

Wednesday, 23 June 2010

SIMON WEBB

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's start. The witness this morning is Simon Webb.

Simon, thank you for coming to see us in private today. It's a long time since we were together in November. We have seen a huge array of witnesses and taken much evidence in public and private since.

Unlike the other occasion, this session is being held in private because we recognise much of the evidence on the areas we want to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in our Protocol on Sensitive Information -- for example, on grounds of international relations or because it relates to secret intelligence. In particular, we want to use this session to explore issues covered by classified documents.

We will apply the Protocol between the Inquiry and HMG regarding Documents and Other Written and Electronic Information in considering whether and how evidence given in relation to classified documents and/or sensitive matters more widely can be drawn on and explained in public, either in the Inquiry Report or, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.

If other evidence is given during this hearing which neither relates to classified documents nor engages any of the categories set out in the Protocol, that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures in our letter.

We recognise witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events. We cross-check what we hear against the papers.

I remind every witness on every occasion that they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given is truthful, fair and accurate.

For security reasons, we will not be releasing copies of the transcript outside the Inquiry's offices. So if you could, at your convenience, review them here upstairs.

With that out of the way, let's turn to the questions.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could start in the pre-9/11 period.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Before the Bush Axis of Evil speech, had any discussions taken place across Whitehall or within the MOD about the possibility that we might be faced with joining military action against Iraq at some point in the future?

SIMON WEBB: I think it's useful to distinguish the fact that we were already, of course, engaged in military operations in Iraq through the No Fly Zone, and there were associated with those operations quite a lot of contingency plans about what happened if Saddam was to launch a surprise attack, which he had done once before and threatened to do so on other occasions.

So to that extent there was a live military operation running, with the usual range of contingency planning against future options and so on. So that's one side of it.

The other side was that there was clearly a policy debate starting to break out in Washington. I say starting because, of course, Afghanistan was the principal preoccupation. But nonetheless there were some threads in Washington which led to debate going on there.

I think the principal of those was something I mentioned in my first open evidence, which was this sense of being no longer ready to wait for threats to materialise, an increasing concern about the creeping tide of WMD, and of course in the closed circle which saw the most secret intelligence, there was a very great concern about the AQ network and that issue. Particularly nuclear, but also biological warfare, which strangely came into

profile in Washington after the anthrax letters, because while no link was actually sensibly made between Saddam and the 9/11 attack, actually there was a question for a while about where the biological agents could have come from, and Saddam came back into the frame actually at that point. I think I saw Christopher Meyer bring that out. It's not always remembered.

There was a strong sense coming out of those two factors of wanting to send a message of at least deterrence to states contemplating supporting or supplying Al Qaeda, UBL in particular having been thought to have tried to get hold of some nuclear materials.

There was also a dissatisfaction with the containment policy, which we had been debating for most of that year, as manifested in the No Fly Zones.

So yes, there certainly was a sense of people in Washington wondering what to do about Iraq. We picked up sort of sporadic indications of this, some of the replanning going on at CentCom we heard about. We knew there was a debate. The embassy reported and we had picked it up from our own contacts.

But then President Bush was quite reasonably emphatic about taking one thing at a time. The message from the White House for a while seemed to be, right up to Christmas, I would have said, "We are doing Afghanistan now". And of course we were enormously busy. We were leading on the deployment of ISAF in Kabul and trying to make sure that operation was sensibly designed, and to bring a big coalition with us on that. We were starting to plan for our other further operation, Op JACANA, where we sent a war fighting brigade into Afghanistan in the spring. We wanted to make sure that went and came back. So it was not surprising.

So I think the conversations that there were with the Pentagon about Iraq were not, if you like, very conclusive. We were aware something was on the agenda, but it wasn't very

conclusive.

I should say at this point that there's one or two bits of the record which we haven't been able to find, despite hard work by the Ministry of Defence. There's one or two records of, for example, the discussion we had with Secretary Rumsfeld in the margins of the NATO ministerial in December 2001, which I was there for. It must be there around somewhere, but we haven't been able to find that. And I just can't remember. I have this general impression of where we were, which I have tried to describe, but I can't remember whether we had specific exchanges on that.

But I think the tempo really started to pick up, as I reflected before, after Christmas, when obviously they were heading towards a major speech which was, I think, very much White House-generated, the Axis of Evil speech, particularly that phrase. Then what I considered to be in the first really substantive exchange I had at a serious policy level with Douglas J Feith on 13 February, which I think you have seen the note of, both as part of an informal quad, as they call it, four countries, and also then a bilateral talk between himself and myself.

So a swirling debate, rather held back by the President's rather sensible view to concentrate on one thing at a time, but starting to gain momentum from January, and then very much so in February.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have your detailed and very thorough analysis of what the Axis of Evil speech might mean for the UK. To what extent did your earlier discussions with Feith influence this?

SIMON WEBB: In two ways really. One was I could see something serious was afoot here, and it was interesting that I got it from

Feith one day, and David Manning had a similar conversation with Condi Rice the next day. So that's the test in Washington. All sorts of individuals have their viewpoints, but when two of them say the same thing, particularly those particular people, close together, then something is happening.

So they were certainly looking at the options. They were doing it in a thorough and wide-ranging way. They certainly weren't in any way near assuming that it was a -- but that option started to come into focus.

So I thought we should take a view on it as a department. That's what you do in the policy world.

There's two reasons for doing that. One is otherwise events might pass you by, and then when I heard the Prime Minister was going to Crawford, I thought if we have got anything to say, we had better get it said before he goes, and so we'll tell our ministers our best shot collectively in the MOD, and we sort of rounded up our views, and then have a talk with Mr Hoon, and then he can -- if he wants to say something to the Prime Minister, he can, which he did.

The MOD desperately also needs wider context at this stage, because the armed forces are going to be much happier when they have got these sorts of issues set in the broadest context that you can manage to lay it out.

The other thing which is very important, even at that very early stage, is the second thing that occurs to the Policy Director of the MOD in that era was: is there any kind of proposition forming here? And the next was: and where on earth would we find the troops to make a contribution to it if we had to? And it triggered off a separate kind of bit of work which was also in train, which was to draw down some other commitments, which takes a long time, but you need to start on that almost before you know you might have another one.

In this case, we were sort of getting into it already, but we had a review of the Balkans. We had two logistic chains in the Balkans, one running into the north, into Bosnia Herzegovina, and one running up from the south, through Macedonia and into Kosovo, and that was the shortage area, was logistics. So we said we are going to have to get out of one of these.

So we held a rather private review, and the trick here is not to let this become a major issue because otherwise people will polarise. But we in the end made a choice for Bosnia, and to try and shunt that into an EU operation and reduce our liabilities in that direction, and to get out of Kosovo pretty much, barring a token presence of a few hundred people, specialists, which was, if you think about it, quite quick really because we had taken an armoured division there under three years before, and we had led into Kosovo, and we had the leading role intellectually on the campaign and so on. Now we had got down to a brigade, and then we were going to go out in under three years, and that seemed to me what I was paid to do.

I also got a bit lucky on Northern Ireland because there were a number of battalions which were held at the discretion of the GOC Northern Ireland and, after some very helpful work by the Northern Ireland Office, we managed to get them off the Northern Ireland roster. There's a sort of -- someone else could probably explain this better than I can, but anyway, it meant that we didn't have to assume that was a commitment we also had. So that actually freed up some resources.

We also managed to make sure we got out of Macedonia.

So strangely enough, that's one of the things you do.

The other thing which I would mention, because I think I may have been part of the cause of some confusion here, is to talk to the commanders in chief if you think there's anything new in prospect.

As it happens, they had a very useful conference every spring, where the commanders in chief, army and air, met in Germany, and the Foreign Office was there, and we went round these sort of things. We were invited to sort of give our best shot of what might be coming up, and I remember saying that I thought there was a chance we would have to find at least an armoured brigade for a deliberate intervention within the year. I think the Foreign Office rather disagreed, but the commanders in chief wrote in their notebooks, and went and no doubt reported, "Usual chaos in Whitehall, but this is what I heard". But I wouldn't have been surprised if anybody had changed -- they might well have changed their training schedules and thought about the commanders and things like that, just because that's what they do.

So there's two ends to it. What's our take on this? As a department of state we should have a view, help our ministers take a view, and then we should think about what we would do if it started to materialise, before you get anywhere near a decision on what it might be. And it is odd that you have to do that, but that's the nature of the job.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: On one more point of thinking at this time, in your discussions with Feith in February he stressed to you the deterrent effect of both Afghanistan and potentially Iraq.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And I wondered where deterrents came in your thinking in regard to the benefits it would have far wider than Iraq specifically.

SIMON WEBB: I thought he had a point, and it coincided with our concerns about the creeping tide, which I talked a lot to a previous inquiry about, that we needed to stop this spread of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear, somewhere

because it was liable to become a string of countries [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], with some nuclear capability. And so to deter potential leaders from thinking they had a free run -- my concern is that you could be getting a nuclear weapons capability, and really nobody is going to do anything other than moan from the United Nations. Therefore I did think there was a deterrent point there, about saying if you push your luck too far, somebody may turn up and stop you.

So I bought some of that argument. He put it in. In rather starker terms than I would have done, but in that sense I bought into it, and I think I've reflected a little bit of that in what I wrote.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes, indeed. Thank you very much.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just on that creeping tide, did you see Iraq as posing, through its nuclear ambitions, a direct threat to the UK?

SIMON WEBB: Not proximately. I mean, they were still -- they still had the people. We did quite a lot of exploration about what that might mean, and how it could materialise if they got hold of fissile material and so on.

But the point about Iraq for me was not so much that, but a comment actually made to me by my arms control unit, which was to say if you can't deal with Iraq, how are you going to confront anybody else? How are you going to go to Iran and say, "We would like you to stop". They would say, "Well, you don't seem to be doing anything about our neighbour, Iraq, who has got this string of UN resolutions which have not been enforced against them. Why are coming round here to tell us to stop doing things?"

So the credibility of action in the nuclear sphere was dependent on making sure that the Iraq issue had been engaged, and that it had been seen to be engaged.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But when you said in your minute to the Defence Secretary after Crawford of 12 April that "in the long term countries like Iraq and Iran are on course to threaten Europe and the UK direct", on what were you basing that? Or were you just taking a very, very long view of long term? Was it just a hypothetical statement?

SIMON WEBB: Well, it was not hypothetical about Iran, because they had a ballistic missiles programme.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But Iraq. This was about Iraq.

SIMON WEBB: I thought Iraq -- if the sanctions regime and containment regime had eroded, and of course in some ways there was -- as we discussed in the open session, there was a loss of momentum on that -- that Iraq would indeed have returned to both getting hold of nuclear weapons and longer range missiles, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the evidence that you had available to you at the time, did that really justify a statement that Iraq was on course to threaten the UK direct?

SIMON WEBB: In the sense of ambition, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Right.

SIMON WEBB: And fading containment.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: After Crawford --

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, just to interrupt. UK was in your mind the homeland, or in addition Cyprus bases?

SIMON WEBB: It could have been Cyprus bases, or it could have been deployed forces which were going to come in and engage Iraq. So it could have --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If you say "Europe and the UK", it sort of implies you are talking about the British homeland, not Cyprus.

But after Crawford and the Prime Minister's Union College Station speech immediately following his meeting with President Bush, what did you interpret the Government's prime objective with regard to Iraq to be?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I went off and worked with the Foreign Office to try and write down some strategic objectives, because the next thing that happens when there's any talk of any kind of military option is the military can't move until they get a grand strategic objective. So I got down to work with the Foreign Office, Peter Ricketts.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's come on to that in a minute. Before you got down to work with the Foreign Office, you wrote a detailed analysis of the situation for the Secretary of State, your Secretary of State, just an internal paper, on 12 April.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And I think you've got that in your documents.

SIMON WEBB: I have, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Under the heading of "Iraq" in paragraph 4, you might like to refresh your memory of what you thought the Crawford speech and the Union College Station speech said about our policy. I'm looking at the sentence that reads:

"The Prime Minister's speech in Texas contained a commitment to regime change (if necessary and justified). Commitment on timing has been avoided."

So that was your interpretation of what the Government's overriding objective with regard to Iraq was at this stage?

SIMON WEBB: That's what the Prime Minister had said in his speech, which is not quite the same. There's a process of settling down more specific interpretations of what policy is than a speech after a meeting.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You will have heard in his public evidence he gave a slightly different interpretation to this. It's interesting, therefore, that your interpretation of what he said is as clear as this, and I'm not saying it's an unfair interpretation.

You go on to argue in paragraph 9 of the minute that:

"To achieve a successful regime change, the UK would need to be actively involved. One might also argue that the Prime Minister has effectively committed us."

So you, as the Policy Director in MOD, were interpreting -- this is a question -- were you interpreting this speech as meaning the Prime Minister had effectively committed us to take part in a policy of regime change in Iraq?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I was having a discussion with my Secretary of State, and I thought it was possible -- it was not -- you know, there was quite a lot of discussion about this point in public and around Whitehall. So I thought I would try it out on my Secretary of State by saying it might be argued, which was an invitation for him to tell me if he knew or could find out what the position was.

This was commissioned as a think piece. But what my duty is to say to my Secretary of State, you need -- we need to have a feel for whether the Prime Minister has committed us here, because it affects what we do next.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So do you flush out his view?

SIMON WEBB: Not explicitly on that point, but we did subsequently -- we did two things really. One was to commission a lot of work on options, and also to get in train to try and get into planning with the US. So we certainly got a decent response from the Secretary of State, which is also, I think, in the pack somewhere.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, it's been put in.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So did you think at this stage that ministers had discussed and agreed on this broad objective of regime change with the UK taking part in Iraq? Had we reached that stage of policy formation?

SIMON WEBB: No.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No?

SIMON WEBB: We were in the stage of being worried about the WMD, of thinking then that you probably would need to remove Saddam to deal with the WMD threat in Iraq, and that ministers were interested in engaging these issues, and they had a serious talk with the Americans, and now they wanted some options.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the Prime Minister's public commitment had come ahead of a ministerial decision?

SIMON WEBB: Well, "if necessary and justified" is a massive qualification. It's not a decision. It's not even a commitment. "If necessary and justified" --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although you said he had effectively committed us?

SIMON WEBB: That's why I separated them out in the piece. I reported what he seemed to have said, and then I said, "Tell me a bit, O Ministers, if I have not got this right".

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. So you went to the Secretary of State, and then, as you say, you went into discussion with the Foreign Office to refine the objectives. Could you tell us about that discussion and where you ended up?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I can't remember quite how we did it. I think we met and went through it. We wrote up some text on this early on, which was about -- have you got this?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think, yes. You want to look at the letter of 3 May from Peter Ricketts to you.

THE CHAIRMAN: And oversight.

SIMON WEBB: That's it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And then there was a response from you to Peter Ricketts on 10 May.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Those, I think, with the key bits of correspondence. They are quite short and clear.

SIMON WEBB: That's right. So we were nearly clear by the beginning of May, but there was a point that Mr Hoon had raised, and which had actually been a little bit in some of -- we've already touched on it, which went a bit like this: are we sure we want to take away all the WMD, particularly chemical, from Iraq, given that they would then be sitting next to their powerful neighbour, and that stability in that region has customarily had as a feature a balance between Iran and Iraq, which of course they had slogged out in a long war?

So Mr Hoon had raised that question, and I thought it was a decent question, and at first the Foreign Office sort of were halfway with that.

I then went off -- the next thing you do -- they put it to the Foreign Secretary. So we felt we were well forward now, and we were particularly clear that regime change was not one of the UK's objectives in its own right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you say "we were particularly clear"?

SIMON WEBB: Ricketts and I were clear.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, Ricketts' letter says the Foreign Secretary was strongly against any specific reference to regime

change.

SIMON WEBB: That will do.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was his view. Was that his departmental view or was this also your view? Because it doesn't exactly sit with the minute that you wrote after Crawford. In fact, it takes exactly the opposite position.

SIMON WEBB: That's why you go through a process of clarification with your ministers. You write a think piece, which is intended to flush out these issues, and then you put the hard points to ministers and get some decent guidance.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. You're negotiating with ministers through officials.

At the end of your post-Crawford minute, you say, interestingly, that:

"The FCO are content for activity to be centred on MOD, to preserve the best prospect for dialogue with the US DOD."

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, here is the Foreign Secretary saying he is strongly against regime change. Here are you saying that you interpret the Prime Minister's remarks as committing us to regime change. Does this mean the Foreign Office are adopting a duplicitous policy of saying, "MOD, you can go ahead and negotiate with the Americans because that's the view you take on this, but we don't want to dirty our fingers with it because the Foreign Secretary can't accept specific reference to regime change"?

SIMON WEBB: I continue to dissent from the first part of that introduction, if I may say so. I don't think I was saying that. "If necessary and justified" is a massive qualification.

But to get on to your point, no. I think the Foreign

Office -- I think we had a very close relationship with the Foreign Office about this. I think it went something like this. You probably remember in the oral session Peter Ricketts saying that the centre of gravity in Washington shifts about. And it was pretty clear -- and they are practical diplomats -- that it had gone into the Pentagon.

In reality the MOD was the people the Pentagon were most likely to talk to. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They weren't going to talk a lot to somebody else's Foreign Office, to be blunt.

So the best solution we had, therefore, was to set up our dialogue with the United States at this level, below the White House level, as it were, where there were very strong links between David Manning and Condi Rice, centred on the MOD, and presented or fronted, if you like -- that's a better way of putting it -- to the Americans through the MOD.

So that was why we formed a group which Tony Pigott chaired and I was on, and which Peter Ricketts and others came to, and where we worked on these sort of issues about the shape of the options. And I had some of the discussions with the Pentagon about them.

So I don't think they were being duplicitous. The Foreign Office were obviously always clear, as we all were, that we would prefer a negotiated solution. But it just meant -- the practicality meant it was going to be better to talk to where the centre of this level of planning was in Washington through MOD. So that was why we centred it on MOD.

I don't think you will find gaps on policy issues like this -- you know, Peter and I had a correspondence. I felt myself to have direction from the Foreign Secretary, and I then went off and negotiated with Doug Feith.

As it happened, it turned out two things came out. You have

seen the record of that discussion. Two things came out of it really. One is once you get into the level of military planning, it doesn't make a big difference whether your policy is to remove WMD, and that means Saddam has to go, or whether you are going to change the regime and take the opportunity to remove WMD.

I think in terms -- I don't think Tony Pigott, who was, as I think he told you -- he didn't really see that this, when you got down to it, added up to a lot of difference. So it's very, very important in legal and policy terms, but it didn't affect the military planning enormously.

So we managed to get to a resolution with the US on that, even though we somewhat we disagreed about the order in which you said these things. And then we argued out this point about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction to balance Iran, where the Pentagon were very strongly against that, and argued that you needed a clean policy on WMD removal.

One of the reasons I was nervous about it was it seemed to me liable -- and this is again the thing you fret about as a British Policy Director -- liable to leave us with a residual security guarantee on Iraq. That was the risk, that you would have to somehow guarantee Iraq's security against Iran, and that was certainly back to the -- I had been in the 1976 defence review, when we had got out of all of that, and I didn't want to get us back into it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is that the situation we are now back in?

SIMON WEBB: I don't think so.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That we have an Iran with an active nuclear programme of great concern to us, sitting next door to an Iraq that doesn't have --

SIMON WEBB: I think we have done the right thing, which is to

engage Iran direct, rather than to give a security guarantee to Iraq. But there's undoubtedly something in there, and this is very important in terms of some of the things that happened subsequently about the size of the Iraqi armed forces because once you take that view -- all these choices about strategic objectives -- I don't want to bang on about it, but they have enormous consequences for military planning subsequently because it immediately tells you you need to have a large Iraqi armed forces. And that takes you into a question about: how do you have a large Iraqi armed forces which doesn't take over the government again? And so -- and de-Ba'athification.

So lots of things flow from these discussions. But that was where we ended up, and it seemed, by the end of May, the Foreign Office had sort of come back in and thought they agreed too that we should take away all WMD, and we changed the wording to "all its obligations", I think it is, in order to reflect that point.

So we got to closure on round 1 of the objectives at that stage. That was enough. Ministers didn't need to decide whether they were going to do anything, but that was enough for us to then embark on some sensible planning, and we were aligned enough with the US -- we were in complete alignment. Their language was different, but we were in alignment.

Of course, later in the year, we then introduced the additional objective about representative government. And that both, in a way, clinched implicitly the point about regime change if you went in to remove the WMD, but also had huge implications for the nature of the military engagement after the initial invasion, because once you say -- once you write -- to be honest, I had been studiously avoiding writing down an objective about governance because I didn't want to be pinned to anything, regime change or anything else, by the objectives at an early stage, and because I knew that in terms of forces -- and we will get back to

this, I'm sure, when we talk about scale of the British contribution, which it also affected, the choice of what scale you went in on -- if you are going to go in to foster -- if you manage to get away from democracy, back to representative government, that has an enormous impact. If you are shutting down the option of picking a military strong man, which you will have seen discussed in the paper -- if you shut that option off, it affects your military campaign planning quite substantively.

But by the end of May, fair to say, I thought we had got to a position on objectives which allowed us to do the work without in any way committing the Government on whether they wanted to proceed with this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You say we had got to the point where we were aligned with the United States. Now, through MOD's very close contacts with the American military, a sort of privileged relationship, to what extent were we aware at this stage of how far American military planning for action in Iraq was advanced?

SIMON WEBB: Well, we knew that it must have gone quite a long way, because if the Under Secretary for Policy tells you he's got options under development, there's a colossal amount of work behind that. That's what it means. You have a huge machine and they would automatically have turned over droves of people to be working on this when he said that.

So I knew from that moment on there was a lot of work going on. We also knew -- we had people at CentCom and, as I say, we were already in an operation with them. So we knew there was an awful lot going on.

What I knew, which is why I recommended for Crawford, that didn't make it, that we should get access to what they were doing at that stage, but we didn't manage that for another few months, was that we needed to get in and have a proper discussion on what

they were up to.

That was particularly important because I knew that there were proponents of what they sometimes called a rolling start, which was that if Saddam had done something provocative, that they would have rolled straight in and, if you like, pushed that back and keep going. I knew that option was around, and I couldn't see how we were to play in that. You will have seen, even in Mr Hoon's note, I think before Crawford, we talked about the difficulties for us of 90-day response times and so on.

So I sort of knew this was around, but I didn't have enough detail. If we were to join or not join that kind of endeavour, you would need to do a lot of planning work at a detailed level, and Tony Pigott's people, all the joint headquarters, all our people in CentCom, just didn't have enough access to get into that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But nevertheless, from picking up these vibes from Tampa and the Pentagon and so on, were you effectively ahead of much of Whitehall in your understanding of the extent to which the Americans were committed to taking military action to deal with Saddam Hussein at this stage?

SIMON WEBB: I don't think so, because David Manning was always going to be ahead of me because the President -- this was the President's choice. He sat on the top of the command chain. I was talking to the adviser --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What about the Foreign Office?

SIMON WEBB: I think it's possibly fair to say that the Foreign Office -- some people in the embassy got in amongst it, but it was just an unfortunate consequence, and in my view not a very helpful consequence actually, that the Foreign Office couldn't -- they just weren't getting the same sort of -- I just don't think that the US Secretary of State was able to read the situation,

the prospects, quite as well as other people at that stage because of his own position, and that affected what they got.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have got a tempo problem a bit. Can you slow down?

SIMON WEBB: Sorry.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You were presumably cross-checking with SIS as well. What was their understanding?

SIMON WEBB: SIS came to the Pigott Group when they wanted to.

[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you talk to them bilaterally? Did you have a strong personal link with --

SIMON WEBB: Yes, I did talk to them. I mean, I didn't put anything like as much weight on that as I did on David Manning's conversations with Condi Rice [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. So I took it as part of one bit of the jigsaw. I didn't pretend I had all the pieces of the jigsaw. I just happened to have the Feith/Rumsfeld bit, and Pigott had the US military. We all had bits of it.

But finally, I don't -- you know, they are very constitutionalist, particularly Republicans, and they were absolutely clear that this was -- the President is the Commander

in Chief. He takes this decision, and they do all sorts of work. But there's no doubt about that.

So although Rumsfeld was a lively and influential character, and the detailed work was certainly being done in the Pentagon, I don't think you deduce from that that that's where the central intention was coming from. The central intention was coming from the President.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How important an objective was it of our policy to stay aligned with the United States on this, because of the importance of that relationship? How big a driver was that?

SIMON WEBB: Well, one wanted to be -- it's clear that ministers were likely, if something was going to happen, to want to participate. So there was a desire to achieve alignment.

But we had had a bit of discussion within the MOD about what we meant by influencing the United States, and we were clear, and in fact I wrote it up, that influencing the United States means to be able to achieve your, British, objectives within the context of a US-led Coalition. It does not mean helping the US to achieve their objectives. They are perfectly capable of working that out for themselves, thank you.

So I was keeping an eye on the objectives which we worked out with the Foreign Office and which the Foreign Secretary had had a look at. I don't know whether the Prime Minister had looked at them at that stage, but we knew Manning had gone seen them and so on. So I was trying to use my influence with the US to keep on with those objectives.

Separately, I was conscious that our ministers had a very different idea about how all this should be handled on the international stage, in particular the UN route. So I considered it part of my job to try and keep the Pentagon on the UN trail, which they really didn't like. Rumsfeld was a strong supporter

of NATO and very strongly opposed to going into the UN, and had to be basically overruled on that.

I was quite explicit with Doug Feith all along that we thought that was the right approach, both for international credibility and in order to build a coalition internationally to support this.

So that would be an example of where I thought I was pursuing our interest while trying to keep in alignment with the US on most things.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you took the agreed objectives, agreed between MOD and the FCO, to Washington in the middle of May, and you discussed them with Doug Feith and Peter Rodman. With the exception of the point about Iran and whether Iraqi WMD needs to be removed entirely or not, you broadly agreed those objectives?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: At what point then, if at all, did these objectives get approved by a wider group of ministers?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I think -- that was in the autumn. To be honest, I'm not quite -- in the autumn we concluded that the Cabinet Office should be sort of taking charge of this exercise on objectives, and by that stage the issue of democracy had come up. There'd been a sort of strong initiative from the White House, I think it really was centred on, that we should be promoting democracy in the Middle East and we should be starting in Iraq.

So when we started to look at the objectives again in the autumn, with a view to eventually publishing them, we had this debate.

The same debate was going on in Washington, and interestingly, actually, Secretary Rumsfeld was in the same position as we were in the MOD for a completely different reason,

which was that he was -- I've got to be careful with all these historians here, but he was a Jeffersonian Republican, and his strong view was that you couldn't give anybody democracy. Democracy was something that you had to find out for yourself. We used to stop there because otherwise we get into George III and so on.

So actually they were strong. As it happens, they were arguing to the White House about not being too specific about forms of government, at the same time as we were maintaining our point that this was highly desirable, of course, but potentially expensive in resource terms and complicating military campaign planning, and we both lost. The wording comes out as "providing effective and representative government for its people".

That eventually went off into the public version, which I think didn't -- for some reason -- I don't know -- it didn't get out until 7 January 2003 on to the Parliamentary record. And somewhere along the line, the word "united" had been put into this text too, which again I wasn't very keen on from a military point of view because it seemed to me bringing the Shias, Sunnis and Kurds all together in a united nation was quite a big ask really. But those were the two changes that happened.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you very much.

SIMON WEBB: The Cabinet Office managed that. To be honest, I think you would have to ask them whether it went round to ministers collectively. I can't quite remember.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will pursue that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm interested in this position that you find yourself in, where the Foreign Office was almost giving up on trying to influence US policy through the State Department and was expecting you to carry the load, as it were.

Now, there's a lot of issues relating to this policy: the

Middle East peace process, the consequences in the Gulf for supporting the Kurds, what may be a transfer of power to Shias and away from Sunnis within a key country, the effect on international oil markets and so on. There's a large number of issues which are largely political, which you might expect to form part of a wider dialogue on policy and, as you have indicated, it's not as if the Pentagon didn't have views on all of these matters.

Did this put a particular responsibility on you to try to hammer home these sorts of considerations and concerns? And to the extent that you were being pushed into trying to set up basically getting our planning systems in alignment, can you actually make sure these broader concerns -- does it actually mean that a key set of foreign policy considerations are out of the equation?

SIMON WEBB: I don't want to overstate -- I talked about the centre of gravity having moved from State into DOD and thus us matching it. I think that was in relation particularly to the idea of a particular military operation and the regime in Iraq and its neighbours.

There was ongoing dialogue about all the range of other issues. Certainly we used -- I used to add into -- certainly I used to make the point about the UN. Certainly I used to make the point that we needed to be sure about the impact on the Israel/Palestine, all that string of negotiations. But I would be doing that in the sense that probably expecting the Foreign Office would be pursuing those actually with the White House. There were people in the White House who certainly were dealing with all those sort of issues. So this wasn't the only route for them into the US Government on those things, and I know that they did pursue them.

So as long as we kept close to the Foreign Office, which I think we did, I didn't see there was a risk of a lack of a join there. If something needed to be said to the Pentagon, by the time I got on my visits to Washington, you know, Tony Brenton, who was the deputy head of mission, used to come with me to the Pentagon, and he would always say, "[REDACTED]"

[REDACTED]", or something, "Could you please help us with that dimension of it?" So it joined in that sense.

I didn't -- I can see what you are saying, but I never felt there was a problem. I think the Foreign Office were pursuing all those angles with people, and I used to go down to visit State and the White House staffs myself. That's quite -- and on the Hill indeed. So it's quite normal to go and do that, whether or not you are in this situation.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But you weren't particularly trying to influence the Pentagon in its view of the world?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I was on the UN, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The UN was the major area?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, and to be careful about Israel and Palestine. They knew all about the Israel/Palestine situation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So I didn't need to remind them. They accepted that as a point, the tactics of it. And its effect on timing, they understood that as well. The UN was where we disagreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Martin, on to you and the aftermath.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to ask about your role and thinking during 2002 about the aftermath. My first question is entirely a British one, and that is: how did considerations of what form a post-Saddam Government of Iraq might be affect our

decision on which package we were going to go for?

SIMON WEBB: A good deal, I think. We wrote up a variety of options, ranging from -- you have seen all these -- from a small one through, and we kept all those in play.

We had said from the outset that, this is very private and we said more than I wrote, but I felt we had to put down on paper somewhere that we had doubts about the US capacity to stabilise Iraq. I didn't say much to Mr Hoon because he had been all through this on Kosovo and so on. So he knew exactly what we were talking about. But we didn't write it down because they are our close allies and so on.

Now, once you said that, the more difficult you make stabilisation task, the more important that becomes. So if it had just been to go in fairly quickly, take out the WMD, dislodge Saddam and accept whatever seemed to be a practical proposition like another Tikriti, strong man of whom there was a short list, but there was a short list, and go away again, then we probably -- there wasn't much contribution to be made to that.

The moment you said that you wanted to move towards a representative form of government immediately adds years into this timetable because we had been all through this in the Balkans. You say, "Let's have a democracy", and then they say, "There aren't any political parties". So you say, "We'll give them a year to form a party and then we'll have elections" and so on.

So it becomes very important that you do that well, and it became very important that we were able to try and help the US as best we could to improve their capacity on stabilisation. We looked at the option of trying to sort of influence them by advice, if you see what I mean, and we concluded that the only chance we had was to put on the ground in Iraq, in a sizeable

chunk of ground, a different way of operating in the hope that that would improve the development of US thinking, which I think it did. Of course, as Rob Fry pointed out, they of course then went away and picked it up and did it well, probably better than we could in their own terms perhaps.

So to that extent it was very important because if you are doing a quick in and out, you think differently about your contribution than if you are trying to have a big effect on stabilisation in the long term.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was there a debate on this in the Pentagon and CentCom that you knew about or were involved in in any way?

SIMON WEBB: I think the Americans -- if you get in a mindset that you think democracy is something that you kind of find, then in a way it slightly takes away the need to do too much, because you arrive and say, "You now have a chance of adopting democracy", and it's rather up to them what they make of it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Martin, could I interject a question?

Simon, what you were saying just now about in effect offering a demonstration to the major Coalition leader of how to do stabilisation implies that there was going to be an area of UK responsibility within an Iraq, Saddam having been toppled. That's quite early on.

SIMON WEBB: No, no, it comes in -- we had the option early on. There were other reasons for -- that was only one factor in why I think eventually ministers went for the larger option. Another one was that --

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, we are really having a serious issue. It's a matter of speed.

SIMON WEBB: I'm so sorry.

MARGARET ALDRED: Simon, when you get a thought into your head, you then deliver it very fast, and I think that's the point.

SIMON WEBB: I'll try.

THE CHAIRMAN: One useful clue that I have heard put to others is imagine this is simultaneous translation going on.

SIMON WEBB: Very good. I have done a lot of that.

When you know you are going into a campaign with a substantial stabilisation phase, with armed forces -- and there are more experts, including in this room, than me on this -- who have a very different doctrine, military doctrine, you need to think about what it's going to be like working together.

The US don't really have a concept of an independent brigade in their structure. They do have these sort of armoured cavalry regiments, things like that, but they didn't have the concept of an independent brigade. It tends to be concentrated at divisional level.

In the dialogue I had with Tony Pigott and the military staffs, which we had integrated really for these purposes, we kind of got to worry about what it would be like if you had, for example, a British brigade in Baghdad as part of a couple of US divisions. I think Rob Fry used the word about liabilities in that case, that it could have been quite -- you wondered how well that was going to work. Let me put it like that.

So, rather than that, you end up saying you need a patch of ground of your own.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are talking now about the post-conflict phase, aren't we?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. This is not new. I found -- I don't know whether -- this will slow me up for a moment. I'll give you an interesting quotation. Maybe one of your colleagues will know

where it came from:

"Something must be said as a fundamental difference between the American and British conception of war. Broadly, the Americans felt that you should find a convenient place to fight the main forces of your enemy at the moment, and regarded a battle as somewhat in the nature of an athletic contest, without much regard as to what would happen afterward. The British tended to take a more sophisticated view. War as a continuation of policy and policies and purpose may fluctuate and change."

It's a quiz for the panel.

This is autumn 1942, the US and British forces joined together first time for active military operations. That was written by Harold Macmillan.

THE CHAIRMAN: In the Middle East?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, who was the minister in the Middle East, who was sent over by Churchill to do the sort of job that Greenstock did. So this ain't new.

It had become more of a problem during the 1990s because after Somalia, where the Americans had had a very difficult experience, Clinton had adopted this very cautious policy of really not wanting to deploy troops on the ground at all -- which was not good in terms of Saddam Hussein's perceptions, I believe -- but of wanting to keep them very much isolated from the local population. There was the boots on the ground thing and there was this force protection mantra. We had seen all of this in Bosnia and Kosovo. I used to say in Kosovo that the title of the US garrison, which was Camp Bondsteel, sort of gave you the whole story really.

So we had a challenge. So how did we achieve -- we had signed up to an objective about stabilising Iraq. That was in

our May objectives. How were we to achieve a stable Iraq when we were worried that the Americans were on a different sort of doctrine and we might not be able to work well with them? That is the nub of -- when you add to that that, you know, in the US system you probably have to have a divisional headquarters to get heard there, that was a feature of why we ended up there. And then Tony -- then that got linked into the idea that we would have a shorter logistic chain if we came in through Turkey, given what I was describing earlier about the pressure we had on the logistic chain.

So it turned into -- this is why Mr Hoon, I think, was quite complimentary about it. It turned into a solution here, was to go in through the north with a division and take an area, which later simply became through the south. But that was, I think, the origin -- I'm sorry, it's a rather long answer and quick answer to your question. But that's where that came from.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When you were in the States in September 2002, you discussed with Feith the nature of the follow-on regime, and you noted, if I could just quote you:

"This seems like a good opportunity to contribute to a key gap in US thinking. May I suggest we work on an FCO-led piece ..."

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did you feel you were able to do something in that follow-up piece that could influence them?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, we did. We did a piece which was -- I sent the first one back, but eventually we got a piece which I handed over to Doug Feith and went into their thought processes.

One of the things which they bought was the idea that you needed to have an integrated campaign, more closely integrated with the civil development, with the security and the follow-up

military operation to follow. They did buy that. It manifested itself, as it happened, in the move to ORHA, something which was run by the Pentagon. But the idea of trying to get more integrated, they certainly bought into as a result of those sorts of exchanges.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And was our own thinking sufficient and developed or precise on this?

SIMON WEBB: I think our thinking was -- our thinking was clear enough, and we knew that -- well, I say we knew -- everybody, of course --

THE CHAIRMAN: Thinking as distinct from planning. Planning implying a detailed outline at least.

SIMON WEBB: I was going to say -- yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: But thinking is conceptual.

SIMON WEBB: Thinking was conceptual, and I think the sort of common currency across the British Government. There was a problem about resourcing it, which you might want to get on to later, which is a different point.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This is really about dialogue with the US, and I want to start with your meeting that you had in December on the aftermath planning.

THE CHAIRMAN: December 2002.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The note that you wrote states that:

"The Iraqi oil wealth might be a source of renewed military capacity, conventional or WMD."

Was there still a debate about whether a post-Saddam Iraq might be allowed to retain some form of WMD capability? This is a note that you organised in December 2002. It's over the page.

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I don't think -- I think this was, again, a very long-term thought. I think what they were saying was that all the history, other than Norway, is that the governments tend to get control of oil revenues. Therefore we were teeing up a situation in which you would have an Iraqi government which would have enough money to do all these things if they wanted to. So I don't think it was much more than that.

Where it was going to, and this was a point I then followed up subsequently a bit with -- or the Foreign Office, I think, followed it up actually, more than I did -- about the idea of having a trust fund arrangement or something in the new Iraqi governance structure which made it more difficult for an Iraqi Government to get their hands on revenue in this way. That was all.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was there a debate about WMD capability? Whoever took over after Saddam, they would want to have some WMD capability in terms of threat from Iran. Is that what's implied there?

SIMON WEBB: No, I don't think so. I think it was just a point to watch, really. It didn't -- by that stage we had decided -- well, our line was that you should be dealing with the Iran issue direct.

THE CHAIRMAN: A supplementary on the trust fund concept, which came out of the States system, not from us directly. Was it that they were sensitive to an allegation throughout the Middle East that they would have gone into Iraq just in order to get hold of the oil and the oil revenues?

SIMON WEBB: They were slightly sensitive to that as a sort of observed phenomenon, but one of the fascinating things about the neo-cons was they are also very fundamental free-marketeers. So I remember I talked to Doug once about this, and said, "I never

hear you talking about resourcing and so on. Other people think you might be, but you never mention it". He said, "It's obvious. We don't worry about that at all in our defence planning. There's a big market for oil. There's all these oil reserves around the world. There's a free market. It will all sort itself out. I don't see any need to take any interest in oil policy at all".

When he did his big, big global policy review [REDACTED] [REDACTED] there never was anything about oil in it, or any other minerals, as far as I can remember. It was interesting.

So it's just a popular myth. Of course we used to think in a rather different way. But no, ironically they saw -- they just saw this rather straight as a lot of revenue washing around and how do you manage it properly.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the US view was they wanted to get rid of WMD completely; there wasn't a question they might retain any?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was that your view?

SIMON WEBB: Well, prompted by Mr Hoon, I had had a question in my mind at an early stage about whether it would be sensible to leave them with CW, partly because I was trying, as I say, to avoid a UK security guarantee coming our way, which I could just see how that could materialise.

So it was a viewpoint which I tried out, and Mr Hoon had tried it out. We argued it out, and we decided that the clarity of a policy, particularly with the spreading tide problem, in the clarity of saying we are getting rid of WMD entirely was more important than that factor. So it's a good policy debate point. I'm glad we had it out. I didn't feel I'd lost. I felt it was a point which we had had, and which, when I had heard all the

arguments, I thought they were right to go for a clear and simple approach, rather than something which was blurry and could be interpreted in odd ways.

But as somebody pointed out early on, it did leave you with the bigger question.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You accompanied Geoff Hoon on his visit to Washington in February as well, 2003?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I don't go on all the trips. So I think so.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: There's a note. Can you recollect whether he was direct in expressing the concerns that were being reported by officials about the US planning?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: He was being very direct?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. He said, "Are you sure you have really got this right?" I think we handed a piece of paper.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: He did say that he handed a paper.

SIMON WEBB: He did.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was it genuine interest? Was he being listened to?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What gave you that feeling?

SIMON WEBB: Because they knew it was a subject we are good at, and so they listened to it.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But when you visited -- you had been in touch with Doug Feith over a period of time, and yet at the presentation on the aftermath to Hoon, I think Feith made it very clear that the DOD did not see the absolute need for a Second Resolution.

Were these suggestions being taken seriously, knowing that the PM had already given assurances? Were they working on the assumption that the PM had given the assurance, so what we were saying was being listened to politely, but not taken on board?

SIMON WEBB: I think there would be a distinction between -- you raise an important point. I think there would be a distinction between the legitimacy that the UN resolution would have provided. Now, the US -- we never did get to closure on disagreement here, except in this sense. They would never accept in the Pentagon that the UN could have a veto over US acting in its own national self-defence. But they could be got -- and I spent a lot of time working with them on this -- to understand that in terms of international support, a UN resolution was helpful, indeed legitimising.

So they sort of thought we had done that with 1441, and therefore they certainly would never have agreed that you needed another resolution in order to authorise their activities.

They also -- and this, I think, was a particularly unfortunate feature of subsequent planning -- were not enthusiastic about the UN having a role in the aftermath administration of Iraq, which we thought was important, more, I think, because of its hugely legitimising influence and the beneficial effects it has on the attitude of non-governmental organisations, rather more than the actual ability of the UN to actually do things through their own agencies, which we got a bit sceptical about from in the Balkans.

But unfortunately I don't think that was a big part. We managed to persuade the Americans to welcome the UN, and of course there was the resolution after.

In my view, one of the greatest unfortunate incidents in this whole business was the Sergio De Mello, who we admired

enormously. I had worked with him in Timor, we worked with him in the Balkans. He was really, really good at this. If you like, the best win for the insurgency was that he was killed.

So that was the sort of the context in which we were having the discussions with the Pentagon. But they still listened to what we had to say about these issues.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you felt we were having influence at that stage?

SIMON WEBB: Well, we were certainly being listened to in terms of them taking it seriously, in terms of being able to put huge amounts of resources, money, into it. It takes a long time to transition a mindset though. This is not a natural activity for them. That was, I think, part of the challenge.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the legal basis for the invasion?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Looking at the early papers that you sent to the Defence Secretary, they don't seem to focus on the legality of the different policy options dealing with WMD. Is finding a legal basis for operating something which concerned you?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I mean -- sorry, I don't think -- can I just go back to my first note? I'm sure my first -- well, it says "if there is a legal option"¹ in the conclusion. So it was there right from the start.

THE CHAIRMAN: But is it a --

SIMON WEBB: I didn't need to say a lot to Mr Hoon who, as you have discovered, is an international lawyer. So the moment

¹ The witness later clarified that the document, from Feb 27 02 states "...a worthwhile and legal option at the time."

I reminded him this was an issue, it wasn't a subject he needed a lot of detail -- it wasn't a subject on which Mr Hoon needed a lot of detailed briefing on because he had a very good background in the field. But it was in there right from the start.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who really owned the problem? Who had the lead responsibility?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Who did you seek advice from on the UK's legal position to inform your policy analysis?

SIMON WEBB: Well, we had our own legal adviser in MOD who was very close to the Foreign Office legal advisers. I would say that the fount of it was probably the Foreign Office legal advisers were the people who laid it out, but we all knew that this was going to come to the view of the Attorney General in the end, if it was narrow.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You knew that, but did you discuss it with the MOD legal adviser? Did you talk directly to -- who did you talk to?

SIMON WEBB: Well, the MOD chief legal adviser was involved in the operational planning side of the MOD in any case. All through the No Fly Zone thing that we talked about in the public session, there were continual issues about the legality, not only of the overall operation, but also of particular targets. So we had got to know the community -- I had briefed the Attorney Generals personally on that. So we knew that community and the legal secretariat there. We knew the Foreign Office legal advisers. So we were well plugged into that group. We knew there was an issue here.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What did you brief the Attorney General about?

SIMON WEBB: About the nature of the No Fly Zone operations.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was earlier on. But I'm talking about the legality of the invasion. That was much earlier. Did you brief the Attorney General around the time when he was considering the advice in early 2003?

SIMON WEBB: I didn't, but others did, I think.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you actually discuss the legal basis with other Coalition partners? Is that something you would discuss with other Coalition partners?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. In the sense of -- I mean, finally people would want -- we talked about it to the US, and we spent quite a lot of time -- and in fact the MOD legal adviser went across to Washington on more than one occasion, to try to get to resolution about why the US found this so simple and we found it so difficult, despite having an origin in the same common law legal base. So they tried heroically to get to resolution on that and never achieved it.

So Doug Feith and I knew perfectly well that that was the case, because this had been an issue for a long time, that the UK was forever putting its hand up, saying, "We are not sure that's within our legal frame", and they always had a little question mark in their mind about us for that. They knew that the Attorney General might turn it down. Colin Powell had made these amusing remarks about this in the past.

So we knew other countries like [REDACTED] and so on, particularly countries which needed to get parliamentary authority for their operations and so on, would be very interested in this. So yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And did you see the long advice that the Attorney General had provided on 7 March, before he arrived at

his better view? Were you aware of the long advice that he had given to the PM? Did you see it?

SIMON WEBB: I did see it in the end. I was certainly at the chiefs of staff committee meeting, saying we are very well advanced on this operational planning, and I advised the CDS that we must insist on seeing a definitive legal view before we go much further, and with the Permanent Secretary, that he could not -- well, he wouldn't have done anyway -- he could not issue the operational directive until he got a clear legal view. I pushed for that view to be produced, yes. But the person who did the liaison with the law officers about that would be the MOD legal adviser, as I recall.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was that the reason why the CDS asked for a categorical legal assurance from the Attorney General?

THE CHAIRMAN: Because he knew there was a controversy?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: There was a controversy --

SIMON WEBB: Well, he knew it was narrow, and he knew that he couldn't -- he wasn't going to live with a complicated formula because he needed to have something to explain to himself, and also that it needed to be clear from the point of view of the troops. And what people forget is that the person you are putting in a position where they need to be clear they are doing something lawful is the front line commands. They have their own legal advisers nowadays who deal with them on tactical issues, but on a big one like this, it's absolutely your duty as a Ministry of Defence to get clarity before you issue these orders.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was this unusual? Had this happened before?

SIMON WEBB: The No Fly Zones, we had had -- so yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did the --

SIMON WEBB: Because the Kosovo campaign required a ...

THE CHAIRMAN: The arrival of the International Criminal Court, which the Americans of course did not accede to, but we did, was that an additional factor by 2003, in terms of the CDS's need and the troops' need for clear legal authority?

SIMON WEBB: I don't think so. I think CDS was just an honourable person with responsibilities to the armed forces and supported by people like me.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And was aware of the uncertainty and all the discussion that was going on --

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: -- in the background?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Okay.

SIMON WEBB: "Narrow", I think is the word they used.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Narrow?

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I think we are probably going to break in about 10 or 12 minutes, but in the meantime can we turn to Sir Lawrence to start off some sets of questions anyway.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. I want to ask about WMD and intelligence and the dossier.

Just to start, to what extent were you satisfied with the quality of the intelligence on Iraq and its WMD? Presumably you had seen quite a bit of it in the JIC.

SIMON WEBB: Yes. It was complicated in a number of ways, really. We had a body of information which was very solid, which was basically what UNSCOM and the IAEA had found out. So we had

that very important stack of fairly hard information from the ground. We had the conundrum then that there were discrepancies. So that at the time that UNSCOM was thrown out, there were unaccounted issues there. They found out some clear things about biological weapons and so on, and there were a number of serious discrepancies left, and the intelligence was trying to engage those.

The other problem was that I didn't feel that we were getting intelligence about the innermost circles of the regime. You could sense that we were -- I could see all the [reporting] as a member of the JIC. So I could see all the [reporting] if I wanted to, and I did have some of it over from time to time.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

So you had that doubt with a dictatorship, and I was conscious that this is a risky area because we had had this with Milosevic, and obviously when you look at the history of the JIC, this is an area in which they have customarily had problems, these very centralised regimes. So there was an uncertainty that came out of that.

There was then something else which both helped and hindered. The fact that Saddam had done this before made you look at things through a certain prism. Usually the Policy Director from the MOD at the Joint Intelligence Committee is the sceptic because he's the person who is desperate to avoid further military commitment because some intelligence analyst has got jumpy and he's saying, "Have you really got collateral for this?", and asking a lot of questions to the irritation of the intelligence community about -- so you are usually the sceptic.

But in this situation you had the problem that Saddam had done all of this before. So the balance of risk felt different.

Yes, you could discount a stray report, but were you entitled to do that when it was consistent with what happened before?

So that in a way helped the judgment. The hindrance was that you could get people or reports coming in or whatever it was, pictures from contacts or whatever, which suggested they had a capability, but it might actually be out of date. It could have been something six or seven years ago which somebody was recycling maybe, for some reason or other, or a facility that hadn't been completely destroyed. So you seemed to have something which looked like it was evidence, but actually might just be out of date.

So for all these reasons, I did find it actually quite difficult, actually. But I suppose when you got down to it, if you are responsible for national security, if you have -- if he had done it before, and you had reasonable information coming in that he was still up to something, it was hard to discount it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you expect the information to improve during the course of 2002? There had been a JIC assessment in March 2002, I think.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Given the uncertainties there, were you expecting, did you see better information during the course of 2002?

SIMON WEBB: There was some new information that came in. I think by that stage -- the way the intelligence priorities world works, the moment you have operations in -- potential operations. The moment ministers ask for options to be generated for a military campaign, the MOD will immediately shunt even higher up the scale of its priorities requests for the agencies to go collect information, because you need it at a much more granular level if you are going to plan the campaign as well as

you can.

So, basically, SIS were told, and GCHQ and the other agencies were told to shunt your resources in that direction, and you get something from that.

So yes, I did see some new things around, but nothing clinching like the thing I was saying, something very close to the centre of the regime.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You will no doubt have seen the comment of David Omand at the public hearing that SIS overpromised and underdelivered. SIS people have different views on that. What's your view on that particular question?

SIMON WEBB: I can't quite -- I'm not sure I was there for the promising bit, because David was in a relationship with them. But, as I say, I don't think they got -- they got some more detail for us which was very helpful, but I didn't find them producing anything which I thought was clinching.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just one question I would like to go to before we break, and that's just how the material on Iraq compared with other countries of concern. I'm particularly interested in the Libyan issue, because I think we have now seen evidence that Libya was moving quite high up the agenda in early 2002.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So how Iraq related to these other questions.

SIMON WEBB: ² [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

² The witness described his understanding of the quality and detail of intelligence available at the time on Libya's WMD

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But Libya and Iran, as the intelligence was telling you at the time, might actually be more serious as threats?

SIMON WEBB: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So I had also had some inkling that we might get the wonderful possibility of a negotiated settlement there, which is the principal interest of all defence policy directors, which is anything which doesn't require troops, apart from a bit of training and friendly support to make the Libyans feel good. So I was absolutely thrilled and solid about that. So I knew we had other options in play there.

On Iran, I was much more anxious about Iran because, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So I was much more worried about Iran as an actual threat issue, but -- sorry to keep repeating this -- I saw the only way to get started on Iran was with Iraq, and I think I put a note to Mr Hoon, which he agreed with and sent off to the Prime Minister, which said that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That takes us back to the deterrent point presumably?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. If we managed to deal with the Iraq WMD problem, hopefully by mounting enough forces proximate to Iraq that they would give up --

THE CHAIRMAN: Proximate to Iran?

SIMON WEBB: No, to Iraq. The last thing you want to do is a military operation if you don't have to. If we could deal with Iraq, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I didn't see this as being about Iraq particularly. In fact, there was an argument I made at one stage of saying we should spend as little time and effort as we can on Iraq, to husband our capacity for Iran, which I knew would be [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's quite interesting, but I think we will stop there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's take a very short break. Five minutes.

Just a postscript. Talking to Baroness Prashar earlier about

the legalities, you mentioned the Kosovo campaign. You said something that you didn't complete. The Kosovo campaign required a ...?

SIMON WEBB: It didn't have a UN resolution. Therefore it required an interpretation by the Attorney General. So we were used to the idea --

THE CHAIRMAN: And there was such an interpretation, obviously?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. So you were used to the idea that, while it was jolly interesting to have all these lawyers debating, when it came down to it the Attorney General actually concluded

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Good enough.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Five minutes.

(A short break)

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's get straight on then.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If I can ask a couple of general questions about the dossier, and then a very specific question.

The general question is really: did you have any particular concerns about it, about the way that intelligence was being used, about the way it was being put together?

SIMON WEBB: I was both an original proponent of something like the dossier -- you may have seen in some of my earliest pieces, this is not a story which is widely understood, we should try and --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That was in February?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. So I had been party, with others, to trying to get some information out there.

I was also very uncomfortable about the specific judgments of the JIC being produced because it is such a difficult area in which to gamble your reputation that I didn't want to in any way

kind of undermine the JIC's ability to back its hunches because they thought they might be embarrassed later, I think the studies of the JIC on the occasions it's not got it right reinforced that view.

So I was very unhappy about the idea of lifting the key judgments off the JIC papers.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Because you thought they weren't sufficiently robust?

SIMON WEBB: No, the --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Or the process itself?

SIMON WEBB: The process. That our successors would be thinking, rather than giving my best view on a Wednesday afternoon, you know, maybe I'll say something a bit more cautious and hedge my bets. That's the most likely thing you would do, in which case it becomes useless for ministers, who were not always very enthusiastic about the product at the best of times. If you say, "Well, it might happen and it might not", it's hopeless. You've got to say, "I think we're safe here" or, "We are at risk there", and there's lots of work now being done which reinforces that.

So that required somebody to write it up, and I was also party to realising that some of the attempts from people who really didn't understand the intelligence to write it up were not working either. So I fell in with the idea that the assessment staff should be put to work on this subject, and I have never been quite as prissy as everybody else about this, because they are government servants and if we decide to tell them to do this rather than write another paper about some other threat, that's fine. So that didn't bother me.

The process of writing I really wasn't much engaged with, to be honest. I had a read through it. John Scarlett was clear that it was consistent with the intelligence judgments, and I was

prepared in a way to give a run to those who could make this as digestible for the public as they needed it to be.

I also didn't find it particularly shocking to be sort of putting intelligence out there as a support for a policy. In a past which you and I share, I remembered that when we had the [REDACTED] nuclear problem with the Russians [REDACTED] [REDACTED] we wrote a whole policy and had a whole NATO process, and announced the whole thing without the Russians ever acknowledging they had these things. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So it wasn't odd to me, coming from the defence background, to be doing this, and I actually didn't -- but I also didn't think it was particularly -- not usual, but it was better to do that than just to assert that you had a policy without explaining yourselves a bit.

When we got to the final draft of the thing, it got a bit rushed for some reason to do with the timetable, and there was a glitch which was that I remember it arrived -- I had seen an earlier draft, and I knew people were working on the detail of the text, and then it arrived on a Friday. I got a not very helpful note on a Friday afternoon, saying, please clear this with your ministers. You are not allowed to show it to anybody else, we are publishing it on Tuesday, and by the way, it's just been sent to press.

So I did something in rather a rush -- you have read my stuff, probably not one of my best pieces really -- on a Friday afternoon, and sent it up to Mr Hoon because, as you will have heard earlier, I believe in giving your ministers a view on things, and Mr Hoon and I had that understanding. So I wanted him to have a chance to read it and know what we thought about it.

There was a glitch that afternoon because I actually knew that the DIS were working on it, but somehow or other I got an impression that they were happy with it. It was only actually, oddly enough, months later that I discovered that some of their experts were still at work on it. They had had an internal correspondence about it which had never actually found its way to me. So that note was not actually right, and I explained myself on that later on. But apart from that --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is where you say, "I understand they are content from a professional DIS point of view with the judgments it contained?"

SIMON WEBB: That was true of the CDI and his deputy, but not --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But you weren't aware at the time of those other concerns?

SIMON WEBB: No. If I had been, I would have said, "We are still working on the nuances" or something. I try and send accurate submissions, even on a Friday afternoon.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I ask you a very specific question? On 22 March 2002 there's something from the DIS --

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- attaching a paper that you had discussed with CDS and CDI, saying you would welcome a second opinion, and it's about how quickly and under what circumstances Iraq might require a deployable nuclear capability. Are you aware -- do you recall this?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. The staff kindly warned me of this.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the paper had been written by Mr Roper.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Possibly Dr Roper.

Now, the first question is just about the paper itself. It deals with an issue that we have discussed a number of times, which is relevant to the dossier and is relevant to differences with the Americans, or the variations in our views with the Americans. In particular it concerns this question of the Iraqis getting fissile material.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, just perhaps first as a general view, you have seen the dossier, the President's speech to the Security Council, this idea that it takes a long time for the Iraqis with sanctions to get nuclear weapons -- perhaps a bit less time when sanctions are removed, but if they got fissile material, it could be done in a matter of months or a couple of years. So it's relevant to that issue.

What it says is that even if they got fissile material, they need a [key nuclear component]. Now, you could do a dirty bomb, I guess, without a [key nuclear component], but if you want to have a bomb that isn't dirty, that you could use in a more sophisticated way, then you need it.

The relevant paragraph, paragraph 3, concludes:

"

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]"

Now that's quite an important point, isn't it, in terms of this whole conjecture about what would happen if they got fissile material?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. It was in pretty sharp contrast to what the Americans were saying. I think what had prompted all this was that I had had a conversation with Doug Feith, and he said, "We

think they can get to a nuclear device within a few months", I think, and I said, Well, that's not the story I have been getting from my own people. So we are not sure it is quite that pressing". This was at a stage when we were on the sort of rapid -- the Americans were on this sort of rapid response option. I think it was at that period.

So when I came back, I asked to be reminded of what the arguments were from the DIS, and I found this note helpful, except that it was a bit unspecific about -- it said five years, and then it didn't say what any shorter period might be. So it was not quite helpful from that point of view.

The other thing about it was that I knew that we had AQ Khan in play here, and that AQ Khan was very close to the Pakistani bomb, the father of it indeed, and that we had been [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So I thought it would be a good idea just to debate this out some more. So I sent it off to our own nuclear scientists, our own nuclear weapons people, and said, you know, what's your take on all this? Give me a second opinion about how quickly this could all happen. And I recall -- I haven't had a chance -- I don't know -- quite this direction. I think they came back and said something like 12 to 18 months is the number you should have in your mind for a plausible story for someone who has access to the technology, because the fissile material could have come --

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So ...

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In the discussions we have had on this in the past, the fissile material point has been made, that there were concerns about the former Soviet Union and so on. I'm not aware of anybody having made the point about the [key nuclear

component] in session. Also, I'm sure it doesn't appear in the JIC assessments or the dossier, and I'm just curious as to why.

The first question is: is your assumption that that's what the AQ Khan network could have provided, had they been in touch with Iraq? Or how else could they have got it?

SIMON WEBB: That was why I went off for another opinion. I probably wanted to see what the other opinion was, because -- do we have the other -- was the reply to my question around? Because I don't think I have seen that. **(Handed)**

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What I have been quoting is the comment from Paul Roper. That was what I was actually quoting.

THE CHAIRMAN: But there is also the document from the Joint Intelligence staff³ of the 15th, which says the same thing.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So D Strat Tech is also saying that you need a [key nuclear component], and that's beyond any domestic capability?

THE CHAIRMAN: Question: do you need a [key nuclear component] to produce any kind of nuclear device? No. You can make a crude one without that option.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It's clear you can make a dirty bomb.

THE CHAIRMAN: So why do you want to make a clean --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Because --

THE CHAIRMAN: No, the witness.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It's a question for the witness. **(Pause)**

SIMON WEBB: Okay. To be perfectly honest, I think I kind of -- my eye went to the one-year guesstimate thing here, rather

³ ie the JIC

than -- I mean, I knew that AQ Khan had been providing designs to North Korea, to Libya. I suppose I would probably have assumed that if he could do a design, why wouldn't he be prepared to hand over a [key nuclear component] if he had one?

So I was all about timescales, and this helped me because it said one year for something -- a real nuclear weapon, as distinct from a dirty bomb, and two to three years for a nuclear missile. That was what I wanted to know, and I went back to Doug Feith and said, "I think you are overdoing this, but at a year-ish we are in the same sort of zone". So I didn't spend a lot of time thinking about exactly where the [key nuclear component] would have come from.

Paul Roper might not have known about AQ Khan.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But by this time we did, and had sort of rumbled him.

SIMON WEBB: No, Roper might not have been --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I know Roper didn't. I don't want to take up more time on this now, but I think from our point of view it does seem to me to be important, because we have the quick fix scenario to nuclear weapons, and this suggests that it actually was a more complicated fix.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And even then you would have had to anticipate things because the concluding paragraph says to get a missile it would take two to three years, but you might have been able to shortcircuit that if you had already started before you actually had the material.

There's a whole series of caveats here that possibly should have gone around assertions about how quickly you could actually get a nuclear weapon, just by getting hold of fissile material.

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I can see that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's the only point I was seeking to make.

THE CHAIRMAN: A change of tack. Relations with DFID.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The two documents that I want to refer to is the advice put by Stephen Pollard to you and your advice to the Secretary of State of 13 January.

SIMON WEBB: I've got the second of those. I'm not sure I've got the first.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The first one is only relevant in terms of what use **(inaudible)**. I think, before we do that, we have heard a great deal about the relationship with DFID and the difficulties.

What, from your point of view, were the barriers to the relationship with DFID? And how did you yourself see that relationship?

SIMON WEBB: At some level there was a fundamental issue, which is that when Mrs Short had first taken over at DFID, she had changed the purposes of the department to be a single concentration on the elimination of poverty, which in my view was a thoroughly sound thing to have done, and removed a lot of clutter that there had been previously about whether they were there to prop up trade and all sorts of other things. She moved them sharply in this direction and they became one of the leading international agencies on that basis and had a very strong reputation.

But as part of that, the sort of support they might have offered where poverty wasn't present, we had noticed had reduced a bit. So in the Balkans, for example, where we had humanitarian

problems, they would help if there was a humanitarian problem, because that was near enough, and they came and helped co-ordinate NGOs in Kosovo, for example, but their orientation was not towards the broader support of policy.

That was compounded in this case by Mrs Short's anxieties, to put it mildly, about the Iraq operation. So even if she hadn't set the department a different objective, she was unlikely to have been encouraging them to do much here.

However, officials there, who I saw regularly at the weekly Manning meeting and so on -- I knew Nicola pretty well from when she was in the Foreign Office -- were trying to find a way forward here, recognising that they were likely to be asked by the Government collectively to help with Iraq.

So they came and joined in on some of the planning, I think initially on the humanitarian side, and arrangements were made for them to make preparations to have an important thing, liaison at the joint headquarters of Northwood, to deploy with the force and so on. So that was all constructive, officials in a way working round quite a divergence between our ministers.

I would like to say personally I felt I had a pretty good relationships with DFID. I remember Clare Short actually invited me personally to come to one of their away-days. We realised that in Africa, for example, there was an enormous amount of collaboration we could and should do. So it wasn't a general problem in a sense. It was rather particular to this arena.

But Mrs Short then said -- well, first of all, there was a question about whether they should be told the timing of the operation, which is just a straightforward bit of Government business, and there are just rules about how few people who get to hear about that. Mostly to protect operational security for the sake of the armed forces, they have to do this.

Then there was this issue about whether we could help

effectively Mrs Short prepare a case to put to other ministers for not participating in the opening phase, and I found this very difficult, because I was trying to preserve a good general relationship with DFID and Nicola, and working together on -- by this stage we had the joint conflict prevention pool for Africa and the joint conflict pool -- we were working together on all sorts of other things. I found it uncomfortable about this. So I thought I would check in with my ministers and see what they had to say, which is why I wrote this slightly agonised piece of paper.

Basically it confirmed the case, which is that if the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office do not -- if they wanted to have the issue of not participating in the offensive phase of the operation on the table for ministers, then they only had to say so and we would have done the work. But we couldn't do the work just because an official from DFID came round and asked for it, unfortunately. So I told Nicola, and she took it in good stead.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But in terms of involvement, is that the reason why you involved them at purely a strategic level, and not telling them about the operational issues?

SIMON WEBB: No, we told them a lot about the operational issues, everything except the timing. They knew where we were going and what the humanitarian issues were going to be like. This was solely about -- I think I said in this note --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What you say here is:

"Pending further guidance from ministers collectively, we should not invite DFID officials in discussions of whether UK military contributions should avoid offensive operations and be central only to stabilisation and aftermath."

SIMON WEBB: Yes. But two up from that it says we should involve them in generic contingency planning for offensives,

stabilisation and aftermath operations, in both the London crisis management organisation and PJHQ, including illustrative analysis of areas that might be controlled by UK forces in Iraq. This is me getting cover for saying I'm going to tell them what the plan is, O Secretary of State, and to ask them to be ready to go deploy with joint forces HQ, which means detailing off people.

So I was saying I'm going to be as helpful as I can in getting them on board here, but there are a couple of points that I'm going to have to say no. It goes to his relationship with Mrs Short.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But you also say here:

"I indicated, as guided by Sir David Manning, that DFID could not expect to see detailed military information."

So it was the --

SIMON WEBB: That was just me sloping shoulders on the decision. But it's true that David Manning confirmed they couldn't have access to the timing. The timing is the issue.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And you were made aware of that? You were made aware of that by Manning?

SIMON WEBB: I asked David Manning. He said no, we back you up on that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was the approach that was taken towards DFID in this planning context in line with MOD's own planning doctrine of Phase IV operations, or were they subordinated to political considerations?

SIMON WEBB: No, we wanted to involve them because we knew they had great expertise, initially in the humanitarian side.

It's quite hard to recreate -- I expect you have had this problem before -- that we were expecting a massive humanitarian problem to break out of a contested ground force advance into

Iraq. We were expecting there to be hundreds of thousands of distressed people out of their homes, possibly disconnected already from their food supplies and everything else. So that was what we were immediately -- our duty to do that. DFID were fine and helpful about all that within the limitations that I've described.

They were also ready to do as we have done before, to bring in some of their expertise to help with some of the reconstruction, though it's fair to say that the concentration on the humanitarian side, which we had expected might go on for a few months, had probably taken people's eye a bit off the reconstruction side of this to follow.

Now, as we know, because Saddam configured his control of the country in such a way as to prevent insurrection, rather than to deal with a US military invasion, we had a very relatively light run. I hope we can find some way of recognising just how fortunate we were in being able to make that amount of military progress with that small number of casualties, relatively speaking, on both the military and civilian side.

DFID were party to all of that. They sat in the chiefs of staff committee meetings from a certain point. So they knew all about this and were, I think, pretty helpful. Except, I suppose, when you came to reconstruction, they were inhibited by this concentration on poverty. I know people have made side remarks about this, but it is a genuine policy point to say -- there's an argument to be said that Iraq was a potentially prosperous country, had a huge oil income, as discussed, had an educated population and an agricultural system which could feed itself without any difficulty.

So I had a bit more sympathy than some other people, saying, and why would you take people from dealing with Africa and a range of much more other difficult problems, in order to help

something that the Iraqis could probably do for themselves? And there's a very good credo down in DFID, which I learned to understand when we and the MOD were trying to sort of help people, a bit unnecessarily in a way, to say if people can help themselves, you should leave them to it, because it's actually better for their social cohesion to work your way out of a problem, than for somebody else to come and give you aid. Aid can be debilitating. So they had sophisticated things to say about all that.

What that left us with though, and which I tried to repair after the conflict by the work I initiated on the post-conflict reconstruction, was to say they didn't have on tap enough experts in reconstruction who could be produced to deal with -- or we, the Government, didn't have enough on tap to deal with the reconstruction task. Somewhere along the line we had sort of lost that capacity. Now we have created it - the stabilisation unit now has 1,000 people on their books to go and do this kind of job. But that was the gap, I think, with DFID, and that was partly, in my view --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So steps were taken after the invasion to sort of --

SIMON WEBB: I had a working group, which we kicked in in the summer of 2004, which produced a proposal for the post-conflict reconstruction unit, and after some sucking of teeth, but they had a new Secretary of State by this point, it was agreed this should be placed in DFID, and they would operate and have accounting officer responsibility for it.

It would be jointly manned between the MOD, Foreign Office and DFID, but the operational decisions on its employment would be taken by a ministerial group chaired by the Foreign Secretary. And that -- have you not seen all this stuff?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We have.

SIMON WEBB: So that was the problem, I think. It was not the humanitarian side, but the post-conflict reconstruction, which they were expecting probably to have a bit more lead time on, and anyway we didn't have enough people around to deal with that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I ask one last question? What opportunities did other Government departments have to contribute to the planning process, to the campaign plan? Leaving DFID aside, what other departments?

SIMON WEBB: The intelligence agencies were there. The Foreign Office, the intelligence agencies, DFID. I don't remember --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you remember, were the Home Office in terms of the police?

SIMON WEBB: I don't remember them. But then that would have been done through the ad hoc group on Iraq and the Cabinet Office group, and then by the Iraq unit. So that wouldn't really have been -- we wanted to know it was happening, but they wouldn't have come to the MOD planning side in the way that DFID did because it was seen that humanitarian risks were so proximate. We knew they were engaged, and we knew all about the trouble, the difficulty of finding policemen. We had been through all that in the Balkans. So we knew the challenges there and we were pushing to deal with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Simon, we are going to have to economise on time now to get through. So if we are asking you to be shorter than you would like to be, I'm sorry.

SIMON WEBB: I'll be slow but short.

THE CHAIRMAN: Exactly. I've got one. It's a bundle of questions, but I think it can resolve almost into a single one,

which is about the immediate post-conflict role that we would adopt and planned for, because we were going to go in with the objective of drawing down to one-third of the invasion level by the autumn of 2003.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: But by going in we became, under the Hague and Geneva Conventions, an occupying power for that part of the country we were in. There was concern being expressed to you, and by you, that we didn't have a clear mandate for a security presence, other than the Geneva/Hague situation, which gave us all the responsibility and rather little power.

What was the plan? What was the strategy? And why -- and this is the nub of it -- didn't we go bald-headed for as quick an UNSCR as we could get? We eventually got one in late May, but there is evidence that we were not trying to get it, or indeed we wanted not to get it, too quickly. Why?

SIMON WEBB: I suppose it's sort of slopping shoulders slightly on this point, to say that in the MOD structure there's someone called the Director General for Operational Policy, or there was in that era.

THE CHAIRMAN: DG Op Pol?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, which was a job I've done, and that was probably Mr Lee's stuff rather than mine. But let me have a go anyway.

Can I just correct a point about the drawdown to a third? When we constructed this idea of an option on large-scale, and it became, in my view, more credible, it always did have in it a presumption -- in fact, the only way we could do it -- that we would get other Coalition allies to do that. That was my business. And I knew, because we had just done this job in

Macedonia, and we had done this job in Afghanistan, that our credit was good enough and there were political orientation on our part -- the Italians, the Dutch, the Danes, the Czechs and a range of other people -- that that was a plausible position.

THE CHAIRMAN: Even without a back-up UNSCR?

SIMON WEBB: Well, one of the reasons for having a back-up UNSCR was that they were more comfortable with that after we didn't get the Second Resolution. So that's one point to make.

The second point is to say that our strategic objectives didn't say anything very specific about the redevelopment and reconstruction of Iraq. It said "stable". It didn't say "rich", being brutal about it. You might say, "And why the heck not?" But you get back to the logic from the Policy Director MOD point of view, that they have got a string of things that the Government would like to do round the world, and if I don't have to make Iraq rich, because we can leave the Iraqis to do it, I would, wouldn't I, because then I've got people saying, can't you do something in Sudan, and so on where there is a desperate need. So on the margin you would rather put the troops somewhere else than Iraq, from that point of view.

But what became clear -- and I'm going to get to your point in a moment -- quite quickly was that the reaction to British presence in the Basra area was a great disappointment that we were not doing more to restore the standard of life. We thought we were going in there to clean up the WMD and chase Saddam out. They thought we were there to make life better for them because they had had a miserable time under sanctions, with which we were partly associated.

So they had expectations and General Brims, a very fine reader of this -- I worked with him in the Balkans before -- read this quickly, as you would expect any British force to do, and

they came up saying, "Look, we have got a problem here, because we need to be doing more on this in order to achieve stability", which is why you got into the quick impact projects and so on.

So we found the money for him almost immediately in the way you always support an deployed commander, because his objective, which was about stability, was being imperilled by our failure to do that.

But you still had the question about what exactly were we trying to do about the reconstruction of Iraq, on which we had not set ourselves objectives, and that is what brought us back into needing an UNSCR for a longer term job, because it became clear that this wasn't going to be solved very quickly.

THE CHAIRMAN: And you needed time to think that one through?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: And get support?

SIMON WEBB: And you probably needed to try out -- we recognised we had not had the humanitarian thing which would have given us a bit of time to try this out. We needed to try out whether the Iraqis would just pick it up and do it for themselves. You are back to the point about compulsory offering of aid is not always a great policy in any case. You need to go and feel it. So that's, I think, how I read that.

THE CHAIRMAN: There's a tailpiece point about the SDR new chapter, which incorporates, doesn't it, that UK forces can go in early, but should come out early and be replaced by follow-on forces within a coalition, which only partly happened for us in MND South East.

SIMON WEBB: No, I don't think so. We got an Italian brigade. We got the --

THE CHAIRMAN: We don't need the detail.

SIMON WEBB: No, I think we got enough troops.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hopes were realised?

SIMON WEBB: More or less, yes. The Japanese, which I consider a personal triumph, having negotiated it with them. So I think we did quite well on that actually.

It would have been nice to have gone smaller still. Once you'd seen the security situation and you've had that reaction, there wasn't a British commander who is ever going to leave himself without a brigade there, because he needed to be able to react, and we had trouble at Al Amarah and some various other places. So you were never going to have a British divisional commander who wasn't going to have his own brigade for a while. How long, is an interesting debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's move on to a question that keeps recurring for us, and that's de-Ba'athification and all of that.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have a few questions on de-Ba'athification.

First of all, in the pre-March 2003 period, were there discussions in Whitehall about our policy towards both de-Ba'athification and also the Iraqi army? I'm thinking, for example, in preparation for Geoff Hoon's visit to Washington in February, when he raised the issue, although not using the word "de-Ba'athification". He told us:

"Implicit in the paper I presented to Rumsfeld was that Iraqi technocrats who may have gone along with the regime become available to administer the system."

So in discussion and preparation of that visit and paper, what was our position?

SIMON WEBB: I think our position had shifted a bit with the -- initially, you know, the sort of snap answer you get out of the

floor is to say you find the existing army and put them in barracks and you employ the police. That's the classic handbook stuff. So we all knew that.

But something complicated happened here, which was this adoption of the objective of democratisation and representative government; plus, in the absence of a CW capability, the need to have a large Iraqi army. So a couple of new things had happened. And if you were going for democratisation, how could you leave a lot of the top end of the Ba'ath Party in place?

There was a judgment which you couldn't really make until you got on the ground about what level you went down to. As you say, at some stage you hit the school teacher who just joined the party because they wanted a job. But where in that spectrum you cut it off, recognising that you, implicitly at least, in deciding you were going to go for representative government, wanted to remove the possibility of an early reassertion of power by Ba'ath Party. So you needed somehow to tackle those two things.

So that's, I think, where we end up with this position of sort of we will need to do some of this, but how much will rather have to wait until we can get a bit more of a view of the situation. But I think we had certainly moved away from just thinking that you would employ the army.

Of course, life then became particularly complicated when the army disappeared, because of course Saddam had himself sort of in a way dispersed the army so that it couldn't become a political threat to him. Under this sort of strange command structure he had introduced in 2002, the army just sort of gave up and went away.

So when Walt Slocombe showed up after a while, as you say, it seemed a bit odd to sort of summon the army back in again when you knew that actually you really wanted a rather different army

from a democratisation point of view. I think really that's how it evolved.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Had you discussed the de-Ba'athification army question with your American interlocutors before March?

SIMON WEBB: A bit. Probably not in huge detail, but this point that you would have to do some of this, but not all of it, and you couldn't really work it out until you got there was roughly where we had ended up, I think.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And had we had any view at that time on, say, how deep the de-Ba'athification went? Had the discussions got to that level of detail?

SIMON WEBB: I don't think so. I wouldn't necessarily have been involved in that. As I say, I was slightly one stage back from the detail coming in at that stage.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When Walt Slocombe came over and called on Geoff Hoon, he sends this report to Bremer, which exists on the web, which was leaked, in which he says that the UK officials and officers agreed with the need for vigorous de-Ba'athification, especially in the security sector.

Were you part of those discussions in the second week of May?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I went to the same meeting with Geoff Hoon, and I remember walking over with Walt to go and prepare for it.

We had certainly accepted, as I just said, the need for de-Ba'athification at some level, and not just a simplistic solution to buy the army, but to reform the army. So we had bought that by that stage.

I don't recall having a specific conversation about how far that was going to go. But I don't think -- I think we were probably content for this to be decided by those in Baghdad. If the policy is partial de-Ba'athification, and everybody seems to

understand the issues, I would have said to Geoff Hoon, well, you've got Greenstock or a source in Greenstock over there, there's a judgment to be made out there, and obviously they had Viggers who understood all these sort of things. So make your judgment out there. I wouldn't have tried to press a particular level in the command structure on Walt.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So these discussions on 13 May weren't really to have an input with regard to what the British policy felt it should be?

SIMON WEBB: Well, it was important to be clear that we had accepted that some de-Ba'athification was going to take place. But I don't think we were there in a position to double-guess what precise amount was right.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Post-conflict phase. Some tensions which are fairly evident from the papers, but just putting together for the sake of opening the theme.

The question arose early in 2003 about bringing in the ARRC. The Americans wanted it, and you do an analysis of the yes/nos. But in the course of that you say that:

"It is probably true to say that our main strategic contribution on Iraq has already been made."

SIMON WEBB: This is 2004, I think?

THE CHAIRMAN: No, 2003.

SIMON WEBB: Is it?

THE CHAIRMAN: 17 April 2003.

SIMON WEBB: I don't think I've got that one. It came up a year later. (Handed)

THE CHAIRMAN: That's the bit I'm quoting.

SIMON WEBB: Oh. Sorry, no, I think -- I don't think it was on my list actually, but I remember it now.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's important in one sense only because it implies that we were not looking forward to a major long-term all Iraq Phase IV contribution. We had made our strategic effort, our heave with the invasion commitment itself.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: And then, going ahead a year to 2004, this is on your bit commenting on the MOD's internal lessons learned process. I don't know if you've got that one. The bit there is essentially in the beginning of the third paragraph:

"We had kept ourselves detached from the main US Phase IV operations."

By "main" I take to mean all Iraq Phase IV operations -- quite deliberately to -- by implication, not quoting anymore -- conserve our effort in MND South East.

All of that suggests closing down, and yet the criteria for strategic success was, you'd said earlier, that we continued involvement on an all Iraq basis.

How did these tensions get resolved in practice?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I think I said we had bought an argument of strategic objectives about a stable Iraq, and we had concluded that our best bit, our best contribution to that stable Iraq was not to go all over Iraq, but to show that in one part of Iraq you could achieve stability by a certain combination of military and other civil activities.

By the time I wrote the first note, we -- and even that was only one phrase in the rest of the note --

THE CHAIRMAN: Sure. It's only a means of pointing to the tension.

SIMON WEBB: By the time we got to that point, we had taken Basra very easily. We seemed to have an accepting population. Most of the other provinces which we had responsibility for looked as though they were on the way towards stability.

So I thought we could be saying that we had achieved a lot of the demonstration that we had intended to the Americans, to say, "If you want to achieve stability in Iraq, here is a way of doing it, we have done it". So to that extent I would stick by saying that at that point I wrote that -- now, behind in my mind there is all the other things. I was already clear a year on that, you know, we had got away with a short deployment in Afghanistan. We had done ISAF 1. General McColl had done that. We had sent the marine brigade in for four months and got them out again. But sooner or later our turn was going to come round again in Afghanistan.

We had already denuded our participation in the Balkans quite substantially, and we needed to do something in Bosnia. We had an opportunity to gain British command there, and put a new operation in Bosnia on a new footing by gaining British command. But you have to put some troops in to get British command in Bosnia.

We had this anxiety about Iran, and whether, if Iran just kept going at full pelt, we might start needing some very substantial fighting units in order to participate in dealing with that.

Then we had the sort of unanswered obligations in Africa, which we were just unable to help in Bhunia and Sudan and elsewhere.

So all the instinct on my part was we had done most of the job here. Yes, you can go from 80 per cent up towards 90 per cent. But actually there might be a chance to draw down fairly quickly in Iraq, and that the ARRC in particular was

an asset we should hold for other things.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. It's a purely side point. It's hardly worth commenting on. I'll just raise it though.

One of your observations about the use of ARRC -- this is in 2003 -- was that it hadn't been deployed for years and years, and it was really anxious to get into business.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Was that a major factor? It didn't prevail, but was it a major factor?

SIMON WEBB: Well, it's quite a lot of assets to tie up when everybody else is so busy. I rather think the commander of the ARRC had probably been in my office, and, like most great British generals, was keen to get on and do something useful.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's what I was fishing for. Thank you.

SIMON WEBB: I did have some useful things in mind for them, but not quite ...

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's move on to UK and the Coalition more broadly.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I want to take a look of how our strategy fits together with the Americans in the CPA period.

Just precedent to that, but very much picking up on what you have just said, you talked earlier about our aim of a quick in and out. You have just effectively said that that was what you wanted to achieve then.

Do you recall the chiefs of staff briefing the Prime Minister two months before the invasion, on 15 January, I think it was, 2003, and warning him of the risk of sectarian conflict and that it might be very difficult for us, if we did go into this operation -- which at that stage was not finally decided -- to

get out quickly?

SIMON WEBB: I don't think I was there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, a note was circulated, and I think you will -- presumably, if the chiefs of staff -- if a note was circulated with their briefing the Prime Minister to people in the MOD --

SIMON WEBB: I'm just asking was I there. I don't remember being there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you recall that line of thinking?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, and it was a perfectly proper thing to draw to ministers' attention. And I myself had said earlier, if we went into Baghdad, we might be there for a long time.

So yes, of course it was a risk that the Prime Minister needed to understand. The question is, having gone into Basra, and recognising that our contribution was limited to part of Iraq, it was not such a risk by that stage as it had been a perfectly proper risk to understand in anticipation, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In this period where we have become joint occupying powers -- and we have the deputy on the military side and we have Jeremy Greenstock, not formally deputy, alongside Bremer -- to what extent did we have agreement, alignment, with Bremer over the strategy that should be followed in Iraq? You attended a strategy conference in the middle of this period, in Baghdad on 18 December 2003, for example. That's quite a good way of reviewing the different points at issue.

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I didn't feel that we had any particular divergence over policy. Everybody had reacted somewhat to Bremer's rather long list of steps. So we had a slight sinking feel that this was going to last for years and years. But it was a reasonable enough thing to have said, and I thought I had a way

of keeping our commitments relatively reduced in the south in the way that I have described. So I didn't feel any particular disparity of overall objective at that time.

The question I went to Baghdad about was to see whether, at a sort of more detailed level, we could support what was then going to be a longer involvement by the Coalition as a whole in Iraq, in ways which were not going to require a lot of commitment of UK forces. So we came up with helping with the training of the Iraqi army, and there was a project which I personally got involved in of helping create a new Iraqi Ministry of Defence, which was civilian. So I got involved in that particular.

But I don't recall a particular problem about overall alignment.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I don't know if you have had a chance to review the record of the meeting -- it's in your documents -- in Baghdad. You and General Fry, with Bremer and his team, Baghdad, 18 December 2002, recorded in General Fry's military adviser's note of 19 December 2003. I think I'm right -- I hope I'm right in saying it's in your documents.

SIMON WEBB: It wasn't actually on the list.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If that wasn't on your list, can I just summarise some of the points that, reading it, appear to be points of divergence between the UK and the US sides of the CPA?

SIMON WEBB: Mm-hm.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We evidently had reservations about the speed and manner in which power should be transferred to the Iraqis. We wanted it sooner than Bremer. We wanted it through a national conference. We were pushing for a UN role.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He was pushing against. No surprise there.

We had differing views, which are reflected in paragraph 7 here, about the security agreement. You are recorded as commenting that the optics were delicate, and that the final security agreement must not be seen as something imposed on the Iraqis, implying that that was rather what you feared might be the effect.

We had differences over the size of the national Iraqi army, which comes back to the point you were making earlier about security guarantees, which are covered in paragraph 9. We had a divergence of view about the militias.

That's just summarising some of the points. I don't want to go through them all in detail. We haven't time, among other things. But all of that implies that there was quite a gap between us, and this is now several months into the CPA.

Now, given that gap, did we have any influence over the way that the Coalition policy was formed at the centre in Baghdad, or was our influence really limited to what happened in MND South East? You could just about get Bremer to come to a meeting, although it does imply in this note that there's some reluctance on his part to even spend time on this.

But did anything change as a result of you and General Fry and Jeremy Greenstock voicing these concerns? Did we have any traction?

SIMON WEBB: Sorry, I'm just -- it's not one of the things I prepared.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm asking for your general recollection of the amount of influence that we had over policy in Baghdad, over Coalition strategy, this just illustrating it in this period. That's a memory point, as it were, not a point of detail from the paper.

SIMON WEBB: Yes. Well, I think -- I don't think the things you

mentioned -- I mean, I didn't see a great policy divergence. I don't recall a policy divergence. I recall debating our points, which, you know, is what you do between allies. These were implementation points, rather than points of fundamental policy.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did the arguments we put forward in that debate make any difference to what happened, or were they listened to and then ignored?

SIMON WEBB: I would have to go through them.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay, this is beyond your memory.

Down in the south east, did you feel that we were in charge, and that we could pursue perhaps a line there a bit different from what was being done in Baghdad because this was our show?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, tempered only by the desire to make sure that the Americans produced most of the money, which meant we tended to sort of facilitate that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Finally on this, can I come back on the point you made about the Iraqi army? You said after the disbandment that it would seem a bit odd to summon the army back in.

Were you aware from prior briefing, including perhaps from the work done by the Red Team that the head of defence intelligence put together just before the campaign started, or from elsewhere, of the importance of the Iraqi army as the most respected institution in Iraq?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Where were you going to get the new army from, if you weren't going to summon back these elements who had gone away?

SIMON WEBB: Well, you could get rid of the Ba'athist elements in

it without destroying the Iraq army. That was the point about levels that we talked about.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, Ba'athists went right down to major level.

SIMON WEBB: Yes, but that was the point we were talking about earlier. You would have choices about how far you decided they were heart and soul Ba'athists who were likely to pull down any nascent democracy, or whether they were just people who signed up because they wanted to get through their majors promotions.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in fact we --

SIMON WEBB: So we sort of --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We did want to summon the army back in, shorn of Ba'athist leadership?

SIMON WEBB: We knew we needed to create another army, and there were good things about the old army which we wanted to preserve, including the respect it had in some parts of the Iraq population, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But having disbanded it --

SIMON WEBB: We didn't disband it. It just went away.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, it went away, and then it was disbanded by the Coalition CPA decision formally.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And it might have been better not to have disbanded it. De-Ba'athify and disbandment, these are separate things.

SIMON WEBB: Well, all I can say is that the outturn of essentially re-recruiting to a new army, as far as I understand -- and I'm really not at all current with recent

years -- but my understanding is that the army is seen to have been a bit of success through this process, whereas the police, where there wasn't so much de-Ba'athification, has not been such a success. So I think it has turned out to be a reasonable approach in arrears.

There was a mistake made about cutting people off without their pay and pensions, which I think the Americans noted. We commented and said, "You need to correct this".

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I now move forward to a specific episode in the spring of 2004, when the Americans made a direct request to the UK to consider spreading its area of responsibility northwards to Najaf and Al-Diwaniyah?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But ministers chose not to do so. What was your view on that, and why did we turn down the request?

SIMON WEBB: Well, I wrote a piece about this, which --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: 18 May 2004?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Which didn't go to ministers. You wrote that to the CDS and the PUS.

SIMON WEBB: Yes, although I'm sure I talked to ministers about it.

I saw it as finely balanced. But by that stage I had been very concerned about Fallujah, and whether the approach to Fallujah, which we had to talk to the Americans about, was putting us into a course which was likely to provoke quite a more sort of deeply embedded Iraqi reaction or an insurgency.

So the Americans were clearly pressed, clearly wanting, if you like, to know what we could offer because they knew things

were pretty stable in the south, in Basra, and of course later -- at this stage things were pretty stable, and I also felt that within a coalition, if you are asked to reinforce because the other folks have got a problem, you should be disposed to do that, as you always are, if a military commander has asked for reinforcements, because they need backing up, and there may be a day when you want to ring up Washington and say, "We want reinforcing".

So despite having achieved most of, perhaps in a way, our strategic objectives there, I could see the stability point going backwards as a result of Fallujah.

So I thought the case was there. I also looked round, as you will see, at what other things the ARRC might be doing. This geography changes all the time. By that stage I had solved the Bosnia problem, and for other reasons I wasn't keen to get into Afghanistan soon.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were ministers keen to get into Afghanistan?

SIMON WEBB: I don't --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You say you weren't keen; what about ministers?

SIMON WEBB: I don't think so. They had not taken a view by that stage.

So I thought there was a space we could put the ARRC in for a one tour to try and help the Americans out, to reinforce them in that real sense, to show -- to extend our way of doing things in the south, to, if you like, make the exemplary area a bit bigger, make a contribution to the overall campaign at a time when it seemed to me to be going, as I said on a couple of points, backwards. So I thought the argument was there on balance.

Ministers, I think, were anxious about our overall commitment

levels in Iraq. It was clearly not very popular. They heard the arguments, took a different view, no grumbles from me about that.

THE CHAIRMAN: I've got just a general question, Simon. It focuses on the insurgency. The question is really about how we maximise our understanding of fragile states when we go into them in terms of their social, demographic, cultural makeup, what the real ground truths of the situation is ahead of the event.

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who in our system is principally involved, engaged, capable on the task? There's the JIC. There's the DIS itself, as well as the assessment staff.

SIMON WEBB: That's a very good question.

THE CHAIRMAN: We clearly had rather little ground truth understanding in March 2003 of what we would actually find. How, next time, can we get a much more broadly based and better picture?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I thought we had -- you put that on my list. I thought we had a very good feel for the Iraqi military capability. We'd spent a lot of time studying it since 1990 and so on, and I felt very confident about that.

As I said, we didn't really have a very good feel for what was happening at the top of the Iraqi administration, and I think -- although when you go back and look at it, we had actually got this point that Saddam was more worried about insurgency than he was about being attacked, but we hadn't quite absorbed that deeply enough.

THE CHAIRMAN: We hadn't taken in, had we, the full effect of the degradation both on the civilian infrastructure and on the governmental structure?

SIMON WEBB: Indeed. Sorry, I just made some notes about this. We were reasonable on areas where the UN was acting. Where the Oil for Food programme and the medical stuff was going on, there was quite a lot of information about that.

The unknowns were about the infrastructure, though we did go out of our way not to bomb it more, and the human terrain, as they say, in the south. We just didn't have a feel for the mood of the populus and so on, partly because of the absence of diplomatic reporting.

To answer your precise question, I think if we had asked, if we had been -- if we had thought that we were going to play a big role in reconstruction, and we'd been asked to gather that information, I suspect we could have had a better picture. I suspect if now you asked the stabilisation unit, and said, "We were thinking of going into X, we would like you to be ready to come and do reconstruction", they would produce a great list of things they wanted to know, and some of that you could get through intelligence, or you would just go and sort of pick it up somehow.

THE CHAIRMAN: There was a question about using academia, the think tanks, and all the open source potential that lies out there.

SIMON WEBB: Yes. The NGOs. You could probably -- so I think it's a fair comment.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is just a tailpiece to it. We caught a loose thread from one witness that there is a deep dug-in US analytical capability, all source, open source included, somewhere in the American system. We found no trace of it. But would you be conscious of their having such a capability and, if so, did they deploy it in terms of theatre understanding?

SIMON WEBB: Not that I saw. Since, you know, they are not set

up to do colonialism, they probably don't have many of the instruments required to prepare for it, frankly. I don't think so. I never saw it.

THE CHAIRMAN: A second tailpiece, fairly quickly. John Scarlett said, when we asked him the question, that really it's not a natural intelligence target to try and construct a picture of a place, even a place that is projected as a closed society. It's not a natural intelligence target, he said. Do you agree with that? And who else, if it's a closed society?

SIMON WEBB: Yes. I'm not sure I do agree with that.

I don't think, to be fair on them, the DIS took that view. The DIS produced quite a range of country guides and stuff, and they would be tasked, not only by the MOD, but also by the joint headquarters, who would say we want to know all -- they had great lists of all the -- I remember seeing they had huge lists of the infrastructure, all the electricity substations, in part so you didn't knock them out accidentally. But they had great lists of things.

There was something about the sort of -- what the state of it all was, which we didn't really have. I think it's a valid part of planning but, again, much better done though jointly between the DIS and the stabilisation unit, because the NGOs -- if you debriefed the stack of the NGOs who had been there under Oil for Food, I suspect they would have probably known quite a lot about this.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you. That's a question mark for us.

SIMON WEBB: Yes, I think it is.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: First, Sir Rod mentioned the Red Team exercise. Were you aware of that? Do you remember reading any of the reports that came from it?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, I think I saw a bit of very high level summary of it at the chiefs of staff committee, I think, but I don't remember seeing -- the detail of it, frankly, would have been aimed at a different -- this is, I think, more for the benefit of the Op Pol and the joint headquarters side. I have some dim recollection of seeing a bit of the top level of it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just out of interest. The next question is: as Policy Director, to what extent did you start to incorporate lessons from the Iraq experience almost as they had happened? Did you start to make changes to planning assumptions, other areas of policy, as a result?

SIMON WEBB: Yes, a good deal. There's a very good habit, which the military have, of starting collecting the data for lessons, which in another context I would endorse very thoroughly, almost as soon as you start the operation. In fact I think the Vice Chief signed off a remit to the defence organisation called DOC, Director of Operational Capability, to go and start on that almost straight away. It's a very good thing because you get best data while memories are fresh. So yes, we had that.

They started to produce material, certainly by the summer of 2003, and then at the end of 2003 I was also responsible for producing an update to the white paper. And I particularly wanted to capture things that we had learned from the Iraq campaign in that.

There were some specific things about logistics, and particularly the tracking of logistics, not so much how much stuff you had, but knowing where it was and getting the right place, about NBC kit, about combat ID, identification -- that's sort of avoiding blue on blue. So that was all stuff --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: They are all issues that --

SIMON WEBB: You follow up on lessons. But there was a more

important thing from the point of view of what the future shape of the armed forces should look like, because I was trying to cope with this issue that we seemed to have a lot of potential interventions in which ministers wanted us to take a role under the force for good policy. And the question was: could you cut back on some bits of capability in order to free up capacity to do more of that?

I concluded that that was possible, that there were elements that we'd not used much in Iraq, or wouldn't in that sort of campaign with the US, particularly armour and heavy artillery, submarine, a small number of fast jets and so on, which allowed you to move from being able to do one ongoing medium commitment plus one intervention, to being able to do one medium ongoing and a short intervention and a small operation. So you could try and do something, for example, in Africa, if that was what ministers wanted.

The way you got the resources for that -- because every time you create a new operation you have a big logistics communications chain -- was by shunting the balance of the army in particular away from some of this heavy capability towards this deployable light capability in order to reshape it. Not a dramatic change, not a big -- the sort of thing we are talking about at the moment, but a change anyway. And all that came out of the lessons because the analysts were able to go round and actually say what bits of force structure were we using for this, and how would we use it for the future.

So yes, and I think the NAO, who wrote their report, I think, about the end of that year, confirmed -- which is sometimes overlooked -- that most objectives are not terribly quickly achieved, and they were complimentary about how that had been done. I would attribute that not to my bit of it, but it's a habit of the armed forces to go round and do this.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then I guess quickly one final question, which we keep on coming back to, you have answered a bit earlier, which is this question of influence on the United States. You gave a neat definition about the importance of achieving UK objectives within the context of Coalition operations.

To what extent do you think we succeeded in that in the end? Do you have any general observations about how much influence we actually gained on American policy?

SIMON WEBB: I think at the widest level we did show that there was an approach to stabilisation in the south which worked. We got a bit -- and that, as the Americans found themselves in difficulty from when the insurgency was picking up at the end of 2003, and then through 2004 and so on, I believe it made a contribution to them deciding to rethink their own doctrine.

As Rob Fry remarked, it was a very remarkable thing that if you think about the starting point of the 1990s and all the sort of history, as an act of will, to say, this is not working -- which I admire enormously -- this is not working, we are going to take our best player that has been in Iraq, Petraeus, and we are going to send him off to the command, to TRADOC in north Kansas, and he is going to rewrite our doctrine, how we train these young soldiers and young officers to do this kind of thing in this kind of situation.

Then to turn a huge machine, which is basically oriented towards fighting the nation's wars, over to doing this, and picking up on what the British had done, criticising some of what we had done, learning from it, adapting, improving on it, turning it into an American thing, and then actually driving that forward in a way which I think helped them to be more successful subsequently, I think that's influence.

Now, it's also, you know, having an American mindset which is

about change and it's also about individuals and so on. But in that sense, I would say, you know, we got rather what we were hoping to do.

What's much harder, I think, and why we went for that sort of demonstrating it on the ground approach, which looks quite expensive at first sight, is it's tough to just try and advise the Americans, to be a voice. I think I felt a bit for particularly the military person in Baghdad, described as a deputy, but actually there weren't any forces anywhere near that officer.

I would like to come back to the best comment I ever heard when I was in the Washington Embassy. It was made by the naval attache, who said to officers arriving, "it's not your job to put the Americans straight".

Once you've got that, you can see how you can influence them. If you think you can do it by shouting at them -- sorry.

THE CHAIRMAN: Simon, I'm going to close the session now.

I would have asked you for any other reflections, though you have given us a great number in the course of this useful morning. If you have any further thoughts, could you let us have a brief note at your convenience?

SIMON WEBB: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: As to the transcript of this hearing, it's available, but only upstairs in this building.

SIMON WEBB: As you know, I'm working here, at least for a couple of weeks, and I promised to come and help.⁴

THE CHAIRMAN: With that, thank you very much indeed. We will close the session.

(The hearing adjourned)

⁴ The witness was referring to work he was involved in elsewhere in the building that the hearings were taking place. He was, and is, not part of the Inquiry team.

FINAL