

Ms Margaret Aldred
Secretary to the Inquiry
The Iraq Inquiry
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Dear Ms Aldred,

Thank you for your letter of 4 June 2010.

In it you asked me for further information about some of my comments which were reported in a recent newspaper article. I hope this letter will be helpful in providing you with the explanation you seek.

The events in question took place on 13 March 2003 and to the best of my recollection were as follows.

In my then role as chief economic adviser I had gone from my office at the Treasury to No 11 Downing Street for a meeting on an economic matter with the Chancellor, Gordon Brown. I believe the meeting was to be about the Euro. However, when I arrived I found that another, impromptu meeting was about to begin in the living room in No 11 Downing Street between Gordon Brown, Alastair Campbell and Pat McFadden, (who were then both No 10 advisers). I stayed, in the expectation that the meeting to which I had been invited would shortly follow.

The purpose of the impromptu meeting was, it became clear, to help prepare Gordon Brown for some media interviews he was soon to give about the UK government's efforts to obtain a second UN Resolution, and the difficulties posed to this by the stance being taken by France. The discussion was about what he should say and how precisely he should say it – which exact 'lines he should take' in response to anticipated questions from journalists.

For the sake of clarity I should emphasise that this impromptu meeting was about how Gordon Brown should best present decisions the Government had already taken to the media, not about the nature of those decisions themselves, nor about any of the policy issues they might raise.

Much later in the day I saw Gordon Brown in the Treasury and it was then that I remarked to him that while I understood why the Government had decided to emphasise the role of France when talking about the difficulties of obtaining a second resolution – as had been obvious to me at the impromptu meeting - I thought this approach was ill-advised, since France was then and remains now such a key ally.

I believe this was the only occasion when I was party to any Government discussions concerning the events which the Iraq Inquiry is examining, other than

Iraq being mentioned in wider discussions on public spending which I was part of in my role as chief economic adviser.

If you would like me to put the contents of this letter into a statement format or if I can help the Inquiry in any other way please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Balls MP