.

7 LORD WILSON: Oh, good!

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In his witness statement to us Lord
9 Williams of Baglan recalled the concern of Robin Cook,
10 then Foreign Secretary, that the air strikes which
11 Britain and the United States carried out outside the
12 No-Fly Zones in February 2001, as Robin Cook had put it,
13 had not merited Ministerial authorisation.

14 As Cabinet Secretary, would you have been consulted
15 as to whether -- the decision not to take this to
16 responsible Ministers, to take this significant step?

17 LORD WILSON: I am afraid I have not read his evidence and
18 this is the first time I have heard it. No, I didn't
19 know about that. This is when? February 2001?

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Right. So this wouldn't have been
21 something which --

22 LORD WILSON: I don't recall it crossing my desk. I may be
23 wrong. Memory is a fickle thing. I don't remember it.
24 I am not bad at remembering things, some things.

25 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Does it seem to you to be an unusual --

1 LORD WILSON: It seems to me significant, yes.

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have looked in some detail at the
3 provision of formal papers to the Cabinet in advance of
4 its discussions on Iraq in 2002, and it seems that the
5 Cabinet was not provided with formal papers except on
6 one occasion a Parliamentary Labour Party paper, which
7 was not of deep significance.

8 LORD WILSON: It is not a relevant ...

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Now in the Iraq options paper, which we
10 have discussed, and a version of which has appeared in
11 the public domain, it stated among other things that the
12 United Kingdom, and I quote:
13 "... should consider a staged approach, which would
14 normally give a lead time of about six months to
15 a ground offensive."

16 Now Mr Blair told us on Friday last week that he saw
17 no need for this paper to be circulated to the Cabinet,
18 because the issues were generally being discussed
19 publicly. They were in the public domain. They were
20 widely in the newspapers.

21 Wouldn't, again from your perspective as Cabinet
22 Secretary, a Cabinet Office paper prepared by the
23 Overseas and Defence Secretariat with all its detail --
24 it's a very detailed and structured paper -- would this
25 not have helped Cabinet Ministers to have a formed view

1 of the situation?

2 LORD WILSON: Through my prism of collective government the
3 answer to your question has to be yes.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have one more question --

5 LORD WILSON: Through the other prism the answer clearly is
6 no. I can elaborate on that if you want.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: No. You have answered it very
8 precisely.

9 One more question from me on this question of
10 Cabinet government and Cabinet involvement in policy.

11 The Butler Report states that the relevant Cabinet
12 Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy did not meet in
13 2001 and 2002.

14 LORD WILSON: Correct. I think that's right.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can you explain why not?

16 LORD WILSON: Because the Chairman of the Committee didn't
17 see the need for a meeting.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And again within -- this is within your
19 two prisms?

20 LORD WILSON: Yes. Sorry. I should have elaborated that.
21 You see it through two prisms, yes, please. Thank you.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were any other Ministers asking for
23 a meeting, because this would normally be the place
24 where you would discuss things?

25 LORD WILSON: Could I say a little bit about the meetings?

1 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

2 LORD WILSON: Would that be all right?

3 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I was going to ask if you would like to.

4 LORD WILSON: I would like to at some point.

5 The answer to your question is no. I think that's
6 really one of the interesting things, the insights which
7 you get into the 'strong centre' view of how you run
8 a government.

9 The point I want to make is this. George Jones had
10 an aphorism -- I think it is him -- that "Prime
11 Ministers are only as strong as their Cabinet let's them
12 be", to which I would say is that what the Blair years
13 illustrate is that Prime Ministers, if their Cabinets let
14 them be extremely wrong, can be extremely strong. And
15 this Cabinet allowed Mr Blair be extremely strong.

16 A lot of what we are talking about is really about
17 the concentration of power, where the power was in the
18 government. Mr Blair was extremely strong in
19 Parliament, in public opinion, in the trade union
20 movement, in the Labour Party and in his Cabinet, with
21 the exception of Gordon Brown, which I don't think
22 I need talk about, because you have read enough about
23 it; but on foreign affairs Gordon Brown on the whole
24 didn't play much of a role. So he was hugely strong.

25 You can argue that I should have been more powerful

1 in arguing the case for Cabinet committees, but (a)
2 I didn't see a need for it on Iraq and (b), and this is
3 a whole separate issue, what are the arguments
4 you use to persuade someone who does not want a Cabinet
5 Committee to have a Cabinet Committee?

6 I can run through the arguments if you want. You
7 can argue you will get a better decision. Jonathan
8 Powell has given you a view on that. There's a nice
9 classic bit of Jonathan Powell where he says:

10 "The key thing is to have the right people there,
11 the people who need to be involved in the decision".

12 which, of course, implicitly rules out collective
13 discussion involving people who aren't immediately
14 involved in the decision. That
15 is one of the many passages that needs to be
16 seen through the prism.

17 He was very strong and he was in
18 a position to play this as he wished to play it.

19 Can I talk about the Cabinet Committee meetings --
20 the Cabinet meetings?

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The Cabinet meetings in March and April.

22 LORD WILSON: In March and April. There was one Cabinet
23 meeting of substance in my time in that period on Iraq.
24 That was the meeting on 23rd March³.

25 I was trying to think how

³ Secretariat footnote: It was in fact on 7 March 2002 – see p77 below.

1 to quantify for you the importance of this discussion. That
2 was a meeting that started at 10.30 and finished at
3 11.34. I made seven and a bit pages of notes of the discussion
4 and Iraq occupied six and a bit pages. So that gives
5 you I think -- I think that's not bad as a full
6 discussion without papers.

7 Robin Cook in his book "Point of Departure" says:
8 "A momentous event. A real discussion at Cabinet."

9 I have to say that was my reaction. I went away
10 feeling pretty pleased. I thought, "In my time as
11 Cabinet Secretary I have seen the Cabinet begin to play
12 its role as I think the Cabinet should play its role".

13 The mood of the meeting was -- I think there are two
14 things I could give you as an illustration. One is
15 Alastair Campbell's diaries, which are just very brief
16 on this, but quite interesting. I have unfortunately
17 not copied them down, but I think he says:

18 "Not quite divided, but concerned. Where is all
19 this going?"⁴

20 I think as a summary that's exactly what I would
21 say. They raised all sorts of issues, not political
22 issues particularly, issues about the legal position,
23 about whether military -- what would be involved in
24 military action, whether you could succeed, all sorts of
25 good -- about the United Nations, the importance of the

⁴ Witness's footnote: his actual words were: "Not exactly division, but a lot of concern, where is it going?"

1 United Nations, about the prior importance of the Middle
2 East Peace Process. All these things came up. I felt
3 quite proud of the Cabinet at that time for doing their
4 job.

5 The Prime Minister in his -- I can disclose this,
6 because it is in the books, though different people give
7 different accounts -- the Prime Minister finished the
8 meeting by saying, "The concerns expressed are
9 justified. The management hasn't gone crazy".

10 Now those are not the words of a man who has had
11 authority to proceed on a course which is likely to lead
12 to military action. It is about a Cabinet which has
13 expressed concern, which is -- they know -- another
14 point I would like to make. They know that force is
15 an essential ingredient in policy on Iraq.

16 It's a very odd thing. In 1998 one of my first
17 Cabinet meetings was on Iraq. They discussed Iraq. The
18 then Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, said
19 in essence things which are entirely recognisable four
20 or five years later. He said a serious situation is
21 building; we would be ready to use force if necessary,
22 because not being ready to use force would undermine our
23 leverage over Saddam Hussein; and thirdly, the United States
24 were clear they had legal authority to take action
25 whereas our legal advice was more nuanced. In other

1 words, those are things you could transpose from
2 January 1998 to March⁵. They are all there.

3 So the Cabinet knew that force was an essential
4 ingredient, and I think Robin Cook said that again, but
5 the message was -- they were worried
6 about the direction the US administration was going and
7 they wanted the Prime Minister to use his power and
8 influence to focus it on the United Nations, on getting
9 the inspectors back in and on giving Saddam Hussein
10 a real fright to get him to cooperate. They weren't
11 talking about military action. Indeed, the whole
12 flavour of this was, "Any decisions on this are a long
13 way away". So that was the discussion.

14 April 11th, the item on Iraq, it is not actually
15 an item on Iraq. It is an item on UK/US talks in
16 the minutes. So note that Iraq is only one subhead.
17 The discussion is mixed up with other topics. So it is
18 quite hard for me to tell you how
19 much is devoted to it. But just to give you a picture on
20 the meeting, my notes are four and a half pages long,
21 but you shouldn't take that as an indication of the
22 length of the meeting, because they also had political
23 discussions on the local government elections. So this
24 is only part of the meeting. But I think less than two
25 pages -- I would say about a page and a half, if you

⁵ Witness's footnote: March 2002

1 added all the lines up -- were on Iraq.

2 The flavour of it was that the Middle East and
3 the Arab world turmoil had dominated the discussion,
4 though we were left in no doubt by Crawford, and this is
5 the message I got, that the Americans wanted regime
6 change, which in a sense is not news. I think
7 Sir Roderic in another context, in a memoire for the
8 Churchill College archives, has said the Americans were popping
9 up in the '90s saying they wanted regime change. But
10 this was serious. This time they were really serious.

11 Four Cabinet Ministers⁶ spoke, and the Prime Minister
12 gave a report, which I think is fairly summarised,
13 which, if you read it, I think is skillfully touching on
14 the things that the Cabinet had been concerned about and
15 reassuring them that nothing was imminent and he was using
16 his influence to bring the American President in the
17 direction he wanted to go. Indeed, I think he may have been
18 congratulated by one Cabinet Minister on shifting American
19 thinking in the direction of the United States. That was
20 not, I would suggest to you, either a full discussion or --

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In the direction of the United Nations.

22 LORD WILSON: Sorry. What did I say?

23 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The direction of the United States.

24 LORD WILSON: The direction of the United Nations. That was
25 the point I wanted to make. It was a discussion, but it

⁶ Witness's footnote: Four Cabinet Ministers in addition to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence

1 was reassuring. I don't think anyone would have gone
2 away thinking they had authorised a course of action
3 likely to lead to military action.

4 There were three further meetings. Two I don't need
5 to spend time on. My notes are each three lines long.
6 They are about the United Nations' smart sanctions.
7 They are on 9th and 16th May. They are just reporting
8 progress and success and noting that the United
9 Nations -- sorry -- the Americans had got engaged in
10 getting it through.

11 The final item, which was on 20th June, was one
12 I looked out, because I remembered it, and it wasn't in
13 your material. I remembered it because it was
14 a slightly curious incident. It shows that the spirit
15 of challenge in the Cabinet was still alive, challenge
16 in the sense of questioning where we were.

17 There had been, and I don't know where, a press
18 report -- I think they said it was on the Today
19 Programme -- which indicated that troops were being
20 brought out of Afghanistan in preparation for military
21 action on Iraq.

22 The Prime Minister was asked by two Cabinet
23 Ministers, "We were not finding ourselves getting
24 involved in some strange military action by the United
25 States, were we? There is not something happening

1 here?"

2 The Prime Minister was absolutely taken aback. He
3 didn't know about the reports. He gave them reassurance.
4 They had a discussion about handling the press, what
5 line they should take, which I put in the minutes.

6 It is not a major item. It is just a tiny clue as
7 to the mood and indication this was not a period when
8 everyone was gung-ho. It was a period when people were
9 worried, concerned.

10 I go back to Alastair Campbell's words, "Not quite
11 divided, but concerned". You know, where was all this
12 going? I think that's where they were. If you had
13 asked me, I think that's what I would have said.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Martin?

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: No.

16 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Over to Sir Roderic.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I be clear about dates?

18 LORD WILSON: Oh!

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The real discussion Cabinet, as you
20 called it, quoting Robin Cook, is that 23rd March or
21 7th March?

22 LORD WILSON: Did I say 23rd?

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

24 LORD WILSON: 7th March. I apologise.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is 7th March?

2 LORD WILSON: 7th March.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: 11th April, as you say, is a subhead to

4 UK/US talks.

5 LORD WILSON: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is not really a discussion of that

7 kind, a substantive discussion of the policy.

8 LORD WILSON: No.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In May and June it crops up in the

10 context of Afghanistan⁷.

11 LORD WILSON: Exactly.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in the course of this year up to

13 September -- there's a discussion on 23rd September

14 after you have left office -- there's only one

15 substantive discussion about Iraq in Cabinet and that's

16 on 7th March?

17 LORD WILSON: Correct.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Right, but that's quite a big discussion.

19 It shows concern. You said earlier that in the first

20 half of 2002, if I heard you correctly, that Iraq had

21 more or less sort of disappeared out of sight because

22 there were all these other issues going on, India,

23 Pakistan, MEPP and on.

24 It had obviously not gone completely out of sight

25 because there is concern in Cabinet on 7th March. So it

⁷ Secretariat footnote: This is in fact true only of the June discussion – see p76 above

1 is around as a subject that is worrying Cabinet
2 Ministers and gets brought up.

3 LORD WILSON: Yes, that's correct, but more questioning
4 "What's going on? What's happening? What's up, Tony?"

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As we now know, by September the policy
6 has advanced a very, very long way in terms of military
7 planning, in terms of discussion with the Americans, of
8 preparing to go to the UN with a policy of trying to
9 coerce Saddam into accepting inspectors and disarming or
10 else.

11 Now if I can just look at this through a slightly
12 different prism, you are a Chairman of a bank and you
13 are a director of a pretty well-known company. Would
14 the board of any company, even one that had a very
15 strong Chairman or a very strong CEO, ever be asked to
16 take collective responsibility for a major strategic
17 decision without having been given a single board paper
18 or having had a single board discussion in a board
19 committee?

20 LORD WILSON: Absolutely not. If they did, there wouldn't
21 half be a row.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It would be in breach of all corporate
23 governance principles.

24 LORD WILSON: Oh, goodness knows! Yes. I am Chairman of
25 the Corporate Governance Committee on one of those and

1 I can tell you there would be a row.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You've discussed earlier the sort of
3 different ways of making decisions collectively. There
4 is an issue here not only of collective decision-making
5 but collective responsibility.

6 The Cabinet, like a board, was taking collective
7 responsible for this policy, which was developing, but
8 without the Cabinet having been informed except, as
9 Mr Blair told us the other day, through the newspapers
10 and it was kind of obvious from the public arena.

11 LORD WILSON: Your finger is absolutely on one of the
12 central and interesting points, if I may suggest it, of
13 your Inquiry, because what it demonstrates indeed is the
14 degree of loyalty that Mr Blair commanded in his
15 Cabinet, and it comes back to my point about Prime
16 Ministers are as strong as their Cabinets let them be.

17 It is very striking reading your evidence how loyal
18 the Cabinet Ministers from that time who
19 have given evidence to you have been. The view of how
20 a run a government that I have described to you wasn't
21 just confined to Number 10. It had support or at any
22 rate acceptance from around the government. They went
23 along with him.

24 This is a man who had won them
25 a fantastic election victory in 1997 and in 2001, and he

1 was a very powerful figure. They knew him extremely
2 well. They knew him and they knew Gordon Brown
3 extremely well. They read that relationship.

4 They brought into government a style of running
5 business that they had developed in opposition.

6 I remember saying at the time on a Michael Cockerell
7 programme, "To understand this government you have to
8 understand what went on in opposition", and that's what
9 I meant.

10 They had developed a style of
11 running the shadow government opposition, which they
12 brought into government and which they accepted. They
13 were and they are still hugely loyal, and they accepted
14 that the Prime Minister's role was to devise and
15 implement strategy. They had huge respect for the
16 miracles, the things he could do with the Americans and
17 others and they were content to let him have his head,
18 although they were sufficiently concerned to ask him
19 what he was up to, but that's how they worked.

20 The reason why Robin Cook wrote that and why I went
21 away feeling pleased was that I felt, to be honest,
22 really this is pretty much the first time they had
23 actually exerted themselves to ask him questions.
24 I thought this is the first stirrings of what I want,
25 which is a Cabinet collective discussion of

1 the kind which you have been describing.

2 Now why this?

3 John Prescott said this, and I think there are some
4 important insights in it, which is in the first Blair
5 government until 2001, very few
6 members of the government had ever been in government
7 before. There were, what -- I can't remember -- four or
8 five who had been in junior positions.

9 The rest of them,
10 say 114, had never been in power before. They
11 found themselves in government departments surrounded by
12 Sir Humphreys and they were learning the job. They
13 stuck to what they knew and they were very happy for
14 Blair and Brown to devise and drive through
15 strategy, impose strategy, and they were very happy to
16 cooperate with
17 that form of government.
18 I have never had this conversation,
19 because in a way I never want to go back to any of
20 this. But it would be really nice, interesting to know how
21 far this is the beginnings of more effective collective
22 government, but I have to say initially they were
23 climbing a very steep learning curve, including Mr Blair
24 and Mr Brown.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the period we are talking about is

1 not initial. Now it is five years on.

2 LORD WILSON: Yes, I am saying five years on they are
3 starting to flex their muscles, and John Prescott said
4 something to you to that effect slightly, I think you
5 will find.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were you at the Chequers meeting on
7 2nd April 2002?

8 LORD WILSON: No. When was it?

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: 2nd April 2002.

10 LORD WILSON: No, I wasn't.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was pre-Crawford.

12 LORD WILSON: Yes.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It wasn't minuted. It wasn't attended by
14 either the Foreign or Defence Secretaries but the Chief
15 of the Defence Staff and other important advisers were
16 there. Did you get an account of that meeting?

17 LORD WILSON: No.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No.

19 LORD WILSON: I don't think I knew it had happened to be
20 honest. I will tell you what I knew, which comes back
21 to the options paper.

22 Ever the optimist, I had rather hoped we would show the
23 options paper to the Prime Minister or to Number 10,
24 John Sawers, say, or David Manning, and get a meeting of
25 DOP on it. Forlorn hope. I asked after a while, and

1 I can't remember when, what had happened to it and I had
2 been told that it had been wrapped up in the briefing
3 for Crawford.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. That's certainly evidence we have
5 had from a number of quarters. Mr Blair told us in his
6 evidence last year, although he made similar points also
7 last week, but specifically about this he said:
8 "We did have a very structured debate with the
9 people", I think he was implying the key people, "the
10 fact that it happened at Chequers rather than Downing
11 Street I don't think is particularly relevant to it, but
12 I think the simple answer is did we consider those other
13 options? Absolutely."

14 Now you are saying you actually propose
15 a specific meeting at which the options would be
16 considered in a Cabinet Committee --

17 LORD WILSON: I would have said to someone like Tom McKane
18 "I hope we can get them to have a meeting to deal with
19 this".

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That never happened?

21 LORD WILSON: That never happened, no.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you are not aware that the options
23 were considered in any sort of structured way?

24 LORD WILSON: No.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You are clear that they were not or you

1 just don't know?

2 LORD WILSON: I do not know what the discussion

3 was that was structured. If Mr Blair says so, no doubt

4 it was but I don't know where or when.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have had trouble pinning that down.

6 Thank you. You can't enlighten us on that?

7 LORD WILSON: I am not aware of it.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think the final question from me. In

9 Mr Blair's written statement before his session with us

10 last Friday he said:

11 "I do not think there was a single suggestion as to

12 process or bureaucratic machinery put to me that I did

13 not agree to."

14 Now did you put suggestions of that kind to him?

15 LORD WILSON: I don't recall doing that because, as

16 I say, I got used to the way,

17 I had to come to terms with the way that Number 10 ran

18 its business. You have to choose the issues

19 on which you hold your ground.

20 Can I just give you an illustration I think from

21 that summer which is this, I have notes on it.

22 In that summer the committee -- what was the

23 committee? The ISC, the Intelligence and Security

24 Committee of the House of Commons or the government,

25 whatever it was, we knew were going to recommend that

1 a meeting of CSI should took place. CSI was the
2 Ministerial committee on intelligence -- that it should
3 take place to approve the requirements of the agencies.
4 This is something -- the requirements is something on which
5 you have had evidence from John Scarlett. It hadn't met
6 the previous year to approve requirements. The
7 committee wanted the committee to meet at least once to
8 look at the requirements. The Chairman of the
9 committee, Ann Taylor, took it up with me and I promised
10 that I would raise it with the Prime Minister, because
11 it seemed to me a good point. I should say that the
12 requirements were considered by the Permanent
13 Secretaries. I chaired a meeting on them and we then put
14 them forward to CSI.

15 I used a new tactic, which was that every
16 Monday morning meeting with the Prime Minister at the
17 end I would say to him just before I left, "Any chance
18 of a meeting with CSI?" I nagged really. He
19 would grin at me and we would go. Then the report came
20 out criticising the government for not having had a
21 meeting with CSI. This is all on the record. You can
22 find these in the government response. The Prime
23 Minister said "What is this about?" I said, "Remember
24 I used to remind you of this". He said, "Did you?"
25 Jonathan Powell, to be fair, gave a laugh and confirmed

1 that I had raised it regularly.

2 The point is that it was not something that he
3 particularly saw as important. He knew we had done our
4 job. He was going to do his job his way. There was
5 a Matthew Parris article early in my time as Cabinet
6 Secretary which I used to think was really insightful in
7 which he said "The boy won't be told". That's a very
8 important ingredient in the then Prime Minister's
9 character which you have to understand for your Inquiry.
10 He knew what he thought, he knew what he wanted and
11 his job was to devise a strategy. He took
12 full responsibility for it and his job was to drive it
13 through. So the answer is: I knew it was a forlorn hope
14 unless he could see a reason for it. There were all
15 sorts of reasons why he didn't like Cabinet Committees.
16 If I could just have 30 seconds on this.

17 They were very worried -- this comes out in John
18 Prescott's evidence -- about the 1970s. They had
19 a memory of the '70s when it had been the way in which
20 dissident people had obstructed business. So he saw it
21 as slowing down business and bringing in people who
22 might be difficult. He wanted meetings -- Jonathan
23 Powell said this in that bit I quoted -- of people who were
24 directly involved and implicitly on side. If
25 you have a Cabinet Committee meeting you may have all

1 sorts of people who are going to get in the way, who are
2 going to slow you down. So control over the meeting and
3 who is there and who writes the minutes matters.
4 Matthew Rycroft's minutes which you have not seen but are
5 on the internet of 23rd July, I think those conclusions
6 were added later. They were not flowing from
7 the meeting. I think they were Number 10 saying, having
8 thought about the meeting, this is what we want.
9 However, that's reconstruction.

10 They were hugely worried about leaks. It saddens me
11 to say that the day after 7th March meeting reports of
12 that meeting appeared in virtually every newspaper, were
13 in the press, which caused huge ructions. It was
14 a setback. It is deeply frustrating when you are trying
15 to nurture a little plant to find someone has trodden
16 on it. It was really very frustrating. It instantly
17 appeared in every newspaper, not very accurately --
18 that's not the point -- but it did appear.

19 They felt that Cabinet committees got in the way of
20 media handling. If you could have a little group
21 without much notice and then just discuss it and then
22 Alistair could go off brief the lobby: that is better
23 than going through the bureaucracy of Richard Wilson, agendas
24 and papers and so on. These are all arguments which I think
25 were very active in their minds. Sorry.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So just to conclude on that, the effect
2 of this was the Cabinet Ministers sharing collective
3 responsibility were left flying blind and you, as it
4 were, the Company Secretary to the Cabinet had had to
5 accept this way of doing business and there really
6 wasn't any point in you going to the Chairman and saying
7 "Hang on. This really isn't the right way to do it.
8 You have to give these people information and bring them
9 into the decision. You owe it to them and actually if
10 they have a chance to critique the policy, yes, they
11 might be obstructive, but they might be raising serious
12 questions that need to be looked at". There was no in
13 you going and giving that advice to the Prime Minister
14 and you didn't do so.

15 LORD WILSON: Well, I didn't do so. I have to say to you at
16 the time I wouldn't have thought it was an issue which
17 deserved it. You have to choose your issues. I didn't
18 think that was an issue on which I should stamp my foot.
19 I was stamping my foot at that time on my successor and
20 on my lecture, call for a Civil Service Bill. Frankly
21 meeting on a subject which was in hand but was the
22 subject of interminable toings and froings of
23 a diplomatic kind between London and Washington, but no
24 sign of anything actually being decided, no real issues,
25 it was about influencing the administration, I didn't

1 see that as an issue of the kind I should be stamping my
2 foot on.

3 There is a sobering point for me and a rather humbling
4 point on this, which is quite clear. I didn't know what
5 was going on enough. Reading some of these papers
6 I think; what else did I not know? That's humbling and
7 I admit it to you. In terms of my knowledge at the time
8 this was not a top issue. If I had had a top
9 issue on overseas for DOP, it would have been on Pakistan or
10 the Middle East Peace Process.

11 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Turning to a different topic, if we may,
12 I will ask Baroness Prashar to pick up the questions.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: A couple of brief questions on the
14 planning for the aftermath. Judging on what you said
15 there would have been --

16 LORD WILSON: What aftermath? Aftermath of what?

17 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Exactly, and give a description of
18 the meeting of 7th March. This was not raised by
19 anybody?

20 LORD WILSON: On the meeting of 7th March, when the Prime
21 Minister started reporting where things stood he began
22 by saying the Americans -- he was talking about bombing.
23 I think all the discussion which
24 I mentioned to you, the brief references⁸ were about
25 bombing. Everyone had a memory of bombing Iraq.

⁸ Witness's footnote: in November 2001

1 He used the word "bombing".

2 We were a long way from option 3, military
3 options for a ground invasion, in terms of that
4 discussion.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So that wasn't on anybody's radar --

6 LORD WILSON: The aftermath of it was not on the agenda
7 really. Although I remember one document and I can't
8 find it, and it may be I have invented the memory, from
9 before 9/11, which did refer to the danger of any
10 action -- it must have been after the administration
11 came in -- danger of any action collapsing into internal
12 turmoil. But no-one has found it, so maybe I have
13 invented it.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Just for sake of argument, if there
15 had been discussion would the planning have been by the
16 Cabinet Office or who would have been involved in the
17 aftermath planning?

18 LORD WILSON: The Cabinet Office would not have done the
19 planning itself because the Cabinet Office
20 is a machine for ensuring coordinated work by
21 departments. It doesn't do the work itself. The job of
22 the Cabinet Office would be to say "Here is an issue
23 which we need to give advice to Ministers on"; to
24 consult Number 10 -- I used to consult
25 Number 10 when I did things for Mrs Thatcher -- and to

1 check whether they had any particular angle the Prime
2 Minister would be interested in; and then to go away to
3 departments A, B, C and D and say to them "We need to
4 produce a paper on this. I am going to have a meeting
5 and let's do so". We would come up with a structure on
6 it, discuss the structure and then send people away to do bits
7 of it. We may have polished the final bits because departments
8 didn't always draft well, and the Cabinet Office would pull it
9 together perhaps; but they wouldn't do the work.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This would not have been so much
11 about advice as implementation?

12 LORD WILSON: But they still wouldn't do the work.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: They would have tasked the
14 departments to do the planning and implementation?

15 LORD WILSON: Yes, aftermath. Whatever the relevant
16 departments were should have been doing the work on
17 aftermath. The Cabinet Office is a small, excellent
18 little institution in my mind whose job is to ensure that
19 Whitehall is performing excellently for Ministers
20 collectively, that it does the work on time or
21 preferably ahead of time and make sure they have the
22 papers on which they can justifiably take a decision. It may
23 pull the papers together and have the departmental work as
24 an annexe, because some times you have lots -- it is not
25 their job to do the work.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Who within the Cabinet Office would
2 have had that responsibility given the fact the two jobs
3 merged on implementation, who from your point of view
4 would have been responsible?

5 LORD WILSON: On the aftermath?

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

7 LORD WILSON: That is Tom McKane. I would go to Tom McKane
8 on that, the OD Secretariat or talk to David Manning. I
9 would say to David "We really ought to be doing some
10 work on this".

11 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So Tom McKane or David Manning?

12 LORD WILSON: Yes, that's the Secretariat, for me.

13 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In a moment I will give you
14 an opportunity to give us any reflections that have not
15 come out already. Before I do I will ask my colleagues
16 if they have any further questions.

17 I have one, which picks up a theme which has run
18 right through this morning. After the substantive
19 Cabinet discussion, though not with papers, on 7th March
20 2002, you said then that the concerns was a way of
21 expressing the mood and mind of Ministers at that
22 meeting.

23 Is there any rise in the level of concern not in
24 formal meetings but in your sense of the political
25 weather through till the time you left at the beginning

1 of September, given that the risks attaching to the
2 things under discussion towards Iraq were clearly
3 mounting? With hindsight it is easier to say that the
4 risks were political in the largest sense, the fate of
5 the government, of the Prime Minister. The risks were
6 legal, very much so. The risks were military.

7 Was there no increase in awareness among the Cabinet
8 through that period of these risks?

9 LORD WILSON: I think the answer is no, because if there had
10 been I think someone would have raised it more strongly
11 than happened on 20th June, and the 20th June incident
12 is important to me because it kind of calibrates where
13 they were and the degree to which they knew what was
14 going on or didn't know what was going on, that they
15 were asking questions on the basis of a press report.
16 They were concerned. They really didn't know.
17 I honestly cannot now truthfully tell you. If one of my
18 Permanent Secretaries had come to me and spoken as you
19 have just done I would have been pulled up short and
20 I would have thought "Hold on. I wonder if he is right.
21 I wonder if we had better be doing something about
22 this". If I had thought it right I would have done it.

23 I used to have a weekly meeting with John Kerr and
24 then with Michael Jay on other things, because Michael
25 was wrestling with issues about resources at the time.

1 You know, there were other issues around. I don't feel
2 that until I went to the meeting on
3 23rd July I had registered where this was.
4 This was a meeting I decided I would go to because I was
5 going to, as it were, assert my right to go to meetings.
6 I think there were other
7 meetings. I remember in June finding out there had been
8 a meeting at which Ministers had been
9 present, making it clear I wished to be at meetings at
10 which Ministers were present. I didn't register that it
11 was as serious as it was is the truth.

12 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. So an opportunity for further
13 reflections.

14 LORD WILSON: Can I just give you some reflections? I would
15 just come back to the George Jones aphorism: Prime
16 Ministers are only as strong as their Cabinets let them
17 be. If they let them be, they are extremely strong.
18 Mr Blair was most probably one of the most powerful
19 Prime Ministers we have ever had, in terms of his
20 potential when he used it, and this is how he chose to
21 use it.

22 I'd like to go back to what Sir Roderic said, which
23 is very much my own thinking about governance. I have
24 been thinking to myself there is a deep irony -- I used
25 to think this after I left the Civil Service -- that the

1 Blair government, which imposed rigorous or pretty
2 rigorous standards of governance on companies in the
3 Higgs Report and other codes, was itself so
4 non-compliant. I put it bluntly because it did
5 seem to me a deep irony. There's a real
6 question as to how -- and I go over this -- how if you
7 had your time again you'd do it differently.

8 One thing I would just like to suggest to you as
9 a proposal is this. One of the things with
10 a private sector company you have to do is go around
11 members of the board every year and ask them privately
12 and anonymously for their views on how the board is
13 working, whether they are getting the papers they want,
14 whether the presentations are right, whether they are
15 happy with the Chairman's style. I am
16 talking about real life here. These are things which
17 I do. All sorts of questions, a questionnaire
18 of about three sides long checking their views.

19 You find even in a really well run company, which
20 I think has got good governance, you find that members
21 of the board have all sorts of thoughts about how they
22 think the board could be improved.

23 They will say "I think it would be very good if at the
24 end of the meeting each time we could have an item of
25 this sort"; or "we don't actually have

1 a regular spreadsheet of this kind and this kind of
2 information". I think it would not be a bad idea if the
3 Cabinet Secretary -- and if this were to be
4 institutionalised so that Prime Ministers could not
5 overrule it -- if the Cabinet Secretary was charged with
6 going round Cabinet Ministers asking them their views on
7 the running of the Cabinet, whether they were happy and
8 whether they had ideas for improvements. That's my main
9 thought for you.

10 I have two other thoughts which are less important.
11 One of the things that struck me when I was in my job
12 was how much the Civil Service corporate memory had been
13 depleted, in the mid '90s particularly but in the years
14 before me. I would look around and say "Where are the
15 people who remember how things should be done," and
16 there were precious few for my purposes. I know the
17 Civil Service is going through redundancies at the
18 moment. I just hope that they are not cutting back
19 further on corporate memory, because one of the great
20 strengths of the service, which is not a fashionable
21 view but it is one I hold to strongly, is that it has
22 a corporate memory of best practice in running
23 governments.

24 Jonathan Powell has said he thinks all this
25 complaint about Cabinet committees is the death rattle

1 of old mandarins. I think it is the knock, knock, knock
2 of modern governance on the door of government.

3 I suppose that's really what I wanted to say.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Lord Wilson, we are grateful to you for
5 your evidence this morning. Thank you and thank those
6 who have been in the room this morning.

7 I will close this session now and we will restart at
8 2 o'clock this afternoon, when we shall be taking
9 evidence from Lord Turnbull, who was Lord Wilson's
10 successor as Cabinet Secretary. Thank you.

11 LORD WILSON: Thank you very much.

12 (12.30 pm)

13 (Hearing adjourned)

14 --ooOoo--

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25