

SECTION 3.1

DEVELOPMENT OF UK STRATEGY AND OPTIONS, 9/11 TO EARLY JANUARY 2002

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Introduction and key findings

1. This Section addresses the immediate impact of the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 (9/11), and the way in which that shaped the context in which decisions on the policy towards Iraq were made.
2. UK policy on Iraq before September 2001 is addressed in Section 1.
3. The UK's concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the risk of terrorists acquiring and using such weapons, which pre-dated the attacks on the US, and the Joint intelligence Committee (JIC) Assessments of that risk are addressed in Section 4. That Section also addresses the UK's assessments of Iraq's residual chemical, biological, nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, its intent to preserve and enhance those capabilities, and the likelihood of proliferation from Iraq.
4. The roles and responsibilities of key individuals and bodies in the UK Government, including the JIC, are set out in Section 2.

Key findings

- After the attacks on the US on 9/11, Mr Blair declared that the UK would stand “shoulder to shoulder” with the US to defeat and eradicate international terrorism.
- Mr Blair took an active and leading role throughout the autumn of 2001 in building a coalition to act against that threat, including taking military action against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.
- Mr Blair also emphasised the potential risk of terrorists acquiring and using a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon, and the dangers of inaction.
- In relation to Iraq, Mr Blair sought to influence US policy and prevent precipitate military action by the US, which he considered would undermine the success of the coalition which had been established for action against international terrorism. He recommended identifying an alternative policy which would command widespread international support.
- In December 2001, Mr Blair suggested a strategy for regime change in Iraq that would build over time, including “if necessary” taking military action without losing international support.
- The tactics chosen by Mr Blair were to emphasise the threat which Iraq might pose, rather than a more balanced consideration of both Iraq's capabilities and intent; and to offer the UK's support for President Bush in an effort to influence his decisions on how to proceed.
- That remained Mr Blair's approach in the months that followed.

UK policy on Iraq in early September 2001

5. Since the end of the Gulf Conflict in 1991, the international community had pursued a policy of “containment” towards Iraq. That was based on the provisions in a series of United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions intended to prevent Iraq from developing WMD or threatening its neighbours and international peace and security.

6. The policy had a number of dimensions. Its key components were:

- a prohibition on the possession of WMD or long-range ballistic missiles, or programmes to develop such capabilities;
- an arms embargo;
- economic sanctions; and
- a strong deterrence component provided by US and UK forces stationed in the region enforcing the northern and southern No-Fly Zones (NFZs) and supporting the arms embargo and economic sanctions regime.

The UN Security Council

The UN Security Council is composed of five Permanent Members – China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States; and ten non-permanent Member States, elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms and not eligible for immediate re-election.

The Presidency of the Security Council is held by the Member States of the Security Council in turn in the English alphabetical order of their names. Each President holds office for one calendar month.

Each Member State has one vote. Decisions on substantive matters, and the adoption of a Security Council resolution, require nine positive votes, without any of the five Permanent Members voting against the decision. That is usually described as the “veto” power held by the Permanent Members. Decisions on procedural matters are made by an affirmative vote of at least nine of the 15 Member States.

7. Throughout the 1990s, there were concerns about the willingness of President Saddam Hussein’s regime to disarm in accordance with the obligations imposed by the UN.

8. After the election of May 1997, the Government had to deal with a series of confrontations between Iraq and the international community about the ability of inspectors from the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) to fulfil its remit, including difficulties over access to sites which Iraq had designated as Presidential palaces. Those events and the action in the UN Security Council, and by Mr Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General from January 1997 to December 2006, to persuade Iraq to co-operate, are set out in Section 1.

9. It was widely assumed that Saddam Hussein had retained some of his chemical and biological capability and a small number of ballistic missiles which might be armed with chemical or biological warheads, and that he had aspirations to preserve and enhance his capabilities for the future.

10. The UK Government considered that a willingness to use force was an essential element of UK policy in persuading Saddam Hussein to co-operate.

11. For instance, in a statement to the House of Commons on 24 February 1998, Mr Blair stated that “nothing else” apart from “effective diplomacy and firm willingness to use force” would have changed Saddam Hussein’s mind and produced a signed agreement with the UN:

“Throughout the dispute, our aim has been a peaceful, diplomatic settlement. There was no desire on either side of the Atlantic to use force, but it was also clear to us throughout that Saddam Hussein only understands and respects force ...

“... As Kofi Annan said in Baghdad: ‘You can achieve much by diplomacy, but you can achieve a lot more when diplomacy is backed by firmness and force.’

“I would put it this way: with Saddam, diplomacy plus force equals success.”¹

12. Mr Blair concluded:

“Saddam Hussein has spent seven years playing for time, but has been thwarted by the resolve of the international community. It is now clearer than ever that his games have to stop once and for all. If they do not, the consequences should be clear to all.”²

13. Regime change became the officially-stated objective of US policy after the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act in October 1998.

14. Following further disputes about access for weapons inspectors and the withdrawal of the inspectors, the US and UK attacked a series of targets in Iraq in December 1998, in Operation Desert Fox. Its objective was described by Mr Blair as:

“... to degrade the ability of Saddam Hussein to build and use weapons of mass destruction, including command and control and delivery systems, and to diminish the threat that Saddam Hussein poses to his neighbours by weakening his military capability.”³

15. The impact of Operation Desert Fox is addressed in Section 4.1

16. In a press conference on 20 December 1998, Mr Blair explicitly ruled out a “land war in Iraq with literally hundreds of thousands of allied troops engaged” and called for a future strategy based on containment and stability for the region including a credible threat of force if Saddam posed a threat to the neighbourhood or developed WMD.⁴

17. By that stage, the Security Council was deeply divided on policy towards Iraq and the other three Permanent Members of the Security Council did not support the US and UK use of force.

¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 24 February 1998, columns 174-175.

² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 24 February 1998, column 176.

³ House of Commons *Official Report*, 17 December 1998, volume 322, columns 1097-1102.

⁴ Press conference, 20 December 1998 (as reported in *Le Monde diplomatique*).

18. A report on disarmament describing the work of UNSCOM since 1991 was sent to the Security Council on 25 January 1999.⁵ That set out in three detailed annexes “material balances”, for proscribed missiles, chemical and biological weapons, for which UNSCOM had been unable to account. Those were subsequently used by the UK as the basis for its estimates of the material Iraq might still retain.

Mr Blair’s speech in Chicago, April 1999

In his speech to the Economic Club in Chicago of 22 April 1999 Mr Blair identified Saddam Hussein and Mr Slobodan Milošević, the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as the cause of “many of our problems”.⁶

That speech set out Mr Blair’s thinking on a doctrine of the international community, including five principles for international intervention:

“First, are we sure of our case? War is an imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian distress; but armed force is sometimes the only means of dealing with dictators.

“Second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options? We should always give peace every chance, as we have in the case of Kosovo.

“Third, on the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake?

“Fourth, are we prepared for the long term? In the past, we talked too much of exit strategies. But having made a commitment we cannot simply walk away once the fight is over; better to stay with moderate numbers of troops than return for repeat performances with large numbers.

“And finally, do we have national interests involved?”

Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the speech had been intended to set out the consequences of an interdependent world where countries would not be able to divorce their national interests from the impacts of security problems in other parts of the world.⁷

Ideas for the speech, which Sir Lawrence Freedman submitted in response to a request from Mr Jonathan Powell, Mr Blair’s Chief of Staff, were set out in the attachment to Sir Lawrence’s letter to Sir John Chilcot on 18 January 2010. The letter was published on the Inquiry’s website.

⁵ UN Security Council, 29 January 1999, ‘Letter dated 25 January 1999 from the Executive Chairman of the Special Commission established by the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 9 (b) (i) of Security Council resolution 687 (1991) addressed to the President of the Security Council’ (S/1999/94).

⁶ Speech, 23 April 1999, *Doctrine of the International Community*.

⁷ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 26-27.

19. UK policy towards Iraq was formally reviewed and agreed by the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (DOP) in May 1999. The UK's policy objectives towards Iraq were defined as:

“... in the short term, to reduce the threat Saddam [Hussein] poses to the region including by eliminating his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes; and, in the longer term, to reintegrate a territorially intact Iraq as a law-abiding member of the international community.”⁸

20. The policy of containment was seen as the “only viable way” to pursue those objectives. A “policy of trying to topple Saddam would command no useful international support”. Iraq was unlikely to accept the package immediately but “might be persuaded to acquiesce eventually”.

21. After prolonged discussion about the way ahead, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1284 in December 1999, although France, Russia and China abstained.⁹

22. The resolution established:

- a new inspectorate, the United Nations Monitoring and Verification Commission (UNMOVIC), which Dr Hans Blix was subsequently appointed to lead;
- a timetable to identify and agree a work programme; and
- the principle that if the inspectors reported co-operation in key areas, that would lead to the suspension of economic sanctions.¹⁰

23. Iraq refused to accept the provisions of resolution 1284, including the re-admission of weapons inspectors. Concerns about Iraq's activities in the absence of inspectors increased.

24. The US Presidential election in November 2000 prompted a further UK review of the operation of the containment policy. There were concerns about how long the policy could be sustained and what it could achieve. That is addressed in detail in Section 1.2.

25. A JIC Assessment in October 2000, which assessed the prospects for Iraq after the death of Saddam Hussein, judged:

- There was “a significant risk of a period of **violent factional and internecine strife** amongst the Sunni elite followed by the emergence of a new military leader”.
- “If the regime appeared weakened, the **Kurds** would be likely to try to re-establish control of the northern towns of Mosul and Kirkuk. But they would

⁸ Joint Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence, 17 May 1999, ‘Iraq: Future Strategy’.

⁹ UN Security Council Press Release, 17 December 1999, *Security Council Establishes New Monitoring Commission For Iraq Adopting Resolution 1284 (1999) By Vote of 11-0-4 (SC/6775)*.

¹⁰ UN Security Council, ‘4084th Meeting Friday 17 December 1999’ (S/PV.4084).

settle for consolidation of their autonomy rather than secession. The **Shia** would attack regime targets in the South, but they do not seek independence ... Iraq's territorial integrity would be maintained."

- "**Any new regime**" was likely to be "**autocratic** and drawn from the **Sunni elite**". "Its policies and methods" were "unlikely to be different from Saddam's. Given Iraq's strategic interests in the Gulf, this will include a long-term desire for weapons of mass destruction."
- "Pressure would build internationally to end Iraq's pariah status and isolation. The level of pressure would reflect the extent to which the regime appeared to moderate its behaviour. But **Iraq's political rehabilitation could be rapid**, overwhelming any voices of caution from London, Washington or elsewhere."¹¹

26. There were concerns over both the continued legal basis for operations in NFZs and the conduct of individual operations.¹²

27. A further Assessment on 1 November judged that Saddam Hussein felt "**little pressure to negotiate** over ... resolution 1284 because the proceeds of oil smuggling and illicit trade have increased significantly this year, and more countries are increasing diplomatic contacts and trade with Iraq".¹³

28. The JIC also judged:

"Saddam would only contemplate co-operation with [resolution] 1284, and the return of inspectors ... if it could be portrayed as a victory. He will not agree to co-operate unless:

- there is **UN-agreed timetable for the lifting of sanctions**. Saddam suspects that the US would not agree to sanctions lift while he remained in power;
- he is able **to negotiate with the UN in advance to weaken the inspection provisions**. His ambitions to rebuild Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programmes makes him hostile to intrusive inspections or any other constraints likely to be effective.

"Before accepting 1284, Saddam will try to obtain the abolition of the No-Fly Zones. He is also likely to demand that the US should abandon its stated aim to topple the Iraqi regime."

29. In November 2000, Mr Blair's "preferred option" was described as the implementation of 1284, enabling inspectors to return and sanctions to be suspended.¹⁴

¹¹ [JIC Assessment, 11 October 2000, 'Iraq After Saddam'](#).

¹² [Letter Goulty to McKane, 20 October 2000, 'Iraq'](#).

¹³ [JIC Assessment, 1 November 2000, 'Iraq: Prospects for Co-operation with UNSCR 1284'](#).

¹⁴ [Letter Sawers to Cowper-Coles, 27 November 2000, 'Iraq'](#).

30. In December 2000, the British Embassy in Washington reported growing pressure to change course from containment to military action to oust Saddam Hussein, but no decision to change policy or to begin military planning had been taken by President Clinton.¹⁵

31. The Key Judgements of a JIC Assessment in February 2001 included:

- There was “broad international consensus to maintain the arms embargo at least as long as Saddam remains in power. Saddam faces no economic pressure to accept ... [resolution] 1284 because he is successfully undermining the economic sanctions regime.”
- “Through abuse of the UN Oil-for-Food [OFF] programme and smuggling of oil and other goods” it was estimated that Saddam would “**be able to appropriate in the region of \$1.5bn to \$1.8bn in cash and goods in 2001**”, and there was “scope for earning even more”.
- “**Iranian** interdiction efforts” had “**significantly reduced smuggling down the Gulf**”, but Saddam had “compensated by **exploiting land routes** to Turkey and Syria”.
- “Most countries” believed that economic sanctions were “ineffective, counterproductive and should now be lifted. Without active enforcement, the economic sanctions regime” would “continue to erode”.¹⁶

32. The Assessment also stated:

- Saddam needed funds “to maintain his military and security apparatus and secure its loyalty”.
- Despite the availability of funds, Iraq had been slow to comply with UN recommendations on food allocation. Saddam needed “**the Iraqi people to suffer to underpin his campaign against sanctions**”.
- Encouraged by the success of Iraq’s border trade agreement with Turkey, “**front-line states**” were “**not enforcing sanctions**”.
- There had been a “significant increase in the erosion of sanctions over the past six months”.

33. There were differences of view within the UK Government about the benefits of in-country inspections, based on a concern that they could hand the initiative to Saddam Hussein without offering any substantive gains.¹⁷

34. The stated position of the UK Government in February 2001 was that containment had been broadly successful.¹⁸

¹⁵ [Letter Barrow to Sawers, 15 December 2000, ‘Iraq’](#).

¹⁶ [JIC Assessment, 14 February 2001, ‘Iraq: Economic Sanctions Eroding’](#).

¹⁷ [Minute McKane to Sawers, 15 February 2001 attaching Note, ‘Iraq’](#).

¹⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 26 February 2001, column 620.

35. When Mr Blair met President Bush at Camp David in late February 2001, the US and UK agreed on the need for a policy which was more widely supported in the Middle East region.¹⁹ Mr Blair had concluded that public presentation needed to be improved. He suggested that the approach should be presented as a “deal” comprising four elements:

- do the right thing by the Iraqi people, with whom we have no quarrel;
- tighten weapons controls on Saddam;
- retain financial control on Saddam; and
- retain our ability to strike.

36. The UK’s thinking was set out in a paper proposing a new policy framework, circulated by Mr John Sawers, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, on 7 March 2001.²⁰ That comprised:

- The pursuit of a new sanctions regime to improve international support and incentivise Iraq’s co-operation, narrowing and deepening the sanctions regime to focus only on prohibited items and at the same time improving financial controls to reduce the flow of illicit funds to Saddam Hussein, (so called “smarter sanctions”).
- A renewed focus on human rights abuse by the Iraq regime; and a “contract with the Iraqi people”, “setting out our goal of a peaceful law-abiding Iraq, fully reintegrated into the international community, with its people free to live in a society based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and economic freedom, and without threat of repression, torture and arbitrary arrest”.
- The continued operation of the No-Fly Zones, but with patrolling set at levels which would minimise the risk to UK air crew.
- Iraqi compliance with resolution 1284 (1999). That would “remain one of our stated objectives (and retaining some incentives for Iraq to comply would be necessary to restore P5 [the five Permanent Members of the Security Council – China, France, Russia, the UK and the US] unity)”.

37. The paper also stated that “the Iraqi regime’s record and behaviour made it impossible for Iraq to meet the criteria for rejoining the international community without fundamental change”.

38. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that one of the key elements of the policy was to seal Iraq’s borders to make the sanctions regime more effective.²¹

¹⁹ Letter Sawers to Cowper-Coles, 24 February 2001, ‘Prime Minister’s Talks with President Bush, Camp David, 23 February 2001’.

²⁰ [Letter Sawers to Cowper-Coles, 7 March 2001, ‘Iraq: New Policy Framework’.](#)

²¹ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 15.

39. During the summer of 2001 the UK had been exploring the way forward with the US, Russia and France on a draft Security Council resolution to put in place a “smart sanctions” regime:

- The US had agreed that a straight rollover of the Oil-for-Food (OFF) provisions would be seen as a defeat and supported reviving the UK’s draft resolution. But it had not agreed the final form such a resolution should take.
- France had come to the broad conclusion that a rollover would strengthen the hawks in the US Administration. The UK draft resolution would be a starting point but French support was “tepid”.
- Russia had set out its arguments about the defects of the UK draft but the FCO formed “the impression that the problems ... were not insuperable”.²²

40. In the context of questions about the attitude towards Iraq in September 2001, Mr Blair emphasised that the nature of the Iraqi regime had made a difference to the nature of the WMD threat and that Saddam Hussein’s “profoundly wicked” mindset “definitely impacted on our thinking”.²³

41. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that, until 11 September 2001, the UK had a policy of containment, but sanctions were eroding.²⁴ The policy was “partially successful”, but it did not mean that Saddam Hussein was “not still developing his [prohibited] programmes”.

The impact of 9/11

The immediate response to 9/11

42. On 11 September 2001 three aircraft were hijacked and flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. A fourth hijacked aircraft crashed in Pennsylvania. The attacks were unprecedented and resulted in the largest ever loss of life from an enemy attack on the territory of the United States. Nearly 3,000 people died, including 67 British citizens.²⁵

43. **The UK’s response to the attacks was to offer support to the US, including constructing an agenda for action against international terrorism and co-opting international support.**

44. **On 12 September Mr Blair wrote to President Bush advocating action before further catastrophes, including a suggestion that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan should be presented with a demand to yield Usama Bin Laden and close the Al Qaida camps.**

²² [Minute McKane to Manning, 18 September 2001, ‘Iraq Stocktake’](#).

²³ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 66.

²⁴ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, page 8.

²⁵ *The Guardian*, 18 August 2002, *9/11 in numbers*.

45. In his statement following the attacks, Mr Blair stated that the democracies of the world must come together to defeat and eradicate mass terrorism.²⁶ It was:

“... not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We, therefore, here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy, and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our world.”

46. Describing the events of 11 September 2001, Mr Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair’s Director of Communications and Strategy, recorded that after the discussion in the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR), Mr Blair held a smaller meeting in No.10 with Mr Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, and Mr Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary.²⁷ During the meeting Mr Blair asked them to work up “an international agenda which went beyond the US just hitting Afghanistan”; and stated that he intended to advise President Bush to issue an ultimatum to the Taliban to hand over Usama Bin Laden (UBL).

47. Mr Blair sent a Note to President Bush on 12 September setting out three goals to:

- bring to justice those responsible;
- construct an agenda for action against international terrorism; and
- co-opt the world’s leading countries in support of action.²⁸

48. Mr Blair wrote that action on the second and third goals should take place as soon as possible.

49. Action on the first goal might include presenting the Taliban with a demand to yield Usama Bin Laden and his associates and close their camps or “face guilt by complicity”. That would have to be “decided on evidential and military grounds”.

50. In considering the need for a political agenda, Mr Blair wrote:

“[A]fter reflection, there will be many who ask: what is the next stage of this evil? What of their capacity to get hold of biological, chemical and other WMD? We know that there are countries and individuals trading in WMD and/or trying to acquire them. We need a range of sanctions and pressures to stop this.

“Some of this will require action that some will balk at. But we are better to act now and explain and justify our actions than let the day be put off until some further, perhaps even worse catastrophe occurs. And I believe this is a real possibility.”

51. Mr Blair added: “It would also help in the Islamic world if we could find a way to revive the Middle East Peace Process.”

²⁶ The National Archives, 11 September 2001, *September 11 attacks: Prime Minister’s statement*.

²⁷ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

²⁸ [Note Blair \[to Bush\], 12 September 2001, ‘Note for the President’](#).

52. Mr Blair stated that Russia and China would be crucial and that it was “time to put aside other geo-political differences and unite against a common enemy”.

53. A copy of the Note was sent to Mr Hoon’s Private Office, which was circulated to senior officials within the MOD.

54. In the context of evidence about Mr Blair’s Note to President Bush of 28 July 2002 (see Section 3.3), Mr Powell told the Inquiry that Mr Blair:

“... had a habit of writing notes, both internally and to President Clinton and to President Bush, on all sorts of subjects, because he found it better to put something in writing rather than simply talk about it orally and get it much more concretely and ... in focused terms.”²⁹

55. The UN Security Council adopted resolution 1368 on 12 September which stated that the Security Council had:

“Determined to combat by all means threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts,

“Recognising the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in accordance with the Charter”.³⁰

56. Condemning the attacks “as a threat to international peace and security” the Security Council called on:

- “all States to work together urgently to bring to justice the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of these terrorist attacks” and stressed “that those responsible for aiding, supporting or harbouring the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of these acts” would be “held accountable”;
- “the international community to redouble their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts ...”;

and expressed:

- “its readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and to combat all forms of terrorism, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations”.

²⁹ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 38.

³⁰ UN Security Council resolution 1368 (2001).

57. In his statement to the House of Commons on 14 September, Mr Blair said that the events of 11 September had been a warning and that “we should act on the warning”.³¹ Terrorists would:

“... if they could, go further and use chemical, biological and or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction. We know, also, that there are groups of people, occasionally states, who will trade the technology and capability of such weapons.”

58. Mr Blair concluded:

“We believe in reason, democracy and tolerance. These beliefs are the foundation of our civilised world. They are enduring, they have served us well, and as history has shown, we have been prepared to fight, when necessary, to defend them. The fanatics should know that we hold our beliefs every bit as strongly as they hold theirs, and now is the time to show it.”

59. In response to an intervention from Mr Paul Marsden (Labour), who asked for caution in the light of reports from American sources that NATO bombing might occur in Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Afghanistan, Mr Blair replied that Mr Marsden and others:

“... should not pay too much attention to some of the wilder pieces of speculation that inevitably are made at a time like this. It is important to recognise that the way in which the United States of America has proceeded so far is exactly right: in a calm and considered way, and in close consultation with allies such as ourselves.”³²

60. Mr Blair added that it was:

“... important that ... we base our identification of those responsible on proper evidence, but then that we are relentless in our pursuit of those responsible and bringing them to justice.”

61. In the subsequent debate on international terrorism, Iraq was mentioned briefly by a number of speakers, including Mr Tam Dalyell (Labour), who argued that a generation in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East was “growing up absolutely to loathe the United States and Britain” and urged the Government to look again at “10 years of bombing of Iraq and sanctions”.³³

62. Asked when he had taken the decision that “we should be prepared to join the Americans in using force and that we should be prepared to use force ourselves” against Iraq, Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

“I think I said in my statement of 14 September 2001 that I think this issue of WMD is going to take on a different meaning now. Of course the Americans had already a policy of regime change. That was a policy in fact articulated by President Clinton,

³¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 September 2001, columns 606-607.

³² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 September 2001, column 616.

³³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 September 2001, column 632.

passed in 1998 following the military action we took in Iraq, US and UK in 1998. So it was obviously going to be on the agenda. I was always going to make it clear and did make it clear we would be shoulder to shoulder with America in dealing with these threats after September 11th. So how we were to deal with that would be an open question. That we were going to deal with it I think was pretty clear from that moment on.”³⁴

63. Following the attacks, President Bush determined that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which was harbouring Al Qaida, should be the priority for the US Administration in what it called a war on terrorism.

64. In the context of a possible Phase 2 of that war, President Bush also ordered the US Defense Department to be ready to deal with Iraq if it acted against US interests.

65. On 15 September the British Embassy Washington reported to London that the US now looked at the world through a new prism: US policy towards Iraq would harden, especially if any evidence emerged which linked Saddam Hussein to the terrorists.³⁵ The “regime-change hawks” in Washington were arguing that a coalition put together for one purpose [against international terrorism] could be used to clear up other problems in the region.

66. President Bush convened a meeting of his national security team at Camp David on 15 September.³⁶ The team included Vice President Dick Cheney, Mr Colin Powell (US Secretary of State), Mr Donald Rumsfeld (US Secretary of Defense), Mr George Tenet (Director of Central Intelligence), Dr Condoleezza Rice (US National Security Advisor) and Mr Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense).

67. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, the 9/11 Commission, reported that:

- President Bush had wondered immediately after the attack whether Saddam Hussein’s regime might have had a hand in it; and that he had also thought about Iran.
- On the afternoon of 11 September, Secretary Rumsfeld had instructed General Myers, the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the US response should consider a wide range of options and possibilities; and said that his instinct was to hit Saddam Hussein at the same time – not only Usama Bin Laden.³⁷

³⁴ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, page 7.

³⁵ Telegram 1056 Washington to FCO London, 15 September 2001, ‘US Terrorist Attacks: Wider Foreign Policy Implications’.

³⁶ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

³⁷ Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Norton.

68. Dr Rice told the Commission that the US Administration had been concerned that Iraq would take advantage of the 9/11 attacks. She recalled that, in the first Camp David session chaired by the President, Mr Rumsfeld had asked what the Administration should do about Iraq; and that Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz had made the case for striking Iraq during “this round” of the war on terrorism.

69. Dr Rice also told the Commission that a Department of Defense (DoD) briefing paper for the meeting, on the strategic concept for the war on terrorism, had specified three priority targets for initial action: Al Qaida, the Taliban, and Iraq. The paper had argued that Al Qaida and Iraq both posed a strategic threat to the United States, citing Iraq’s long-standing involvement in terrorism and its interest in weapons of mass of destruction.

70. Secretary Powell told the Commission that: “Paul [Wolfowitz] was always of the view that Iraq was a problem that had to be dealt with ... And he saw this as one way of using this event as a way to deal with the Iraq problem.” President Bush saw Afghanistan as the priority.

71. In his memoir, *Decision Points*, President Bush recorded:

- Secretary Rumsfeld had said: “Dealing with Iraq would show a major commitment to antiterrorism.”
- Secretary Powell had cautioned against it and Mr Tenet had agreed.
- Vice President Cheney had “understood the threat of Saddam Hussein and believed we had to address it. But now is not a good time to do it ... We would lose our momentum.”³⁸

72. Mr Tenet wrote:

“When an informal vote was taken on whether to include Iraq in our immediate response plans, the principals voted four to zero against it, with Don Rumsfeld abstaining.”³⁹

73. According to his memoir, President Bush took the decision on 16 September that:

“Unless I received definitive evidence tying Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 plot, I would work to resolve the Iraq problem diplomatically. I hoped unified pressure by the world might compel Saddam to meet his international obligations. The best way to show him we were serious was to succeed in Afghanistan.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

³⁹ Tenet G & Harlow B. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*. HarperPress, 2007.

⁴⁰ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

74. Dr Rice told the 9/11 Commission that President Bush had called her that day to say the focus would be on Afghanistan, although he still wanted plans for Iraq should the country take some action or the US Administration eventually determine that it had been involved in the 9/11 attacks.⁴¹

75. The 9/11 Commission reported that there was some further discussion of Phase 2 of the war on terrorism, at a meeting in Washington of the National Security Council on 17 September. President Bush had ordered the Defense Department to be ready to deal with Iraq if Baghdad acted against US interests, with plans to include possibly occupying Iraqi oilfields. Within the Pentagon, Mr Wolfowitz had continued to press the case for dealing with Iraq.

76. Secretary Rumsfeld provided guidance on 19 September to US commanders working on their contingency plans.

77. The Commission reported that General Tommy Franks, Commander in Chief CENTCOM (US Central Command), told them that he:

“... recalled receiving Rumsfeld’s guidance that each regional commander should assess what these plans meant for his area of responsibility. He [Franks] knew he would soon be striking the Taliban and Al Qaida in Afghanistan. But, he told us, he now wondered how that action was connected to what might be needed to be done in Somalia, Yemen or Iraq. The CENTCOM commander told us he renewed his appeal for further military planning to respond to Iraqi moves shortly after 9/11 ... Franks said that President Bush again turned down the request.”

78. **The JIC assessed on 18 September that the attacks on 11 September had set a new benchmark for terrorist atrocity and terrorists seeking comparable impact might use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) devices. But only Islamic extremists such as those who shared Usama Bin Laden’s agenda had the motivation to pursue attacks with the deliberate aim of causing maximum casualties.**

79. **The potential threat to UK interests would be higher the more closely the UK was identified with the US.**

80. Following a request from Mr Blair, for a reassessment of the nature and scale of the threat posed to the UK by terrorism and the contingency plans for dealing with it, the JIC considered whether the scale and nature of the terrorist threat to the UK had changed.⁴²

⁴¹ Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Norton. Page 335.

⁴² Minutes, 14 September 2001, JIC meeting.

81. The Assessment, issued on 18 September, considered whether the attacks of 11 September changed the nature and scale of the terrorist threat to the UK, and its potential vulnerability to major terrorist attack, and “the current and immediately foreseeable threat in terms of the intention and capability of known terrorist groups”.⁴³ The Assessment assumed that there would be “a continuation of the current political circumstances in which the UK is closely identified with the US”.

82. The JIC’s Key Judgements included:

- The attacks had “set a new benchmark for terrorist atrocity. The level of destruction and the public impact are unprecedented.”
- “Terrorists seeking comparable impact may try to use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear devices ...”
- The “potential scope for terrorist attacks” was “very wide”: “But in order to assess the threat to the UK, we need to consider both the capabilities and the intentions of the terrorist groups.”
- “Only Islamic extremists such as those who shared Usama Bin Laden’s agenda currently have the motivation to pursue” attacks “with the deliberate aim of causing maximum casualties”. The more closely the UK was identified with the US, “the higher the potential threat” to UK interests “both here and overseas”.
- Major attacks like those of 11 September required considerable planning and were “therefore likely to remain relatively infrequent”.

83. The development of the JIC position on the risk of terrorists acquiring and using CBRN is addressed in Section 4.

84. On 20 September, Mr Blair advised President Bush to “take our time to see whether we could build up the case against Iraq or other countries” before acting.

85. Mr Blair attended a memorial service for British victims of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 20 September, and subsequently travelled to Washington to meet President Bush.⁴⁴

86. In relation to suggestions then circulating in the US that Iraq was behind the 9/11 attacks, the record states that Mr Blair told President Bush there was no doubt that Saddam Hussein was evil:

“But before any action was taken against him, we would need to be very sure indeed that there was compelling evidence. It would be best to deal with Afghanistan initially

⁴³ JIC Assessment, 18 September 2001, ‘UK Vulnerability to Major Terrorist Attack’. As a Director in the Treasury Public Services Directorate responsible for the Defence, Diplomacy and Intelligence Team, Ms Margaret Aldred, the Secretary to the Inquiry, was present at the discussion.

⁴⁴ *BBC News*, 21 September 2001, *Blair pledges solidarity with the US*.

and then take our time to see whether we could build up the case against Iraq or other countries.”⁴⁵

87. Mr Blair added that there was very wide international support for a careful and considered US approach. It was sometimes frustrating to work with a coalition, but its support was a crucial investment.

88. Citing the US National Security Council’s record of the meeting between President Bush and Mr Blair, the 9/11 Commission wrote:

“When Blair asked about Iraq, the President replied that Iraq was not the immediate problem. Some members of his administration, he commented, had expressed a different view, but he was the one responsible for making the decisions.”⁴⁶

89. Mr Campbell wrote in his diaries that President Bush had said the focus was on Usama Bin Laden and the Taliban: “But he also talked about how they could go after Saddam’s oilfields.”⁴⁷

90. Mr Jonathan Powell, Mr Blair’s Chief of Staff, told the Inquiry that President Bush had agreed: “the focus would be on Afghanistan and Al Qaida”.⁴⁸

91. Sir Christopher Meyer, British Ambassador to the United States from 2001 to February 2003, told the Inquiry that Mr Blair had sent a message to President Bush:

“... setting out his views on what needed to be done and he argued very strongly for a laser-like focus on Al Qaida and Afghanistan. By the time he got to Washington ... the door was already open. He didn’t have to argue the case.”⁴⁹

92. In a speech to Congress, President Bush set out the US determination to fight a war against terrorism by every means at its disposal.

93. That included an ultimatum to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to give up the leaders of Al Qaida and close its training camps.

94. Addressing the US Congress on 20 September, President Bush stated that the US had “no truer friend than Great Britain” and thanked Mr Blair for crossing the “ocean to show his unity of purpose”.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Letter Manning to McDonald, 20 September 2001, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Washington on 20 September: Dinner with President Bush’.

⁴⁶ Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Norton. Page 336.

⁴⁷ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

⁴⁸ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 16.

⁴⁹ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, page 22.

⁵⁰ The White House, 20 September 2001, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*.

95. President Bush stated that the evidence for responsibility for the attacks on 11 September pointed to “a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations” known as Al Qaida, which was also linked to “many other organizations in different countries”. Al Qaida had “great influence” in Afghanistan, and supported the Taliban regime.

96. President Bush condemned the Taliban regime for “aiding and abetting murder”, and demanded that it should:

“Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of Al Qaida who hide in your land ... Release all foreign nationals ... Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers ... Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities ... Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.

“These demands are not open to negotiation ... The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.”

97. President Bush stated:

“Our war on terror begins with Al Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.

...

“... How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary instrument of war – to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.

“This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago ... It will not look like the air war above Kosovo ...

“Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen ... And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation ... now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists ... From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”

98. The attacks on 11 September 2001 fundamentally changed the context within which the US Administration and the UK Government viewed policy towards Iraq.

99. Secretary Rumsfeld recorded that President Bush had first asked him to “look at the shape of our military plans on Iraq” on 26 September; and had said that the options should be “creative”.⁵¹

⁵¹ Rumsfeld D. *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*. Sentinel, 2011.

100. Secretary Rumsfeld ordered a review of existing US war plans for Iraq on 29 September.⁵²

101. Subsequent accounts by key members of the US Administration set out how they considered the context for US policy on Iraq had changed following the attacks.

102. In remarks to the press at the White House during Mr Blair's visit on 31 January 2003, President Bush said:

“After September the 11th, the doctrine of containment just doesn't hold any water ... My vision shifted dramatically after September the 11th, because I now realize the stakes. I realize the world has changed.”⁵³

103. In his memoir President Bush wrote that the “lack of a serious response” to previous Al Qaida attacks had been interpreted:

“... as a sign of weakness and an invitation to attempt more brazen attacks ... After 9/11, I was determined to change that impression.”⁵⁴

104. Describing the impact of the attacks on his view on Iraq, President Bush wrote:

“Then 9/11 hit, and we had to take a fresh look at every threat in the world. There were state sponsors of terror. There were sworn enemies of America. There were hostile governments that threatened their neighbors. There were nations that violated international demands. There were dictators who repressed their people. And there were regimes that pursued WMD. Iraq combined all those threats ...

...

“Before 9/11, Saddam was a problem America might have been able to manage. Through the lens of the post-9/11 world, my view changed ... I could only imagine the destruction possible if an enemy dictator passed his WMD to terrorists. With threats flowing into the Oval Office daily – many of them about chemical, biological or nuclear weapons – that seemed like a frighteningly real possibility ... The lesson of 9/11 was that if we waited for a danger to fully materialize, we would have waited too long. I reached a decision: We would confront the threat from Iraq, one way or another.”

⁵² Feith DJ. *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*. HarperCollins, 2008; Bowen SW Jr. *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*. U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009.

⁵³ The White House, 31 January 2003, *Remarks by the President and British Prime Minister Tony Blair*.

⁵⁴ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

105. Dr Rice wrote that after 9/11:

“No security issue ever looked quite the same again, and every day our overwhelming preoccupation was to avoid another attack ... Our entire concept of what constituted security had been shaken.”⁵⁵

106. Mr Tenet wrote:

“After 9/11, everything changed. Many foreign policy issues were now viewed through the prism of smoke rising from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For many in the Bush administration, Iraq was unfinished business. They seized on the emotional impact of 9/11 and created a psychological connection between the failure to act decisively against Al Qaida and the danger posed by Iraq’s WMD programs. The message was: We can never afford to be surprised again ... we might wake up one day to find that Saddam possessed a nuclear weapon, and then our ability to deal with him would take on an entirely different cast.

“... it seemed a given that the United States had not done enough to stop Al Qaida ... and had paid an enormous price. Therefore ... we could not allow ourselves to be in a similar situation in Iraq.”⁵⁶

107. Sir Peter Ricketts, Chairman of the JIC until September 2001 and subsequently FCO Political Director until July 2003, told the Inquiry that “through to 9/11, the dominant player [on Iraq policy in Washington] was the State Department”; but after 9/11 the dominant force changed.⁵⁷

108. Sir David Manning, Mr Blair’s Foreign Policy Adviser and Head of the Cabinet Office Overseas and Defence Secretariat (OD Sec), told the Inquiry that “Indefinite containment ... looked increasingly implausible”. After 9/11 the mood in Washington had “changed dramatically” and “tolerance for containment had changed”.⁵⁸

109. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that the US saw 9/11 as a “Pearl Harbour of the 21st Century”; they were being attacked at home and that made them “much more willing to be pre-emptive”.⁵⁹

110. Mr Straw told the Inquiry that 9/11 changed everything and that in his view “people in Europe still don’t quite comprehend the degree”.⁶⁰ Mr Straw added that the attacks led to a consensus across the world that a policy of tolerating failing or failed states was unacceptable. The perception of risk changed.

⁵⁵ Rice C. *No Higher Honour*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

⁵⁶ Tenet G & Harlow B. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*. HarperPress, 2007.

⁵⁷ Public hearing, 24 November 2009, page 24.

⁵⁸ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 28-29.

⁵⁹ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 15.

⁶⁰ Public hearing, 21 January 2010, pages 6-7.

111. Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

“... I think I would fairly describe our policy ... as doing our best, hoping for the best, but with a different calculus of risk assessment ... up to September 11, we thought there was a risk but we thought it was worth trying to contain it. The crucial thing after September 11 is that the calculus of risk changed.”⁶¹

112. Mr Blair added: “after September 11, our view, the American view, changed dramatically”.⁶²

113. Mr Blair stated that his:

“... primary consideration ... was to send an absolutely powerful, clear and unremitting message that ... if you were a regime engaged in WMD, you had to stop.”⁶³

114. In the UK, pursuit of agreement in the Security Council for improvements in the sanctions regime for Iraq was seen as key to both sustaining the policy of containment and to removing an impediment to securing a coalition for action against international terrorism.

115. The FCO proposed amending the UK draft resolution to address the perception that it imposed additional obligations on Iraq’s neighbours to enforce sanctions.

116. The background to the UK’s pursuit of an improved economic sanctions regime for Iraq is set out in Section 1.2.

117. Following a meeting to “discuss the options available for dealing with the UK’s draft UNSCR [UN Security Council resolution] and the best way forward in the light of terrorist attack in the US”, Mr Tom McKane, the Deputy Head of OD Sec, advised Sir David Manning:

“The Cabinet Office Assessments Staff reported that Saddam Hussein was comfortable and in control. He had no desire for a confrontation but could change his stance if the security situation changed in the North or if a new resolution was passed which brought with it tighter controls on imports and exports. Currently his position is not being challenged ...

“... there was no intelligence of an Iraqi link to the terrorist attacks in the US last week. But the Iraqis were nervous of being blamed for the attack. There were indications of the dispersal of Iraqi military assets. Saddam Hussein had urged the US to exercise restraint.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 7.

⁶² Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 9.

⁶³ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 24.

⁶⁴ [Minute McKane to Manning, 18 September 2001, ‘Iraq Stocktake’.](#)

118. Mr McKane added that there had been diplomatic activity over the summer to explore options. In relation to the end of November deadline for the renewal of the sanctions regime authorised by resolution 1360 in July 2001, the US had supported reviving the UK draft “smart sanctions” resolution. But Mr McKane advised that “it was doubtful in current circumstances whether they [the US] would be willing to throw much weight behind it, particularly with the Russians”.

119. Mr McKane reported that officials had agreed that a revised draft resolution, which “dropped the proposals to tighten existing controls and the references to neighbouring states”, was the option “most likely to succeed in building a consensus”. He added:

“In practice, there was no realistic prospect of tightening the existing controls at the present time, though we should return to this at a later date.”

120. Mr William Patey, Head FCO Middle East Department, advised Mr Straw:

“In the context of building the broadest possible coalition for a sustained attack on terrorism we need to address some of the wider concerns about our Iraq policy ...

“The main objection to the current proposals is the perception that they impose additional obligations on neighbouring states by putting the onus on them for enforcing sanctions on Iraq. The reality is that our draft resolution does not impose any new obligations on neighbouring states ... These tightening provisions were mainly window dressing. We would not lose a great deal in reality by removing the provision relating to neighbouring states although it would increase the presentational difficulties for the US.

“... we would undermine the Russian and other objections, and increase the prospects for consensus in the Security Council. The unanimous backing ... for a Goods Review List is worth having. It would not remove the existing obligations on neighbouring states or the international community as a whole ... This would not be easy to sell ... but the alternative is a weakening of containment through growing sanctions busting and the withering away of existing controls on Iraq. This would leave us with little to fall back on, other than excessive reliance on military force, which in turn would undermine our ability to maintain a coalition against terrorism.”⁶⁵

121. Mr Alan Goulty, FCO Director Middle East and North Africa, commented:

“If this approach is to be tried we should tackle the Americans soon. The key argument is that progress on Iraq will help coalition-building. But that will be hard to sell to the Washington hawks, especially in the Pentagon.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Minute Patey to Goulty and PS [FCO], 20 September 2001, ‘Iraq: Way Forward’.

⁶⁶ Manuscript comment Goulty, 20 September 2001, on Minute Patey to Goulty and PS [FCO], 20 September 2001, ‘Iraq: Way Forward’.

122. Mr Straw's Private Office responded that he agreed with the proposed way forward set out in Mr Patey's advice, subject to any views which Sir David Manning might have and the need for it to be worked through with senior members of the US Administration.⁶⁷

123. Sir David and Mr McKane were sent copies of the exchange.

124. Mr Blair's speech to the Labour Party Conference on 2 October 2001 provides a clear indication of Mr Blair's thinking and approach, including: the need for the international community to come together to act to address terrorism; the dangers of inaction; and the failure of the Taliban to respond to the ultimatum to surrender Usama Bin Laden and his followers.

125. Mr Blair did not mention Iraq in his speech, but many of the points he made about Afghanistan appeared in later speeches about Iraq.

126. In a speech addressing the Assembly on Terrorism on 1 October, Mr Annan stated that, after the attacks of 11 September, "no one can dispute the nature of the terrorist threat, nor the need to meet it with a global response". He added that that would require:

"... Member States to live up to their responsibilities under international law. They must deal firmly with the reality of armed groups and other non-State actors who refuse to respect common principles of human dignity.

"It is hard to imagine how the tragedy of 11 September could have been worse. Yet, the truth is that a single attack involving a nuclear or biological weapon could have killed millions ... The greatest danger arises from a non-State group – or even an individual – acquiring and using a nuclear, biological, or chemical weapon. Such a weapon could be delivered without the need for any missile or any other sophisticated delivery system."⁶⁸

127. Mr Blair set out his vision for the world after the events of 9/11 in his speech to the Labour Party Conference on 2 October 2001:

"It [9/11] was a tragedy. An act of evil. From this nation, goes our deepest sympathy and prayers for the victims and our profound solidarity with the American people.

"We were with you at the first, we will stay with you to the last."⁶⁹

128. Of the relatives of those who died, Mr Blair said:

"They don't want revenge. They want something better in memory of their loved ones.

⁶⁷ Minute Davies to Patey, 24 September 2001, 'Iraq: Way Forward'.

⁶⁸ UN Press Release, 1 October 2001, *Secretary-General, Addressing Assembly on Terrorism, Calls for 'Immediate Far-Reaching Changes' in UN Response to Terror.*

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, 2 October 2001, *Full text: Tony Blair's speech (Parts one and two).*

“I believe their memorial can and should be greater than simply the punishment of the guilty. It is that out of the shadow of this evil, should emerge lasting good: destruction of the machinery of terrorism ... hope amongst all nations of a new beginning ... so that people everywhere can see the chance of a better future through the hard work and creative power of the free citizen, not the violence and savagery of the fanatic.”

129. Setting out his thoughts on the way ahead, Mr Blair stated:

“I know that here in Britain people are anxious ... People know we must act but they worry about what might follow ...

“Whatever the dangers of the action we take, the dangers of inaction are far, far greater ...

“So what do we do? ... Look for a diplomatic solution. There is no diplomacy with Bin Laden or the Taliban regime.

“State an ultimatum and get their response. We stated an ultimatum; they haven’t responded ...

“There is no compromise possible with such people ... Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we must ...

“I say to the Taliban: surrender the terrorists; or surrender power. It’s your choice ...”

130. Mr Blair added:

“I have long believed ... interdependence defines the new world we live in. People say: we are only acting because it’s the USA that was attacked. Double standards, they say. But when Milošević embarked on the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Kosovo, we acted.

“... if Rwanda happened again today ... we would have a moral duty to act there also. We were there in Sierra Leone ...

“We can’t do it all. Neither can the Americans.

“But the power of the international community could, together, if it chose to.

“... our self-interest and our mutual interests are today inextricably woven together. This is the politics of globalisation ...

“This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us ...

“By the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more together than we can alone.

“For those people who lost their lives on September 11 and those that mourn them; now is the time for the strength to build that community. Let that be their memorial.”

131. Commenting on the impact of Mr Blair’s speech on 2 October, and in particular the reference to being with the US at the first and staying with them to the last, Sir Christopher Meyer told the Inquiry that, in the weeks after 9/11, Mr Blair’s:

“... reputation ... was sealed ... The man above all other Europeans ... who expressed his sympathy for, support for the United States of America in its hour of need with unparalleled eloquence.

“That speech, and that particular phrase ... resonated enormously around the United States.”⁷⁰

132. Military action in Afghanistan began on 7 October.

133. A UK Government document on the responsibility for the attacks on the US on 11 September was issued by No.10 on 4 October.⁷¹

The October 2001 “dossier”

On 4 October 2001, No.10 issued a document setting out its conclusions on responsibility for the attacks in the US on 11 September.⁷²

The document made clear that it was, in part, based on intelligence and stated:

“The details of some aspects cannot be given, but the facts are clear from the intelligence.

“The document does not contain the totality of the material known to HMG, given the continuing and absolute need to protect intelligence sources.”

On the basis of the information and intelligence available, the Government was “confident of its conclusions” that:

“Usama Bin Laden and Al Qaida, the terrorist network which he heads, planned and carried out the atrocities on 11 September 2001;

“Usama Bin Laden and Al Qaida retain the will and resources to carry out further atrocities;

“the United Kingdom, and United Kingdom nationals are potential targets; and

⁷⁰ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, pages 22-23.

⁷¹ Paper No.10, 4 October 2001, ‘Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001’.

⁷² Paper No.10, 4 October 2001, ‘Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001’.

“Usama Bin Laden and Al Qaida were able to commit these atrocities because of their close alliance with the Taliban regime [in Afghanistan], which allowed them to operate with impunity in pursuing their terrorist activity.”

The document also stated that:

- “[F]rom the early 1990s”, Al Qaida had “sought to acquire nuclear and chemical materials for use as terrorist weapons”.
- In June 2001, the US had warned the Taliban that “it had the right to defend itself and that it would hold the regime responsible for attacks against US citizens by terrorists sheltered in Afghanistan”.
- The “Taliban regime had responded by saying no evidence existed against Usama Bin Laden, and that neither he nor his network would be expelled”.
- When asked in 1998 about obtaining chemical or nuclear weapons, Usama Bin Laden had said “acquiring such weapons for the defence of Muslims [was] a religious duty”.

134. Mr Tim Dowse, Head of the FCO Non-Proliferation Department from January 2001 to November 2003, told the Inquiry that the issue of the dossier was “regarded as a rather successful action”.⁷³

135. The air campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan began on 7 October.⁷⁴

136. Concern that continuing speculation about further American military action against other states was undermining support for the campaign against Al Qaida led Mr Blair to try to influence President Bush to “deal with” Iraq at a later date, including suggesting that President Bush should avoid debate in public on the next steps until they knew what that might mean.

137. Following discussions with leaders in the Middle East, Mr Blair wrote to President Bush on 11 October about the military operation in Afghanistan and the pressures generated by the “War against Terrorism”.⁷⁵ Mr Blair described “extending the war zone” and the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) as the “top flashpoints”.

138. Mr Blair wrote that it was time to move to the “next stage of the military operation [in Afghanistan]”, and that it was “hard to see how we do this without removing the Taliban”.

139. In a section headed “Extending War Aims”, Mr Blair wrote that there was “a real willingness in the Middle East to get Saddam out but a total opposition to mixing this up with the current operation” in Afghanistan. The uncertainty caused by references to a “Phase 2” in the war on terrorism “seeming to extend to Iraq, Syria etc” was “really hurting ... because it seems to confirm the UBL propaganda that this is West vs Arab”.

⁷³ Public hearing, 25 November 2009 [morning], page 52.

⁷⁴ The White House, 7 October 2001, *Presidential Address to the Nation*.

⁷⁵ [Letter Blair to Bush, 11 October 2001, \[untitled\]](#).

140. Mr Blair added that he had:

“... no doubt we need to deal with Saddam. But if we hit Iraq now, we would lose the Arab world, Russia, probably half the EU ... I am sure we can devise a strategy for Saddam deliverable at a later date.”

141. Mr Blair suggested that:

“... in order to give ourselves space that we say:

“Phase 1 is the military action focused on Afghanistan because it’s there that the perpetrators of 11 September hide.

“Phase 2 is the medium and longer term campaign against terrorism in all its forms. Of course we will discuss that ... This kicks it away for the moment but leaves all options open. We just don’t need it debated too freely in public until we know what exactly we want to do; and how we can do it.”

142. Mr Blair concluded that a “dedicated tightly knit propaganda unit” was required, and suggested that he and President Bush should “talk soon”.

143. In a telephone conversation on 17 October, mainly about Afghanistan, Mr Blair and President Bush discussed the recent anthrax attacks on the US and whether the source of the material might be Iraq.⁷⁶

144. In his memoir, President Bush wrote that “One of the best intelligence services in Europe” had told the US it suspected Iraq.⁷⁷

145. On 19 October, US Special Forces landed in Afghanistan to link up with the CIA and Northern Alliance.⁷⁸

146. Lord Wilson of Dinton, Cabinet Secretary from 1998 to September 2002, told the Inquiry that he thought Mr Blair had:

“... played ... an important part in dissuading them [the US] from any thoughts that 9/11 was connected with Iraq and dissuading them from taking any action against Iraq”.⁷⁹

147. Lord Wilson stated that international terrorism and the military action in Afghanistan was the major focus of the UK government at that time.⁸⁰

148. By mid-October, discussions on a revised economic sanctions regime for Iraq had made little progress. Russia was seen as the main obstacle to agreement.

⁷⁶ Letter Wechsberg to McDonald, 17 October 2001, ‘Prime Minister’s Telephone Conversation with President Bush: 17 October’.

⁷⁷ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

⁷⁸ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

⁷⁹ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 13.

⁸⁰ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 28.

149. Following a visit by Mr Blair to Moscow, where there was no movement in the Russian position, Mr Simon McDonald, Mr Straw's Principal Private Secretary, wrote to Sir David Manning on 11 October stating:

"The present position is not sustainable. Sanctions are eroding. Iraqi WMD programmes are continuing. The Security Council is divided."⁸¹

150. Mr McDonald recorded that another, simple Oil-for-Food rollover resolution would be seen as a victory for Saddam Hussein at the US and the UK's expense.

"We need to convince them [the US] that uniting the Security Council on Iraq is a core component of building a coalition against terrorism, not a peripheral issue. We also need to head them off the temptation to take military action against Iraq which would fracture the coalition."

151. Sir David Manning discussed the UK's draft resolution, and the need for US help to persuade Russia to support it, with Dr Rice on 12 October. He reported that it was unlikely to be a priority for President Bush in his discussions with President Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia.⁸²

152. Sir David and Dr Rice also discussed differences between the UK and the US about the scale of any response if a UK or US pilot was shot down in the No-Fly Zones.⁸³

Operations in the No-Fly Zones

The UK had continuing concerns about the potential US response if a UK or US pilot enforcing the No-Fly Zones (NFZs) was shot down by Iraq.

UK operations in the No-Fly Zones had been reviewed twice in the previous two years, largely at the request of Mr Robin Cook, the previous Foreign Secretary, and Lord Williams of Mostyn, the Attorney General, and his successor Lord Goldsmith. Those reviews and the outcomes are considered in Section 1.2.

Mr McKane responded to a letter of 24 August from Mr David Brummell, the Legal Secretary to the Law Officers, on 16 October.⁸⁴ Mr McKane stated that, if the UK pulled out of the southern No-Fly Zone it would have to be explained; and that "could only be politically sustainable if couched on the basis that the Zone was no longer required, presumably because we judged that Saddam's behaviour and intent had shifted in a satisfactory direction".

Mr McKane added that it would be "very difficult" to maintain the northern Zone without the southern Zone; Turkey would be "unlikely, in a minority of one, to continue to facilitate" coalition patrols. Regular patrols of the northern Zone were "necessary" if lives were to be saved.

⁸¹ Letter McDonald to Manning, 11 October 2001, 'Iraq: Next Steps'.

⁸² Letter Manning to McDonald, 12 October 2001, 'Iraq: Next Steps'.

⁸³ Letter Manning to McDonald, 12 October 2001, 'Iraq: Desert Badger'.

⁸⁴ Letter McKane to Brummell, 16 October 2001, 'Iraq: No Fly Zones'.

Mr McKane also wrote that nothing had happened to change the Ministerial conclusion earlier in the year that, if patrolling of the southern Zone ceased, “an unacceptably high risk” of “extreme humanitarian distress” would remain.

Mr McKane informed Sir David Manning that the MOD had been asked what would have to be done to ensure that Kuwait could be defended effectively if patrolling over the southern NFZ stopped. He suggested that “once the immediate crisis is over” the issue should be considered again; stopping patrolling in the Zones could “remove a major source of discomfort from our relations with the Arab world”.⁸⁵

At the Cabinet Office meeting on 30 October, the MOD reported that the US had “returned to normal operations over Iraq” but there were “fewer coalition patrols over a more restricted area (largely south and west of the Euphrates)”.⁸⁶ Contingency plans in the event that a coalition aircraft was shot down were being discussed with the US.

In January 2002, Mr McKane reported that there had been no Iraqi violation of the southern No-Fly Zone since 11 September 2001, and that the last Allied bombing of an Iraq air defence target had taken place on 27 November 2001.⁸⁷ The MOD was “concerned about the risks to RAF aircrew” and considering whether “It might be necessary to attack air defence targets north of the 33rd parallel ... in order to make it safe for such patrols to be resumed.”

153. In late October, Sir Jeremy Greenstock advised that a damaging “vacuum” in collective policy towards Iraq was looming; a “clear long-term strategy” agreed with the US would be needed. The key elements included determining whether UNMOVIC had any genuine value and convincing the US that the UK would not support heavy military action against Iraq. The UK could not do nothing and allow “war against Iraq to become the only option by default”.

154. Officials concluded that a revised draft resolution was the preferred option but, if that was not achievable, a rollover resolution would just sustain containment.

155. A paper written within the FCO on 24 October stated that the US was deliberately keeping open the option of coercive military action and US military Commanders in Chief had been “instructed ... to work up contingency plans for dealing with terrorist targets within their area of responsibility”.⁸⁸ The MOD was “trying to discover some of the detail”.

156. In relation to Iraq, the FCO paper stated that it was:

“The prime candidate for military action among US hawks and the only realistic target for coercive/punitive/regime-change military action (as opposed to targeted

⁸⁵ Minute McKane to Manning, 17 October 2001, ‘Iraq: No Fly Zones’.

⁸⁶ Minute McKane to Manning, 31 October 2001, ‘Iraq’.

⁸⁷ Minute McKane to Manning, 15 January 2002, ‘Iraq’.

⁸⁸ Minute Bloomfield to Wright, 24 October 2001, ‘Terrorist and State Sponsors: Possible US Strategies’ attaching Paper, ‘Terrorist and State Sponsors: Possible US Strategies’.

strikes). But such action would carry significant downsides in terms of alienating world opinion.”

157. The FCO concluded:

“The US is in no mood to co-operate with Iraq. A likely option is to make specific demands backed up by threats of tougher action in the event of non-compliance. Whether this includes military action will depend on US judgements about the balance of advantage between the domestic pressures and the international ramifications of such actions.”

158. Sir Jeremy Greenstock, UK Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, wrote to Sir David Manning on 29 October warning that the UK’s draft resolution adapting the sanctions regime “looks unachievable this autumn, largely because of Russian obduracy and US unwillingness to exert sufficient pressure to move them”.⁸⁹

159. Sir Jeremy added:

“... there remains an urgent need for us to sort out a coherent strategy with the Americans, and at a level which binds in the whole Administration and not just the State Department. Our conversations with them recently ... have not managed this. The WMD danger is too great to ignore. A vacuum not just in the Security Council, but also in our collective policy is looming. Most dangerously, the volume of talk ... about the military option looks from here to risk real damage to our wider interests in the Middle East and our campaign against terrorism.

“In New York, there is widespread scepticism of the US/UK approach ... The policy is seen not only as a failure, but also the foremost example of the double standards ... in the Middle East. This corrodes support directly for sanctions ... but also insidiously for our broader objectives on Afghanistan and terrorism. In the longer run, the failure of the Council to secure Iraqi compliance with the resolutions undermines its credibility more generally.

“We therefore need to think hard about a clear long-term strategy ... to fill this vacuum (and to prevent the militarists doing so).”

160. Sir Jeremy set out the main elements for such a strategy, including:

- Drawing in the Russians on controlling Iraq’s WMD and Saddam Hussein more generally.
- Exploring the possibility of restoring P5 unity, which would require thinking about the clarification of resolution 1284 (1999).
- Working out whether UNMOVIC had any genuine political value. The Americans did “not want a repeat of the UNSCOM problem, with Saddam calling the shots”.

⁸⁹ [Letter Greenstock to Manning, 29 October 2001, ‘Iraq: Cabinet Office Meeting, 30 October’.](#)

Sir Jeremy thought an “intensive capability” on the ground would be “an enormous asset” and that the US should be persuaded it was “worth paying a price for”.

- “... perhaps most crucially, convincing the US that we will not support heavy military action against Iraq in the current circumstances. If the Americans do not buy into the strategy outlined above, then together we will have to think of another one. We cannot do nothing and allow war against Iraq to become the only option by default.”⁹⁰

161. The objectives should be:

- a “unified P5 approach to tackle Iraqi WMD, perhaps involving a negotiation to clarify but not renegotiate 1284”;
- clear limits “to avoid the Russians demanding endless concessions to secure Iraqi cooperation”; and
- “reinvigorated action to tackle illegal Iraqi revenue”.

162. Sir Jeremy wrote that he “remained surprised at the lack of US and UK activity to take on the Syrians over their pipeline”.

163. Sir Jeremy concluded:

“Much of this deals with the US angle ... The most immediate need is to have a dedicated discussion with them at a senior level in sufficient detail to thrash out the answers on the complex questions involved.”

164. Sir Jeremy Greenstock told the Inquiry that:

“As the US-led Coalition in Afghanistan began to deal effectively with the problems there, and as the US machine gathered itself to create firmer defences against any possible further terrorist attacks, we began to see that there was not much energy being expended in Washington on outreach, consultation and good relationships. Even before I heard of any serious action being taken to prepare for a possible attack on Iraq, I was coming to the conclusion that the United States was missing an opportunity ...”⁹¹

165. FCO junior officials prepared a draft paper, ‘Iraq: Fallback option’ for a meeting on Iraq to be chaired by the Cabinet Office on 30 October, setting out the background to the differing positions of Iraq and of the P5 members of the Security Council.⁹²

Those included:

- Iraq’s claims that resolution 1284 (1999) was so ambiguous that the US could easily deny that co-operation had been adequate to trigger suspension of sanctions;

⁹⁰ [Letter Greenstock to Manning, 29 October 2001, ‘Iraq: Cabinet Office Meeting, 30 October’.](#)

⁹¹ Statement, November 2009, page 5.

⁹² Email Tanfield to Saunders, 30 October 2001, ‘Iraq: Fallback Option’.

- a Russian proposal to suspend sanctions in return for Iraq allowing weapons inspectors to return:
- a French preference to clarify the provisions of resolution 1284 – including:
 - definition of the key remaining disarmament tasks rather than leaving that right to UNMOVIC (the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission);
 - shortening the timetable for suspension of sanctions;
 - clarifying the trigger for suspension; and
 - defining the key differences pre- and post-suspension particularly in financial controls; and
- a prevalent view in the US Administration that resolution 1284 was best left unimplemented and UN weapons inspections were of limited value.

166. Against that background, the FCO recommended “a simple rollover resolution with a P5 statement of commitment to engage in serious discussion on how to tackle Iraqi WMD, within existing SCRs [Security Council resolutions] but including the clarification of ambiguities in SCR 1284”.

167. The Cabinet Office meeting on 30 October discussed the wider approach to Iraq.⁹³

168. Mr McKane reported to Sir David Manning that there was little change to Saddam Hussein’s position:

- “Sanctions erosion continued with a near regular air service and up to 500,000 b/d [barrels per day] exported outside the oil for food regime. Saddam’s efforts to acquire aluminium tubes and graphite for his nuclear/missile programmes showed his intention to continue to build up his WMD capability. His division of the country into semi-autonomous zones and his recent dispersal of military equipment, including from suspect CBW related sites, were indicative of contingency plans in case of coalition strikes. But there were no indications that he felt threatened.”
- “Externally, Saddam maintained leverage over his neighbours through his oil exports.”

169. Mr McKane stated that the US had agreed that the UK’s draft resolution “remained the least bad option available” but there would be difficulties persuading Russia to support it. If that proved to be the case, the UK wanted to avoid a second veto. It would seek a P5 statement “of commitment to engage in serious discussion on Iraqi WMD, including clarification of UNSCR 1284”. If that was not possible, a simple rollover resolution would be a setback: “But it would sustain containment, just.”

⁹³ Minute McKane to Manning, 31 October 2001, ‘Iraq’.

170. Sir David Manning continued to pursue the UK proposals for “smarter sanctions” in his contacts with Russia.⁹⁴

171. Sir Jeremy Greenstock told the Inquiry that although the focus on Afghanistan and terrorism “overshadowed discussions on Iraq ... there were intensive efforts ... to re-establish P5, and especially Russian support, for a revised Goods Review List resolution”.⁹⁵ That included three meetings between the Mr Straw and Mr Igor Ivanov, the Russian Foreign Minister, and discussion on the telephone between Mr Blair and President Putin.

172. Mr Patey told the Inquiry that there had been British efforts “to sweeten the deal for the Russians”.⁹⁶

173. Mr Blair met President Bush on 7 November, primarily to discuss Afghanistan.

174. Sir Christopher Meyer sent Mr Straw a letter, ‘America after 11 September’, on 5 November.⁹⁷ That drew attention to President Bush’s anxiety about the anthrax attacks.

175. Commenting on the balance between multilateralism and unilateralism, Sir Christopher wrote that the US had a historic preference for “informal alliances and coalitions of the willing, over the sovereignty-limiting provisions of international conventions”. The UN was “usually an exercise in damage limitation, save where the organisation can advance US interests, as in providing Article 51 cover to fight terrorism”. The best Europe could hope for was “the continued predominance of mainstream pragmatists in the conduct of US foreign policy”, but “even that” was “not guaranteed”.

176. Sir Christopher added that Mr Blair, Mr Straw and Mr Hoon had leveraged UK popularity “brilliantly to influence the conduct of the war on terrorism”. The “real test” of that influence would be “whether we can generate a recalibrated and more energetic US policy towards the Middle East, and stop the Americans doing something self-defeating in Iraq or elsewhere”.

177. Sir Christopher concluded:

“The Americans are very good at compartmentalising their sentimental and sincere affection for Britain from the single minded pursuit of national interest. It is a gap we have to close ...”

178. Mr Blair visited Washington on 7 November for talks with President Bush, primarily about Afghanistan.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Minute McKane to Manning, 2 November 2001, ‘Iraq’.

⁹⁵ Statement, November 2009, page 5.

⁹⁶ Public hearing, 24 November 2009, page 46.

⁹⁷ Letter Meyer to Straw, 5 November 2001, ‘America after 11 September’.

⁹⁸ [Letter Manning to Rice, 8 November 2001, \[untitled\]](#).

179. Mr Blair gave President Bush a Note during their private meeting, which, under a section on ‘International Initiatives’, referred to the need for a new UN resolution on Iraq and a wider ‘WMD Agreement’.⁹⁹

180. The record of the meetings contains no information about discussions of Iraq.¹⁰⁰

181. The Government has confirmed that a telephone conversation between Mr Blair and President Bush on 12 November did take place but it has been unable to find a record of the conversation.¹⁰¹ Other papers indicate that the conversation focused primarily on Afghanistan.

182. In mid-November Mr Powell suggested that, after Afghanistan, the UK should use its leverage to engage President Bush on an alternative strategy to deal with the threat posed by terrorism, including the need to persuade the US to take the Middle East Peace Process seriously.

183. Mr Powell argued that only the removal of Saddam Hussein and a new regime would deal with the risks from Iraq.

184. Mr Powell envisaged that would be achieved by “proper backing” for the internal opposition in Iraq, not the insertion of arms inspectors or bombing Baghdad.

185. On 15 November Mr Powell wrote to Mr Blair stating that:

“If we are successful in Afghanistan over the next few days and weeks there is a real danger that we will part company with the Americans on what comes next. The right wing of the Republican Party will want to carry on by bombing Iraq and Somalia. [President] Bush’s natural tendency would be to support them unless presented with an alternative. David [Manning] has commissioned some work by the FCO on this, but I think it needs some lateral political thinking about what would provide an attractive – and effective – alternative strategy.

“I think the first thing is to persuade the Americans that rather than repeating what we have done in Afghanistan elsewhere we need to use the leverage that our success in Afghanistan provides to achieve our aims elsewhere.”¹⁰²

186. On Iraq specifically, Mr Powell wrote:

“... I think we need a new policy for Iraq. I do not believe that a warmed over UN Security Council resolution re-inserting arms inspectors and changing sanctions is likely to cut any ice with the Americans let alone the Russians and French ... I think we need a completely fresh look at our policy starting from our objectives.”

⁹⁹ [Note \[Blair\], \[7 November 2001\], ‘Note’, attached to Letter Manning to Rice, 8 November 2001, \[untitled\]](#).

¹⁰⁰ Letter Manning to McDonald, 8 November 2001, ‘Prime Minister’s visit to Washington – 7 November’.

¹⁰¹ Email Cabinet Office [junior official] to Iraq Inquiry, 30 June 2014, [untitled].

¹⁰² [Minute Powell to Prime Minister, 15 November 2001, ‘The War: What Comes Next?’](#)

187. Mr Powell added:

“It seems to me that our over-riding objective is the removal of Saddam not the insertion of arms inspectors. It is only with a new regime that we can be sure of an end to CBRN proliferation and an end to hostile intent towards his neighbours plus his support for terrorism. We need to make a far greater effort to bring him down [...] with proper backing for internal opposition [...]

“There will be a military role, but bombing Baghdad is not the most obvious route to changing regime.”

188. Mr Powell made a number of proposals for dealing with terrorists, including the need:

- for “much stronger domestic defence against future terrorist attacks”;
- to stop the “martyrdom of UBL setting him up as ... an inspiration to another wave of suicide bombers”; and
- to address political causes.

189. Mr Powell wrote: “Most importantly that means persuading the Americans to take the MEPP seriously.”

190. Mr Powell concluded that Mr Blair should engage President Bush:

“... on all this next week, and perhaps send him another note setting out the way forward before the Pentagon tries to take him off on another tangent”.

191. Mr Blair replied: “I agree with this entirely and I should prepare a note for GWB [President Bush] next week.”¹⁰³

Resolution 1382

192. By late-November it was clear that agreement could not be reached on the UK draft resolution.

193. Resolution 1382, adopted on 29 November, was significantly less than the UK had originally sought.

194. Mr McKane wrote to Sir David Manning on 23 November, advising:

“The UK draft does not now appear to have any realistic chance of being accepted by the Security Council.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ [Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Powell to Prime Minister, 15 November 2001, ‘The War: What Comes Next?’](#)

¹⁰⁴ Minute McKane to Manning, 23 November 2001, ‘Iraq’.

195. Mr McKane identified two options:

- a further, simple rollover of the OFF resolution which “would do nothing to address the humanitarian position in Iraq or to stop erosion of the sanctions regime and would indicate that the approach to Iraq set out in SCR 1284 had hit the buffers”; and
- a compromise of a further rollover for six months with a commitment to revisit the items controlled under the Goods Review List (GRL).

196. The FCO preferred the second option, but with a two month, rather than six month rollover.

197. On 29 November, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1382 extending the existing regime for 180 days and proposing a Goods Review List. The procedures for operating the List would be adopted “subject to any refinements ... agreed by the Council”, for implementation on 30 May 2002.¹⁰⁵

198. The resolution also reaffirmed the Security Council’s “commitment to a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the relevant resolutions ... including any clarification necessary for the implementation of resolution 1284 (1999)”.

President Bush’s comments, 26 November 2001

199. On 26 November, President Bush called publicly for the readmission of weapons inspectors by Iraq.

200. In a press conference on 26 November, President Bush was asked what message he would like to send to Iraq. He responded that his message was:

“... if you harbour a terrorist, you’re a terrorist ... If you develop weapons of mass destruction that you want to terrorize the world, you’ll be held accountable ... And I also have said ... we’re going to make sure that we accomplish each mission that we tackle. First things first.”¹⁰⁶

201. Asked whether agreement to allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq was an “unconditional demand”, President Bush stated that Saddam Hussein needed to let weapons inspectors return to prove to the world that he was not developing weapons of mass destruction.

202. Asked what would be the consequences if Saddam did not, Mr Bush said: “That’s up for – he’ll find out.”

203. Asked to confirm previous remarks that Afghanistan was “just the beginning”, President Bush replied that he could not make it clearer that, if nations developed

¹⁰⁵ UN Security Council, ‘4431st Meeting 29 November 2001’, (S/RES/1382(2001)).

¹⁰⁶ The White House, 26 November 2001, *The President Welcomes Aid Workers Rescued from Afghanistan*.

weapons of mass destruction “that will be used to terrorize nations, they will be held accountable”.

204. Asked if the definition of terrorism was being expanded to countries like North Korea which did not just harbour terrorists but developed such weapons, President Bush stated:

“... we want North Korea to allow inspectors in ...

“So part of the war on terror is to deny ... weapons to be used for means of terror getting into the hands of nations that will use them.

...

“... I’ve always had that definition, as far as I’m concerned.”

205. Asked when and where President Bush had included any country that produced weapons of mass destruction in his definition of terrorist aiding states, Mr Ari Fleischer, President Bush’s Press Secretary, suggested that referred to “the obvious and well-known fact that Iraq and North Korea” were already listed by the US State Department as state sponsors of terrorism.¹⁰⁷

206. Mr Fleischer subsequently referred to concerns that Al Qaida or another terrorist organisation would seek to acquire nuclear weapons from Iraq or North Korea. That was “another way they would use nuclear weapons if they were to give them to another nation or an entity, a terrorist group like Al Qaida”.

207. Following President Bush’s remarks, speculation about the possibility of military action against Iraq immediately increased.

208. The British Embassy Washington commented that although the White House spokesman had described President Bush’s remarks as a re-iteration of existing policy, they would fuel media speculation about a shift towards military moves towards Iraq.¹⁰⁸ In its public posture the US was keeping all options open.

209. In the Embassy’s view, a debate behind closed doors indicated unresolved differences between different elements of the US Administration about the way ahead, including whether to support any of the opposition groups inside or outside Iraq as part of planning for regime change.

210. Asked about the meaning of President Bush’s comments, Secretary Powell stated that the President had not said what he meant and he was “not going to prejudge what it might mean”.¹⁰⁹ The only way to make sure Iraq was complying with the agreements

¹⁰⁷ The White House, 26 November 2001, *Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer*.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram 1589 Washington to FCO London, 26 November 2001, ‘Iraq: US Policy on Regime Change’.

¹⁰⁹ CNN, 26 November 2001, *CNN Larry King Live – Interview with Colin Powell*.

“to give up all weapons of mass destruction activity” was to let the inspectors back in and allow them to do their work.

211. Asked if the term “he’ll find out” was threatening, Secretary Powell stated that it should be seen “as a very sober, chilling message”. There were “many options available to the international community and to the President”.

212. Secretary Powell stated that the US had been pushing “smart sanctions”. It had support from 14 of the 15 members of the Security Council, and he had been “working with the Russians to see if we can find a compromise that would satisfy the need”.

213. Secretary Powell added that sanctions had kept the Iraqi regime “fairly well bottled up”. Iraq was a “danger” and continued “to try to develop” weapons of mass destruction. The US would:

“... keep the pressure on them to make sure these weapons do not become a serious threat to the region or to the world.”

214. In the context of President Bush’s remarks on 26 November, the British Embassy Washington reported that US officials in Washington and New York were discussing the draft resolution with Russian officials.¹¹⁰

215. Mr Ben Bradshaw, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, told the House of Commons on 27 November that he did not think it was “helpful to speculate about the expansion of the current military campaign [in Afghanistan]”:

“People should not speculate about expanding the ... campaign beyond Bin Laden and al-Qaeda ... There is no evidence of any other state involvement ... We have always made it clear that the military campaign is limited and specific.”¹¹¹

216. Asked specifically about Iraq and President Bush’s remarks, Mr Bradshaw replied that Iraq “could very easily solve the problem by adhering to the demands” made by the UN. He reiterated that the military campaign was directed specifically at those responsible for “the mass murder of 11 September”.¹¹²

217. In an interview in October, Mr Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister, stated that Iraq would not allow weapons inspectors to return asking: “Why should they return?”.¹¹³

218. Responding to a question on whether in the light of Iraq’s rejection of the call to admit weapons inspectors there was a need to increase the pressure on Iraq and the next steps, Mr Fleischer stated on 27 November that the focus remained on the first

¹¹⁰ Telegram 1589 Washington to FCO London, 26 November 2001, ‘Iraq: US Policy on Regime Change’.

¹¹¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 27 November 2001, column 820.

¹¹² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 27 November 2001, columns 820-821.

¹¹³ *The Telegraph*, 28 October 2001, *Attack on Iraq ‘will be grave mistake’, warns Aziz*.

phase of the war on terrorism.¹¹⁴ He emphasised the US support for the discussion in the Security Council on more effective and narrowly defined sanctions.

219. Following discussions with senior US Senators, primarily about developments in Afghanistan, the British Embassy Washington reported on 29 November that Mr John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, had been told there was “an overwhelming majority (80 votes) in the Senate in favour of taking out Saddam Hussein, as a piece of unfinished business”.¹¹⁵

220. One Senator suggested that the military had a “very detailed plan”, which he described as constituting precision bombing and Special Forces’ support for internal uprisings. He “believed they had the capacity to decapitate Saddam Hussein. Preparations were well beyond the discussions stage.”

221. The Senator also suggested that the decision to attack the Taliban in Afghanistan was “a feint: he [President Bush] had been offered the choice between Afghanistan and Iraq and had chosen to do the former first”.

222. Another Senator had set out a strategy of “increased heat”: with strengthened sanctions, the re-introduction of inspectors, and compiling evidence followed by military action. That Senator had said that if the UK could not agree with this it should be weighing in now with the Administration. It would be much more difficult for the US to go it alone than with the European allies in support. Other countries linked to international terrorism were not threats of the same order as Iraq.

223. The Embassy commented that the discussions offered “an interesting insight into the mood on the Hill”. There was “no reason to believe” that either Senator spoke for the Administration or had privileged access to Pentagon plans; the military details did “not square with what we understand of military thinking”.

224. On 1 December, the British Embassy Washington reported that public speculation about action against Iraq was moving faster than Administration thinking; and that the momentum in the debate had shifted in the direction of the hawks.¹¹⁶ A *Washington Post* poll of 27 November had found that 78 percent of Americans favoured “having US forces take military action against Iraq to force Saddam Hussein from power”.

225. The Embassy reported that, in addition, two new elements had emerged in comments from the Administration: an increased stress on the need for arms inspectors; and a clearer identification of WMD with the terrorist threat. The increased emphasis on weapons inspectors had been seen by some as a step towards military action – “a Taliban-like deadline”; others might see it as an alternative to unilateral action.

¹¹⁴ The White House, 27 November 2001, *Press Briefing*.

¹¹⁵ Telegram 1616 Washington to FCO London, 29 November 2001, ‘Deputy Prime Minister’s visit to Washington: Afghanistan and Iraq’.

¹¹⁶ Telegram 1631 Washington to FCO London, 1 December 2001, ‘The Wider War against Terrorism: Iraq’.

226. In comments during an interview on *CBS* on 2 December, Secretary Powell stated explicitly that President Bush had not taken any decisions on what the next phase of the campaign against terrorism would be.¹¹⁷ Moreover, none of the President's advisers, either individually or collectively, had yet made "recommendations ... as to what we should do in the next phase" of the war on terror.

227. Secretary Powell stated that the US was "watching Iraq" because it had "always developed weapons of mass destruction that are a concern to us". Saddam Hussein had not been "as successful as he would have liked to have been" because sanctions and containment had been "effective".

228. Asked why the US did not just take Saddam Hussein out, Secretary Powell replied that President Bush would "make a judgement in due course" about how to "deal with the threat that continues to reside in Iraq". The way to keep the international community focused on the problem was to let the inspectors in. The US had not set a new deadline for compliance and President Bush retained all his options. If Saddam Hussein admitted inspectors he would be "complying with what he agreed to as his obligation under UN resolutions".

229. Secretary Powell added:

"The United States still continues to believe as a separate matter that it would be better to have a different regime in Iraq and as you know, we have supported the efforts of opposition groups to begin organizing themselves for a change of regime in due course ...

"Regime change would be in the best interest of the Iraqi people. It is a goal of the United States. But the United Nations' goal is the inspectors and getting rid of those weapons of mass destruction."

230. In a separate interview on *CNN*, Secretary Powell stated that there was "no reason to believe" that Iraq had not continued its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction or that it had "abandoned their intent and desire to obtain such systems".¹¹⁸ He observed that there were different kinds of weapons of mass destruction. The one which was of "the greatest concern" to him was "what might be happening with respect to biological weapons because it is much harder to detect that kind of activity".

231. Secretary Powell emphasised that President Bush had "not given away any of his authority to act in a way he believes is appropriate". The US had a policy, separate from UN policy, that "regime change would be good for the Iraqi people, good for the region". The US was "trying to find ways to make the Iraqi opposition more effective in this regard".

¹¹⁷ US State Department, 2 December 2001, *Interview on CBS' Face the Nation – Secretary Colin L. Powell*.

¹¹⁸ US State Department, 2 December 2001, *Interview on CNN's Late Edition – Secretary Colin L. Powell*.

232. Asked if, as Senator Joe Lieberman had suggested, the Iraqi opposition could play the same role that the Northern Alliance had played in Afghanistan, Secretary Powell replied that was “not clear yet”. He added that Iraq and Afghanistan were different countries with different situations and different kinds of military forces. The Northern Alliance “was a competent military force but needed the support of American air power”. The Iraqi opposition did “not yet rise to that level”.

233. It has subsequently been made public that President Bush asked for further advice on the military plans for Iraq in late November.

234. General Franks recorded that he was asked on 27 November to give Secretary Rumsfeld a “Commander’s Concept”.¹¹⁹

235. General Franks confirmed with Secretary Rumsfeld on 4 December that the assumed objective, dependent on the President’s ultimate decision, would be to “remove the regime of Saddam Hussein”.

236. President Bush wrote in his memoir that he had asked Secretary Rumsfeld to review the existing battle plans for Iraq in November 2001, adding: “We needed to develop the coercive half of coercive diplomacy.”¹²⁰

237. Secretary Rumsfeld wrote that when asked about involving the CIA in the planning, President Bush had said that:

“... he didn’t want me to communicate with people outside DoD for the time being, and that he would personally talk to Tenet and others at the right moment.”¹²¹

238. Asked at what point the most senior levels of the US Administration had settled on the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime as their primary objective, Sir Christopher Meyer told the Inquiry:

- Although he hadn’t realised at the time, the anthrax scare had “really steamed up the Administration, because they thought the last person who had ever used anthrax aggressively was Saddam Hussein”.
- Those who had been arguing that “there was a need to settle accounts with Saddam and do it fast, suddenly got much more traction with the President” before the end of 2001.
- The President himself had been “reinvigorated and found a real purpose for his Presidency ... which had not been evident before 9/11 ... Everything changed after 9/11.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

¹²⁰ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

¹²¹ Rumsfeld D. *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*. Sentinel, 2011.

¹²² Public hearing, 26 November 2009, pages 34-35.

239. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that he knew from his conversations with Dr Rice that the “top players” in the US seemed to have been touched personally by the attacks and that they were “puzzled and deeply disturbed by the appearance of the anthrax that seemed to have been targeted against key members of the Administration”.¹²³

240. Mr Jonathan Powell told the Inquiry that after 9/11:

“... American policy shifted relatively gradually ... By the time you get to December [2001], you have speeches being made in the Senate calling for action on Iraq. We started sensing that something was happening.”¹²⁴

JIC Assessment, 28 November 2001: ‘Iraq after September 11 – The Terrorist Threat’

241. The JIC assessed on 28 November that Iraq had no responsibility for, or foreknowledge of, the attacks against the US on 11 September 2001.

242. Saddam Hussein had ruled out terrorist attacks for the time being; in the medium term there was a credible threat against Western interests and regional states.

243. Practical co-operation between Iraq and Al Qaida was “unlikely”; and there was no “credible evidence of covert transfers of WMD-related technology and expertise to terrorist groups”.

244. Iraq was “capable of constructing devices to disperse chemical or biological agent, or radiological material”, but there was “no reliable intelligence of any Iraqi intent”. If the regime was under serious and imminent threat of collapse, WMD terrorism was possible but, in other circumstances, the threat would be “slight”.

245. At the request of the FCO the JIC assessed Iraq’s support for terrorism on 28 November.¹²⁵

246. The minutes of the JIC record that the Assessment was “significant” and “it would be important to get its judgements and nuances right, given the importance of the policy debate that was going on with and within the US about what might or might not be done next in the campaign against terrorism”.¹²⁶

¹²³ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 7-8.

¹²⁴ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 17.

¹²⁵ [JIC Assessment, 28 November 2001, ‘Iraq after September 11 – The Terrorist Threat’.](#)

¹²⁶ Minutes, 28 November 2001, JIC meeting.

247. The JIC Key Judgements stated:

- “On the basis of the information available ... **Iraq had no responsibility for, or foreknowledge of, the attacks in the US on 11 September** ... Nor is there any evidence, or intelligence, of an Iraqi role in the subsequent anthrax attacks.”
- “Saddam has refused to permit any Al Qaida presence in Iraq ...”
- “Iraq has long seen terrorism as a potential weapon in its conflict with the US and regional enemies [...] Since September 11, however, **Saddam is likely to have ruled out such attacks for the time being**, for fear of a heavy US response.”
- “But in the medium term the threat against Western interests and regional states remains credible. **Saddam has not given up terrorism as a policy tool.**”
- Saddam Hussein “would consider”:
 - “the assassination of key oppositionists if he felt threatened, most likely in the Middle East where there would be a greater chance of success and deniability ...”
 - terrorist attacks on coalition forces and regional allies in the event of a major US attack which threatened his hold on power; and
 - “WMD terrorism, if his regime was under serious and imminent threat of collapse. In other circumstances **the threat of WMD terrorism is slight**, because of the risk of US retaliation.”¹²⁷

248. Iraq had “provided finance, logistics and training to a range of secular terrorists and groups” in the 1970s and 1980s, and had “encouraged and sponsored terrorist groups to mount attacks on coalition targets” during the Gulf Conflict in 1990 to 1991, which had been “largely ineffective”. Since then, Iraq had been “cautious in pursuing terrorist attacks abroad, lest it jeopardise the lifting of sanctions”.

249. In “recent years”, Saddam Hussein had:

“... expanded his contact with terrorist groups to include Islamic extremists such as Hamas. In his rhetoric, he has referred more to Islam as he ... sought to exploit the Palestinian issue in his conflict with the US, Kuwait and Saudi. **But ideologically he is poles apart from the Sunni extremist networks linked to UBL**; [...] he is wary of allowing any presence in Iraq for fear of the radicalising effect on the population.”

250. The evidence of contact between Iraq and UBL was “fragmentary and uncorroborated”, including that Iraq had been in contact with Al Qaida for exploratory discussions on toxic materials in late 1988:

“With common enemies ... there was clearly scope for collaboration.

¹²⁷ [JIC Assessment, 28 November 2001, ‘Iraq after September 11 – The Terrorist Threat’.](#)

“But there is no evidence that these contacts led to practical co-operation; we judge it unlikely because of mutual mistrust ... There is no evidence UBL’s organisation has ever had a presence in Iraq.”

251. Since 11 September, Saddam Hussein had “felt under pressure” and “adopted a low profile”:

“The current US focus on the war against terrorism would make a heavy response inevitable if Iraq mounted or sponsored a terrorist attack on Western or regional interests. Iraq would also pay a wider political price, losing the international support it derives from sanctions-related propaganda. We assess that **Saddam is likely to have ruled out any terrorist attacks against the US or its allies for the time being.**”

252. The Assessment stated:

“Although the risks to Iraq have increased, we judge the regime is likely still to see terrorism as a tool of policy. Saddam may be currently constrained, but he hates the US and UK, and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for their continued support to the West. In the medium term, therefore, the threat to Western and Gulf interests remains credible. Saddam is an opportunist. We judge he would be willing to use terrorism if he thought he could gain advantage or exact revenge ... without attracting disproportionate retaliation. Saddam has miscalculated in the past and he could again misread the response his actions would attract.”

253. Addressing what would happen if the US attacked Iraq, the Assessment stated:

- Iraq was “likely to consider terrorism as one of its few realistic options in response to a major US attack”. It saw “no need to raise the stakes” in response to limited coalition action in the NFZs, and the Desert Fox campaign [in December 1998] was not “sufficiently damaging to justify the risk. But a longer campaign aimed at regime change could alter Saddam’s calculations.”
- Iraq would claim attacks against US targets were “acts of self-defence”.
- It was “also possible that terrorist groups not previously aligned with Iraq would consider conducting terrorist attacks against the Western ‘aggressors’ ...”
- “Overall ... unless the Iraqi regime’s hold on power was threatened, it would be unlikely to undertake or sponsor such terrorist attacks, for fear of provoking a more severe US response.”

254. The Assessment concluded that “Iraqi capability and willingness to conduct **WMD terrorism**” was “not known with any certainty”. The JIC judged Iraq was “capable of constructing devices to disperse chemical or biological agent, or radiological material”, but it had “no reliable intelligence of any Iraqi intent. Nor did it have:

“... any credible evidence of covert transfers of WMD-related technology and expertise to terrorist groups, or of any Iraqi role in the anthrax attacks in the US.

Iraq would have to consider the risk of US retaliation ... On balance, we judge the **threat of Iraqi WMD terrorism is slight**, unless the regime was under serious and imminent threat of collapse.”

Development of UK strategy on Iraq

Mr Powell’s advice to Mr Blair, late November 2001

255. Mr Jonathan Powell drew the report of 26 November from the British Embassy Washington to Mr Blair’s attention, commenting: “This is what I was talking about. We ought to have a brainstorming session.”¹²⁸

256. Mr Blair responded: “Get our own strategy ready.”¹²⁹

257. Sir Richard Dearlove, the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), wrote to Sir David Manning on 27 November, alerting him to a likely discussion about “Phase 2” of the “War against Terrorism” between US Principals¹³⁰ the following week. He suggested:

“The end of this week would therefore be a very good moment for us to feed our thinking into the Washington machine at a variety of levels ...”¹³¹

258. Copies of the letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Mr Hoon and to Sir Richard Wilson, Admiral Michael Boyce (Chief of the Defence Staff) and Sir John Kerr (FCO Permanent Under Secretary).

259. On 27 November, Sir David Manning wrote to Mr McKane: “You will now reconvene the group to look at Iraq again as a “Phase 2” issue.”¹³²

260. In the context of a discussion about Afghanistan on 28 November, Sir David Manning asked Dr Rice about progress in US thinking. His comment, that the UK was “giving a great deal of thought to Phase 2 issues and would want to share our ideas”, was welcomed.¹³³

261. Mr Powell produced a second note for Mr Blair advocating a strategy for regime change based on a demand for the return of inspectors and the use of military force to support an internal uprising, with public lines explaining why Iraq was a threat.

¹²⁸ Manuscript comment Powell to PM on Telegram 1589 Washington to FCO London, 26 November 2001, ‘Iraq: US Policy on Regime Change’.

¹²⁹ Manuscript comment Blair on Telegram 1589 Washington to FCO London, 26 November 2001, ‘Iraq: US Policy on Regime Change’.

¹³⁰ A Committee of the US National Security Council – see Box in Section 1.2.

¹³¹ Letter C to Manning, 27 November 2001, ‘Phase II of the War against terrorism’.

¹³² Manuscript comment Manning to McKane, 27 November 2001 on Minute Manning to McKane, 23 November 2001, ‘Iraq’.

¹³³ Letter Manning to McDonald, 28 November 2001, ‘Conversation with Condi Rice’.

262. At the end of November, Mr Powell produced a second note for Mr Blair, 'Iraq: Change of Heart or Change of Regime', which elaborated the points in his earlier note.¹³⁴

263. Mr Powell identified the "Objectives" as:

"Removal of Saddam and replacement by a new, more moderate regime. Ending of WMD programmes and destruction of stocks. Ending of support for terrorism. Peace with neighbours."

264. Mr Powell envisaged a "Plan" comprising diplomatic pressure "followed by [a] military campaign (without large scale coalition ground forces)"; the insertion of inspectors which would not, "by itself, be sufficient to stop the campaign" which would end "only ... with the replacement of Saddam".

265. Mr Powell set out three steps:

- Using the power of the example of US success in Afghanistan to increase pressure on Saddam". There were already signs that he was worried and might be "prepared to accept return of inspectors if he thinks [the] prospect[s] of attack are serious". The US should: "After the fall of Kandahar and the capture of UBL", make clear that "Iraq is next (in parallel with action in other countries, e.g. [...])."
- The "US, UK and others" to "set up" a UN "demand" for the return of inspectors. If that did not happen, action would be taken. It would be "important not to be specific" about what the action would comprise nor "to set a deadline", and to keep Saddam Hussein guessing. If asked, the reply would be that "regime change would be desirable, but not our formal objective for the moment".
- Put in place, a military plan, and if Saddam failed to meet the demands, "there would be grounds to go ahead with the military plan ... [reference to a possible coup]. Supported by air power and a small numbers of Special Forces in support roles. Need to be clear with everyone that this time we are going all the way ...". If Saddam Hussein did allow the inspectors in, there would be a "need to find a new demand to justify military action".

266. Mr Powell identified a number of "Conditions", including:

- "[N]one of this will work unless we can isolate Saddam further in the international community".
- The need to secure support from Russia, France, the Middle East and Europe.
- Making progress "in parallel" on the MEPP. That would be: "Absolutely essential ... or we will be accused – correctly – of double standards."

¹³⁴ [Note Powell, \[undated\], 'Iraq: Change of Heart or Change of Regime'](#).

267. Mr Powell proposed “Public Lines” comprising:

“Iraq a threat because of WMD capabilities and support of terrorist groups (do not try to link it to Al Qaida – war is on all international terrorism not just AQ and there is no convincing proof of AQ involvement with Iraq).

“Demand return of inspectors so can verify dismantling of WMD facilities. Seek UN resolution.

“If no return of inspectors will consider what further action ...

“Our duty to support rising ... Cannot allow him to use terrorism against his own people once again. Just like Bosnia or Kosovo international community cannot stand by and watch genocide.”

268. Asked about the ideas being considered in late 2001, Mr Powell told the Inquiry:

“... we didn’t really have a serious discussion of proposals at that stage, or we weren’t clear, and I jotted down some ideas on a piece of paper which I would rather forget at the moment, about encouraging people in Iraq to resist, Shi’ites, Sunnis and military leaders.”¹³⁵

269. Asked whether that was an Afghanistan sort of model, Mr Powell replied:

“Yes, it was ... but it wasn’t a very serious piece of work and it didn’t go anywhere. The Prime Minister did me the good grace of not commenting on it.”

FCO advice, 3 December 2001

270. Throughout the autumn, as Sir David Manning told Dr Rice on 28 November, the UK had been thinking about the next steps in countering international terrorism.

271. A FCO minute written in mid-November explained that a counter-terrorism strategy had been developed following extensive inter-departmental discussion, which identified the objectives needed “to defeat UBL and his networks”.¹³⁶ It had “evolved from an initial MOD desire to fit the current military action in Afghanistan into a wider strategy”. The intention was to draw up “country strategies” to guide efforts in the months ahead.

272. Iraq was identified as one of more than a dozen countries “which would seem to merit particular attention”.

273. Following President Bush’s remarks to the press on 26 November 2001, the FCO considered the legality of military action against Iraq in November 2001.

¹³⁵ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 30.

¹³⁶ Minute Bloomfield to PS [FCO], 13 November 2001, ‘Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Phase Two’.

274. Mr John Grainger, an FCO Legal Counsellor in the Middle East Department, wrote a minute on 27 November, which briefly set out the history of the use of force against Iraq and the legal basis for it.¹³⁷ He emphasised that there had not been any significant decision by the Security Council since 1998 and that caution should be exercised about relying upon that decision after the expiry of such a long time. Mr Grainger advised that the UK should take a cautious line in relation to the latest US statements.

275. Sir Michael Wood, the FCO Legal Adviser from 1999 to 2006, told the Inquiry that the legality of the use of military force against Iraq had been raised as early as November 2001 “when President Bush made some kind of statement, which made it look as though force might be used. So we set out the position immediately.”¹³⁸

276. In response to a request from Mr Blair for advice on the options for dealing with Iraq, the FCO proposed “ratcheting up” the policy of containment, including pressing Iraq to comply with its disarmament obligations and making the “red-lines for military action more specific”.

277. The FCO warned that the UK could be confronted with an unwelcome dilemma of supporting unlawful and widely unpopular action or distancing itself from a key US policy.

278. A visit to Washington by Sir David Manning would be an opportunity to find out what the US was thinking and “test the viability of any plans”.

279. In relation to Iraq’s possession of WMD, the FCO letter did not fully reflect the caveats which the JIC had attached to its Assessments.

280. Mr McDonald wrote to No.10 on 3 December:

“In advance of David Manning’s trip to Washington on Wednesday the Prime Minister has asked for a note on the options for dealing with Iraq.”¹³⁹

281. The letter began:

“US hawks, especially in the Pentagon, are talking up the possibility of military action against Iraq and of trying to topple Saddam Hussein (regime-change). That would confront us with an unwelcome dilemma: support unlawful and widely unpopular action or distance ourselves from a key US policy. Decisions have not yet been taken in Washington: we need to influence the debate.”

282. Mr McDonald added that there were:

“... no anti-terrorist grounds for Stage 2 military action against Iraq ...”

¹³⁷ Minute Grainger to Tanfield, 27 November 2001, ‘Iraq: Comments by President Bush on WMD’.

¹³⁸ Public hearing, 26 January 2010, pages 14-15.

¹³⁹ [Letter McDonald to Tatham, 3 December 2001, ‘Iraq: Options’.](#)

283. Addressing Iraq's WMD capability, Mr McDonald wrote:

“There is real reason for concern about Iraq's WMD programmes, principally CBW and long range missiles. There is evidence of continuing Iraqi attempts to procure nuclear-related materiel. Saddam's history of aggression and use of CW sets Iraq apart from other WMD-armed states. It might be possible to construct a (threadbare) legal case for military action to deal with the threat. But a new SCR would almost certainly be needed. And though bombing can degrade missile and even nuclear capability, it is ineffective against CBW ...”

284. An Annex to the letter set out the FCO perspective on Iraq's WMD capabilities and intentions and Iraq's response to its obligations. That stated Iraq was:

- “**concealing information about large quantities of chemical and biological munitions, agents and precursors.** UNSCOM inspectors were unable to account for [material related to chemical weapons] and very large quantities of growth media acquired, on Iraq's own admission, for the production of biological weapons”;
- “concealing up to 20 long-range Al Hussein missiles”;
- “**actively pursuing chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles.** The missile-related facilities damaged by Operation Desert Fox in 1998 have been repaired, research continues and new facilities are being constructed. Other former chemical and biological weapons facilities have been restored: some CW and BW-relevant activity is under way”;
- “**seeking to rebuild a nuclear weapons programme.** Recent intercepted Iraqi procurement efforts have involved material relevant to production of fissile material”; and
- “most importantly, **barring entry to UNMOVIC and IAEA Action Team Inspectors.** Iraqi officials have made clear as recently as last week that they do not intend to cease this obstruction until sanctions are lifted: in defiance of UNSCRs which repeatedly call for Iraqi compliance to be *unconditional*.”

285. The JIC's assessment of Iraq's WMD at that time is addressed in Section 4.1.

286. On the way ahead, Mr McDonald wrote:

“A strategy to deal with a WMD threat will require ratcheting up our present policy of containment. We should press Iraq to comply with its disarmament obligations under the SCRs, accept an intrusive and continuing UN inspection regime and accept Kuwaiti sovereignty unequivocally.”

287. The strategy “could involve” four elements:

“... making previously declared red-lines for military action more specific; by defining what we meant by reconstitution of WMD and threats to neighbours.

“We could also make more explicit guarantees for Kurdish autonomy now and in any future Iraq.

“We should encourage and support the Iraqi opposition.

“We could mount a higher profile campaign on the issue of war crimes and consider the options for an international tribunal to try Saddam and his principal lieutenants.”

288. Mr McDonald added:

“We could set out a vision of post-Saddam Iraq by deploying a ‘Contract with the Iraqi People’ on the lines of the attached draft ...”

289. The background to the proposal for a “Contract with the Iraqi People” is set out in Section 1.2; the details of the “Contract”, and the subsequent development of a vision for Iraq, are addressed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

290. The letter reviewed discussions with Iraq’s neighbours about curbing illegal oil imports.

291. Mr McDonald concluded:

“Regime change may look an attractive alternative. Removal of Saddam, if achieved swiftly, would be applauded by his neighbours, the GCC and the wider Arab/Islamic world. But previous uprisings in 1991 failed for want of outside support and military intervention for this purpose would be illegal. The US are nevertheless considering their options again. David Manning’s visit to Washington this week offers the opportunity to find out what they have in mind, and to test the viability of any plans.”

SIS advice

292. In parallel, No.10 had also commissioned urgent advice from SIS.

293. SIS4 produced three papers, addressing how the UK might divert the US from a policy of regime change, a “route map” for pursuing regime change, and an analysis of the potential risks and costs were the US to take military action against Iraq.

294. On 3 December, Sir Richard Dearlove wrote formally to Sir David Manning enclosing three “papers”:

- A paper discussed with SIS4 on 30 November which began: “What can be done about Iraq? If the US heads for direct action, have we ideas which could divert them to an alternative course?”
- A second paper, ‘Iraq: Further Thoughts’, reflecting discussion at “our meeting on 30 November” of a possible way ahead which combined “an objective of regime change in Baghdad with the need to protect important regional interests which would be at grave risk, if a bombing campaign against Iraq was launched in the short term”.

- A third paper which offered “some thoughts on the risks and costs of US attacks on Iraq”.¹⁴⁰

295. In the first paper, SIS4 set out the issues that would bear on planning for regime change in Iraq, including:

- The “read across from Afghanistan (cf Richard Perle’s ideas)” was “deceptive”. The defences of the Iraqi regime were “formidable” and the Tikritis were “not a bunch of Taliban”.
- Neighbouring Arab states preferred “the Sunnis” to the Shia “alternative”, and feared “Kurdish expansionism”.
- Iraqi external opposition groups were “divided, badly penetrated” by Iraqi intelligence and had “little credibility inside Iraq”.
- Action against Iraq would undermine the unity of purpose of the war against terror.
- There was “no convincing intelligence (or common sense) case that Iraq supports Sunni extremism”.
- There were “significant fragilities” in the countries neighbouring Iraq.
- The implications of a “US installed regime in Iraq” for the UK’s regional alliances were “not at all positive”: “‘Fundamentalism’ would be boosted.”
- It was “not clear” that destruction of identified WMD facilities “would do more than temporarily arrest Iraq’s WMD capabilities”.
- There was no identified nuclear target.

296. Setting out a “Strategic View”, SIS4 wrote:

- Action against Iraq “climbs a steep gradient of complex regional opposition”.
- EU co-ordination would be “problematic”.
- Co-ordination by the Security Council had been “difficult” because of Iraqi influence on Russia and, to a lesser extent, China.
- Iraq policy was “inextricably tied up with the problem of Israel”.
- Egypt, which was “vital to UK interests in the Middle East” was “vulnerable to Iraqi influence due to the failure of MEPP”.
- Maintaining international cohesion against terrorism was “a prior imperative”.
- Iraq was “succeeding in eroding sanctions” but isolation was “costing Baghdad heavily”. Maintaining regional balances, “especially with Iran”, was “a problem for Saddam”.

297. SIS4 told the Inquiry he had been asked to produce the paper that afternoon and deliver it to No.10.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ [Letter PS/C to Manning, 3 December 2001, ‘Iraq’ attaching Paper ‘Iraq’; Paper ‘Iraq: Further Thoughts’ and Paper ‘US Attacks on Iraq: The Risks and Costs’.](#)

¹⁴¹ Private hearing, Part 1, page 7.

298. SIS4 stated that Sir David Manning had asked for:

“A quick paper ... of key issues that we need to bear in mind to keep our balance and our perspective in considering Iraq as a rapidly expanding threat ... A sort of sedative paper ...”¹⁴²

299. SIS4 stated that the first paper was trying to bring out the hazards about the experience to date with Iraq if direct action were taken.¹⁴³

300. SIS4 stated that he had been concerned about:

“... the lack of our response to the re-emergence of Iraq as a serious regional power ...

“I was very alarmed at the way that Iraq was eroding the sanctions regime and evading it. It had been successful in seeing us off with propaganda since the end of the first Gulf War ...

“... that power and vitality of Iraq were, in my view, a real threat to the stability of the region.”¹⁴⁴

301. Citing the impact of Iraqi chemical attacks on Iranian troops in the Iran-Iraq War, SIS4 added that “Iraq’s potential, its capability in the WMD field, was very dramatic”:

“So the idea of putting an end to this problem was not something I would advocate, but I would see the force of the desire to do it to be decisive.”¹⁴⁵

302. Sir Richard Dearlove could not “recall the exact details” that led to the request for SIS advice, but he recalled “the circumstances”, which he described as “a sort of dearth of expertise in the Foreign Office at that sort of level of sophistication, and I’m pretty sure that this initiative comes out of me, David [Manning] and [SIS4] talking amongst each other”.¹⁴⁶

303. Sir Richard described the papers as “catalysts” to stimulate thinking; and emphasised that they had “no status as official papers at all”.

304. Sir David Manning was unable to recall the circumstances in which he had requested advice from SIS4 on 30 November, although he postulated that it was a reflection of SIS4’s expertise.¹⁴⁷

305. Sir David pointed out that the discussion of regime change at that stage was about fomenting regime change within Iraq, not about an invasion.

¹⁴² Private hearing, Part 1, page 6.

¹⁴³ Private hearing, Part 1, page 6.

¹⁴⁴ Private hearing, Part 1, page 12.

¹⁴⁵ Private hearing, Part 1, page 13.

¹⁴⁶ Private hearing, 16 June 2010, pages 9-11.

¹⁴⁷ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 9-16.

306. Although the covering letter from Sir Richard Dearlove's Private Office described the second paper as "an expansion" of the first, the paper drew on SIS4's discussion with Sir David Manning about a "possible way ahead".¹⁴⁸

307. Addressing the question "Why Move?", SIS4 wrote:

"The removal of Saddam remains a prize because it could give new security to oil supplies; engage a powerful and secular state in the fight against Sunni extremist terror, open political horizons in the GCC [Gulf Co-operation Council] states, remove a threat to Jordan/Israel, undermine the regional logic on WMD. The major challenge would be managing the regional reintegration of Iraq, without damaging important local relationships. Working for regime change could be a dynamic process of alliance building which could effect climatic change in the Arab-Israeli conflict."

308. SIS4 proposed a "new route map" where the key idea was that it would be "possible to speak openly about support for regime change in Iraq without compromising the actual project to support a coup". He suggested a "policy statement: **we want regime change in Baghdad and we are ready to provide air support to coup makers**". The latter would "need to be Sunnis ready to abide by UN resolutions".

309. SIS4 made a number of other observations, including:

- "To meet US impatience a 12-18 month timeframe should be imposed."
- There had been "a serious problem" with the legality of supporting coup makers.
- The message to key partners should include "assurances" that the approach was "going to be balanced, studied, planned and proportionate – better than bombing now".
- Examination of the interests affected and "means to compensate" them – "especially Turkey, Iran and Syria".
- Consideration of "international participation" in the military "task force".
- Legal examination of Iraqi liabilities and draft arrangements to manage them.
- "Promotion of serious **debate** within the region on **WMD**: costs and responsibilities."

310. Setting out "Our Aims for the Region", SIS4 wrote that there were:

"... two further aims: climatic change in the psychology of regimes in the region, a pre-condition for progress in the Arab-Israeli dispute ... The problem of WMD is an element in driving for action in Iraq. In turn, this should open prospects for Arab-Israeli talks, and, beyond, regional work to reduce the WMD inventories which threaten Europe as well."

¹⁴⁸ [Letter PS/C to Manning, 3 December 2001, 'Iraq' attaching Paper, 'Iraq: Further Thoughts'](#).

311. SIS4 confirmed that the second paper he had produced was:

“... about managing the paradox of working hard for regime change, communicating in secret, and being able to communicate to the world and to the Iraqi population in the hope maybe of precipitating local Iraqi help, without compromising that core and secret effort.”¹⁴⁹

312. Asked about his view that it would be important not to parachute a regime in from the external opposition, and that: “The new government would need to be broadly based but predominantly Sunni”, SIS4 replied:

“... the people being toppled were Ba’athists, who were culturally Sunni ... but being a Ba’athist wasn’t co-extensive with being Sunni. There were a lot of Sunnis in Iraq who would have liked Iraq to be run differently.

“I don’t think at this time it occurred to me that it was plausible to transfer an adversarial, party political, representational political system to Iraq.

“... The idea that Iraqi Shias could be fitted out with Republican, Democrat, Lib Dem identities, organisations and run the difficult place which is Iraq, a place which has never had stable political geography, wouldn’t have occurred to me in 2001.”¹⁵⁰

313. Asked about the second paper, a “new route map”, which stated that the Government Law Officers were going to have to provide assurances of legality, and that there had been a serious problem there, SIS4 replied:

“... I can’t honestly tell you what particular thought was in my mind there. I’m not aware of any discussions of the legality ...”¹⁵¹

314. The third paper was a companion piece to the second, providing an expanded analysis of the risks and costs of US attacks on Iraq in four categories:

- **“Strategic”** – including increased distrust of the US and damage to confidence in HMG; serious strain on the coalition against terrorism; and reinforcing the motives and grievances of terrorists.
- **“United Nations”** – including erosion of UN sanctions and renewed splits in the Security Council.
- **“Regional”** – including resentment in the Arab street and popular pressure on regional regimes; an increase in radical Islamist extremism; a boost to the Intifada and damage to the MEPP; threats to the stability of key allies; and reduction of support for operation of the No-Fly Zones.
- **“Iraq Internal”** – including the division of Iraq and the possibility that Saddam Hussein might respond to a perceived existential threat by attacking Israel with

¹⁴⁹ Private hearing, Part 1, page 14.

¹⁵⁰ Private hearing, Part 1, pages 23-24.

¹⁵¹ Private hearing, Part 1, pages 26-27.

any remaining SCUD-type missiles with chemical or biological warheads, “The Samson Scenario”; or mount conventional attacks on Israel or unconventional attacks on Israel or UK/US military assets.¹⁵²

315. SIS4 also stated that the outcomes of a bombing campaign would be “both uncertain and hard to control”.

316. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the first paper he had received was the FCO advice on options.¹⁵³ While it “concluded there were no anti-terrorist grounds” for military action against Iraq, that was because “we saw no link between Iraq and Al Qaida”. It did not “deal with the point, however, that post September 11th WMD” had taken on “a different significance”. Mr Blair also referred to the details of Iraq’s capabilities and its concealment activities as “not exactly ... reassuring”.

317. Addressing the papers provided by SIS4, Mr Blair stated that one had pointed out that getting regime change would be “very, very difficult ... so watch out”, and another had argued: “On the other hand, leaving him [Saddam] there is also very, very difficult.”¹⁵⁴ Those two views remained.

318. Mr Blair added that he thought that one of the papers said “by implication you cannot stop the WMD programme unless you actually remove Saddam”.

319. The papers produced by SIS4 did not address whether regime change was a prerequisite for stopping Iraq’s WMD programmes. That was the conclusion of the JIC Assessment of 27 February 2002 and the CO Options Paper of 8 March (see Section 3.2).

320. On 5 December, Mr McDonald wrote to Sir Richard Dearlove’s Private Office recording that Mr Straw had seen two SIS papers and thought they were “very perceptive” and he hoped that the Prime Minister would read them.¹⁵⁵

321. Asked whether Mr Straw’s comments constituted support for his proposals, SIS4 replied:

“No ...

“I don’t want to leave the impression in your minds that at this point there was an autonomous UK based drive towards regime change, because I have no memory of that. I have a vivid memory of people being very concerned that all this stuff may be about to happen, and what do we think about it. What do we think of the arguments? ... What are the dangers? ... But clearly we would need to be in a position to discuss

¹⁵² [Paper, ‘US Attacks on Iraq: The Risks and Costs’ attached to Letter PS/C to Manning, 3 December 2001, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁵³ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 32-33.

¹⁵⁴ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 33-34.

¹⁵⁵ [Letter McDonald to \[PS/C\], 5 December 2001, ‘Iraq’.](#)

it with the Americans. They were likely to bring it to us. I think there's a distinction there."¹⁵⁶

322. Mr Straw confirmed that he had seen the second and third papers sent to No.10.¹⁵⁷ Mr Straw wrote that his comments were based on the two papers taken together and that from his perspective SIS4's reference to the need for assurances of legality were:

"... spelling out quite plainly that 'assurances of legality' were an essential pre-condition to any HMG policy in support of UK military action with the objective of regime change."

323. Mr Straw emphasised that one of the central arguments against regime change was, as the FCO advice of 3 December and SIS4's paper had made clear, "the fact that it was illegal".

Mr Blair's paper for President Bush, 4 December 2001

324. Mr Blair and President Bush discussed future options for Iraq on 3 December 2001.

325. Mr Blair told President Bush that he was not opposed to the removal of Saddam Hussein, but an extremely clever plan would be needed.

326. Mr Blair suggested the visit to Washington by Sir David Manning and Sir Richard Dearlove later that week would be an opportunity to share thinking on the next phase.

327. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush by telephone on 3 December.¹⁵⁸

328. The conversation was primarily about the position in Afghanistan, including the prospects for the Bonn Conference to generate a request for an international security force, possibly under UN auspices, and whether the UK might lead such a force.

329. In a discussion on future options in relation to Iraq, Mr Blair told President Bush that Sir David Manning and Sir Richard Dearlove would be in Washington later that week. That would be an opportunity to share thinking on "how the next phase might proceed".

330. In response to a discussion about the potential effects in the Middle East if Saddam Hussein were overthrown, Mr Blair said that:

"... contrary to press reporting, he was not in a different place on this ... it would be excellent to get rid of Saddam. But there needed to be a clever strategy for doing this."

¹⁵⁶ Private hearing, Part 1, page 15.

¹⁵⁷ Statement, 16 March 2011, page 1.

¹⁵⁸ Letter Tatham to McDonald, 3 December 2001, 'Telephone Conversation with President Bush'.

Following further discussion of the possible options, including that a conventional land invasion was out of the question, Mr Blair repeated that he was:

“... not opposed to action against Saddam. But an extremely clever plan would be required.”

331. Mr Blair and President Bush also discussed Israeli actions.

332. The record of the conversation was sent to Mr Straw’s Private Office. It was also sent to Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary, Adm Boyce, Sir Richard Dearlove, Sir Stephen Lander (Director General of the Security Service), Sir Francis Richards (Director of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)), Sir Christopher Meyer, Mr John Scarlett (Chairman of the JIC), Mr McKane, and to Sir Richard Wilson’s Private Secretary.

333. The following day Mr Blair sent President Bush a paper setting out proposals for Phase 2 of the war against terrorism.

334. In relation to Iraq, Mr Blair stated that it was a threat because: it had a WMD capability; was acquiring more; had shown its willingness to use it; could export that capability; and was in breach of UN Security Council resolutions.

335. Mr Blair suggested a strategy for regime change in Iraq that would build over time which would permit military action to be taken “if necessary, without losing international support”.

336. Mr Blair sent President Bush a paper ‘The War against Terrorism: The Second Phase’ on 4 December.¹⁵⁹

337. The paper comprised an overview of the possible approaches to potential terrorist threats in seven countries¹⁶⁰ and a ‘Strategy for Confronting Islamic Extremism’ in moderate Muslim states.

338. In relation to Iraq, the key points were:

- Iraq was a threat because: “it has WMD capability; is acquiring more; has shown its willingness to use it; and can export that capability”. Iraq was in breach of UN Security Council resolutions 687 (1991), 715 (1991) and 1284 (1999) and Saddam Hussein supported certain Palestinian terrorist groups and used terror tactics against Iraqi dissidents.
- Any link to 11 September and AQ was “at best very tenuous”.
- Although “people want to be rid of Saddam”, international opinion “outside the US/UK” would “at present” be “reluctant” to support immediate military action.

¹⁵⁹ [Paper Blair \[to Bush\], 4 December 2001, ‘The War Against Terrorism: The Second Phase’.](#)

¹⁶⁰ Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Philippines, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

339. Mr Blair suggested that a “strategy for regime change that builds over time” was needed: “until we get to the point where military action could be taken if necessary” without losing international support and “facing a choice between massive intervention and nothing”. That might comprise six elements.

340. The first was “Softening up” opinion by:

- drawing attention to Saddam’s breach of UN resolutions;
- saying that regime change was “desirable”, but “not yet setting it as a military objective”;
- signalling willingness to support opposition groups;
- building a regional coalition against Iraq; and
- demanding the return of weapons inspectors “without specifying military action if the demand is not met, we let it be clearly seen that nothing is ruled out. But our time frame is deliberately vague.”

341. Mr Blair commented that that would be “presentationally difficult”:

“We need to be very precise to avoid getting drawn into threats we are not yet ready to implement. But we would be unsettling Saddam; possibly forcing concessions out of him ... and giving ourselves room for manoeuvre.”

In the meantime, the US and UK would “continue to enforce the No-Fly Zones on a more intensive basis”.

342. The other elements suggested by Mr Blair were:

- Applying “real pressure on Syria to stop the flow of Iraqi oil by closing the oil pipeline”, clamping down on “Saddam’s illegal financial transactions”, and helping Jordan. Turkey would also need to stop illegal oil imports.
- Bringing “Russia on board, by ensuring their financial interests don’t suffer adversely”. Withdrawal of Russian support would have a very negative impact on Saddam Hussein.
- Supporting “opposition groups” and setting out an agenda for post-Saddam Iraq (the FCO’s ‘Contract with the Iraqi People’).
- Mounting “covert operations” in support of those “with the ability to topple Saddam”.
- “When the rebellion finally occurs we back it militarily.” That included air support and support for uprisings. Mr Blair wrote: “What everyone in Iraq and around fears is that we will start this action but not finish it. They need to know, and we need to be clear, that if an uprising occurs, we are willing to act militarily in support.”

343. Summarising his position, Mr Blair wrote:

“So: my strategy is to build this over time until we get to the point where military action could be taken if necessary; but meanwhile bring people towards us, undermine Saddam, without so alarming people about the immediacy of action that we frighten the horses, lose Russia and/or half the EU and nervous Arab states and find ourselves facing a choice between massive intervention and nothing.”

344. Addressing Syria and Iran, Mr Blair wrote:

“If toppling Saddam is a prime objective, it is far easier to do it with Syria and Iran in favour or acquiescing rather than hitting all three at once. I favour giving these two a chance at a different relationship ... in return for closing down support for Hizbollah and Hamas and helping us over Iraq. I don’t underestimate the problems ... but I think it is possible ...”

345. Mr Blair also identified the dangers in any action of “unintended consequences” for international support. He added that the outcome of Afghanistan would be important to Phase 2. If Afghanistan was left as a:

“... better country, having supplied humanitarian aid and having given new hope to the people, we will not just have won militarily but morally; and the coalition will back us to do more elsewhere. In particular, we shall have given regime change a good name, which will help us in the argument over Iraq. So in my view, the political and diplomatic must always be reinforcing the military.”

346. Mr Blair drew attention to the need to put the Middle East Peace Process “back on track” or it would “complicate everything”.

347. Finally, Mr Blair suggested that the US and UK should be working with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries “on a strategy for confronting Islamic fundamentalism and extremism”.

348. Sir David Manning delivered the paper to the US.

349. Following discussions in Washington, Sir David reported that the US Administration was “open to Mr Blair’s ideas”, and that the discussions “had been worth the journey”.

350. Sir David also advised that there was a need to “make more of the WMD menace presented by Saddam”.

351. Following talks in Washington, at which Sir Richard Dearlove had also been present, Sir David Manning reported that he had taken Dr Rice through Mr Blair’s paper, including the “vital need” for progress on the MEPP.¹⁶¹ The US response had been “encouraging”, except on the MEPP.

¹⁶¹ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 6 December 2001, ‘Meeting with Condi Rice: Iraq and Phase 2’.

352. On Iraq, Sir David reported that the US was conducting a full review of the options. The US had been reviewing the possibilities before 9/11, but the attacks had given the process new urgency. He had stated that:

“... Saddam would only be overthrown if there was a strategy which co-ordinated work on all aspects of the problem. We should be patient. We must prepare very carefully, even if Saddam felt the net tightening. We should do it right rather than do it quickly.”

353. In the context of a discussion about what had changed since 1991, including the availability of precision weapons and Saddam’s “new WMD capabilities”, Sir David wrote:

“We should make more of the WMD menace presented by Saddam: people were far more sensitive to the dangers after what we had discovered in Afghanistan. And we should take the time and trouble to maintain the support of the coalition that we had worked so hard to build. The moderate Arabs were impressed by our swift and successful conduct of the Afghan campaign ... They were also united in loathing Saddam. If we contrived his initial overthrow, with outside support, they might stick with us.”

354. Sir David concluded that the discussions “had been worth the journey” and that it seemed the thinking “at the top level of the Administration” was “very close” to Mr Blair’s. The Administration was “open to Mr Blair’s ideas”.

355. Sir David suggested that Mr Blair should talk to President Bush and propose a US/UK group to “take the Iraq issue forward together”. At the request of the US, the discussions would need to be “extremely tightly held, involving only No.10/SIS/Cabinet Office”.

356. Mr Blair wrote on the minute: “I agree with all this as discussed.”¹⁶²

357. After his return to London, Sir David Manning sent a copy of the paper he had taken to Washington to the Private Secretaries to Mr Straw and Mr Hoon, Sir Richard Wilson, Mr Scarlett, Sir Richard Dearlove, Mr Powell and Sir Christopher Meyer.¹⁶³

358. There was no mention in that letter of Sir David’s visit to Washington or the substance of the discussions.

359. Sir David’s report of the discussions for Mr Blair was not sent to anyone outside No.10.

¹⁶² Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 6 December 2001, ‘Meeting with Condi Rice: Iraq and Phase 2’.

¹⁶³ Letter Manning to McDonald, 7 December 2001, ‘The War Against Terrorism: The Second Phase’.

360. Mr Jonathan Powell told the Inquiry that when Sir David Manning returned from Washington, he had reported that Dr Rice had assured him that the Administration had “no immediate plans for action in Iraq”.¹⁶⁴

361. In a minute on 10 December, the FCO Counter-Terrorism Policy Department (CTPD) stated:

“We have dropped plans to produce a paper on ... Iraq, as our objectives there are better pursued in different ways.”¹⁶⁵

362. In a meeting with Secretary Powell in London on 11 December, Mr Blair repeated his view that “we needed a clever strategy to deal with Saddam”; and identified the important consequences of success in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁶

363. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke on 11 December but there is no mention of Iraq or Phase 2 of the war on terrorism in the record of the discussion.¹⁶⁷

364. Asked what he had said to President Bush, Mr Blair replied:

“... when you get to my conversation with President Bush ... I am saying to him ‘Look, we are going to have to deal with this issue. We accept that. After September 11, the calculus of risk has changed and changed fundamentally. We cannot allow Saddam Hussein to be in breach of UN resolutions.’

“So I am signalling that I am up for the policy of handling and dealing with this issue and we are going to be with America in doing that.

“We then I think from memory had a discussion about all sorts of different aspects of that and how it might be done ... I was in no doubt it would be beneficial for the world to get rid of Saddam Hussein and to get rid of his regime.”¹⁶⁸

365. Mr Blair added:

“On the other hand, I was saying ‘This is going to be difficult precisely because of the things listed in the paper from the SIS officer’. Those were:

- The lack of response to the re-emergence of Iraq as a serious regional power.
- Alarm at the way that Iraq was eroding the sanctions regime and evading it.
- Iraq’s success in seeing us [the US and UK] off with propaganda since the end of the first Gulf Conflict.

¹⁶⁴ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 17.

¹⁶⁵ Minute Bloomfield to Prentice, 10 December 2001, ‘Counter-Terrorism: Phase Two: Country CT Strategies’.

¹⁶⁶ Letter Manning to McDonald, 11 December 2001, ‘Call by Colin Powell on the Prime Minister: War on Terrorism’.

¹⁶⁷ Email Cabinet Office [junior official] to Hammond, 23 June 2014, ‘BB8 issues’.

¹⁶⁸ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 34-35.

- Iraq's potential to produce WMD at very short notice. Nuclear would be slightly different ... but Iraq's potential, its capability was very dramatic."¹⁶⁹

366. Asked whether Iraq should have been encompassed in Phase 2, Mr Blair replied:

"Absolutely ... I thought we had to deal with all the problems ...

"My view was that this was all part of one issue in the end, and that you had to deal with each and every individual part ... that you couldn't ... say: '... we will deal with it sequentially ...' That was not my view."¹⁷⁰

367. Asked whether he had agreed with the advice in the FCO letter of 3 December, to ratchet up containment and steering away from the idea of supporting uprisings, let alone military intervention for the purposes of regime change, Mr Blair replied:

"... they were not quite saying that. What they were saying was, '... there is a policy of containment.' ... They go on to say: 'However, it's not actually stopped him doing what he is doing'."¹⁷¹

368. Asked if, in the context of the paper he had sent to President Bush, he was actively looking at a strategy that would build up in stages to military action against Iraq to deal with Saddam Hussein, Mr Blair replied:

"... I could see where this was heading the same as everybody else ...

"... It was very obvious you had to deal with the issue. There were two ways of dealing with it: change of heart or change of regime. That was more or less as it remained throughout."¹⁷²

369. Asked if the initiative had been followed up, Mr Blair referred to "a sort of build-up", including an Assessment from the JIC, leading to his meeting with President Bush in Crawford in April.¹⁷³ That had evolved at "quite a fast pace ... down a track towards regime change".

370. Mr Blair added that it was "absolutely clear from the outset" after 9/11 that President Bush was going to change the regime if Saddam Hussein did not let the inspectors back into Iraq. The question was whether the US strategy could be "put into a somewhat different track", initially an ultimatum and then through the UN.

371. The development of thinking in preparation for Mr Blair's meeting with President Bush at Crawford in early April 2002 is addressed in Section 3.2.

¹⁶⁹ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 35-36.

¹⁷⁰ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 37-38.

¹⁷¹ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 38-39.

¹⁷² Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 40-41.

¹⁷³ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 41-42.

372. Reporting a discussion with Mr Peter Mandelson on 4 December, who wanted background information on Iraq for use in speaking engagements on Middle East issues, Mr McKane recorded that Mr Mandelson had been “particularly interested in the prospects for effective action to unseat Saddam Hussein”.¹⁷⁴ Mr McKane reported that he had “pointed out the legal position, and also the difficulties in finding an effective strategy, whether military or otherwise, to deal effectively with Iraq”.

373. In response to a question about other targets for coalition action in Phase 2, Mr McKane reported that he had “sketched out in general terms” the links between Usama Bin Laden and Islamic extremists in other countries.

374. On 5 December, Mr Straw emphasised the need for Iraq to meet the obligations imposed by the UN, including the re-admission of weapons inspectors.

375. On 5 December, in a debate in Parliament on the Middle East, following terrorist attacks in Israel, Mr Dalyell asked whether the Government was “doing everything possible to deter certain Americans from the folly of attacking Iraq”.¹⁷⁵ Mr Straw responded:

“... The key to Iraq coming back into the civilised world is for Iraq to implement the undertakings imposed on it by the ... Security Council resolutions, including the re-admission of weapons inspectors. I say strongly ... that Iraq continues to pose a very serious threat to Arab states, as well as to the state of Israel, by its continued unlawful development of weapons of mass destruction.”

376. Asked if the UK took the same view as President Bush that UN inspectors must return to Iraq, Mr Straw told the Foreign Affairs Committee on 5 December:

“Yes. Saddam Hussein is the architect of the misfortunes of the Iraqi people ... Iraq poses a very severe threat in terms of its development and possible use of weapons of mass destruction, of that there can be no doubt. Therefore restraining the development of those weapons ... is essential, and to do that we require proper inspection.”¹⁷⁶

377. Mr Straw added that the UK had “been in the lead in the United Nations on seeking ... a more effective replacement, of ... resolution 1284”. The new sanctions regime might “With luck” be in place in six months. That would allow the export of goods to Iraq for civilian use for humanitarian and other purposes, and “more effectively interdict material which is either for military use for weapons of mass destruction, certain conventional weapons, or of dual use”.

¹⁷⁴ [Minute McKane to Manning, 4 December 2001, ‘Iraq: Peter Mandelson’](#).

¹⁷⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 5 December 2001, columns 338-339.

¹⁷⁶ Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, 5 December 2001, *Minutes of Evidence*, Qs 47-52.

378. Asked whether Iraq could be persuaded to permit the return of inspectors “without an intensification of military action”, Mr Straw replied:

“... I would not use the verb persuade. I see some prospect of Iraq coming to accept that this has to happen for the future of the regime as well as the future of the people in that country. I would not put it higher than that but I think there is some evidence to that effect.”

...

“There certainly has to be an intensification of diplomatic pressure ... it requires more active engagement, for example by Russia ... and a recognition ... that what has been an ambiguous approach to Iraq ... is not helpful in terms of the stability of the region and the stability of the international community.”

379. Asked if he thought the rights under the UN Charter extended “to taking pre-emptive action against a state which the US” believed might attack it, Mr Straw replied that all states had a right to self-defence and he was not going to be “drawn into hypothetical answers to hypothetical questions of the ‘what if’ variety”. If a country received “very good information” that it was about to be attacked it could take action in self defence consistent with Article 51 of the UN Charter, but the exact circumstances would vary.

380. In response to a final question about Iraq’s programme of developing a larger ballistic missile capability and that it was “possibly developing chemical, biological, maybe even nuclear weapons” and what might happen next after Afghanistan, Mr Straw replied:

“... You are right to say that Iraq’s building of weapons of mass destruction is a very serious potential threat to the peace and stability of the region and, therefore, to the whole of the international community ... [and] to imply that the international community has to take action. There is then a question of what action is best taken in respect of that where care and consideration is required. This is a separate matter to culpability for the atrocities of 11 September ... but we are ... very concerned, about Iraq’s development of these weapons. We believe that international action has to take place and I have talked already about the dramatic steps which have to be taken.”

MOD's initial response to international terrorism

In a speech at King's College on 5 December, Mr Hoon set out "preliminary thoughts" on the work commissioned by the MOD following the attacks on 11 September.¹⁷⁷

Mr Hoon set out five approaches the Armed Forces might take in countering the threat outside the UK:

- preventing the conditions that allowed international terrorist organisations to operate, including peace support operations to prevent instability or to assist in stabilisation of states which did not have the means to exercise control over their own territory;
- deterring attacks including:
 - considering "setting out more clearly and repeatedly our views on holding to account regimes which directly support international terrorist groups, or condone their presence within their borders"; and
 - looking "at how we deter the use of chemical, biological and radiological weapons as well as nuclear weapons and, importantly, dissuade those who facilitate the proliferation of such weapons";
- coercion of regimes and states which harboured or supported international terrorism "with the threat and, ultimately, the use of, military force in the event that diplomatic and other means fail";
- active disruption of activities supporting international terrorist groups; and
- destroying terrorist cells "and, perhaps in the last instance, to act against regimes such as the Taliban" which supported and protected terrorists.

The perspective in the US, December 2001

381. On 6 December, *The Washington Post* reported the text of a letter sent to President Bush by Senators McCain, Lieberman, Holmes and Lott, amongst others, arguing that "as we work to clean up Afghanistan and destroy Al Qaida, it is imperative that we plan to eliminate the threat from Iraq", suggesting that the US "must directly confront Saddam, sooner rather than later".¹⁷⁸

382. The letter stated:

"We cannot be drawn into the ethnic politics of any particular nation, but should find a way to work with all the opposition in a unified framework. The Iraqi National Congress is the only umbrella organisation comprising all elements of the Iraqi opposition. No one group is excluded, no one group is favoured ... All indications are that in the interest of our own national security, Saddam Hussein must be removed from power."

¹⁷⁷ Speech, 5 December 2001.

¹⁷⁸ Email Hall to various, 6 December 2001, 'Letter to the President on Iraq'.

383. Mr Kevin Tebbit, the MOD Permanent Under Secretary, visited Washington from 5 to 7 December 2001 where his meetings with a range of contacts included discussions on Afghanistan and the next stage of the war against terrorism.¹⁷⁹

384. Reporting to Mr Hoon on the visit, Mr Tebbit stated that Washington saw itself as being on a “war footing” and “the focus on international terrorism remains intense”.¹⁸⁰ That focus influenced “the US attitude and approach to the rest of the agenda”. In his view that meant:

“UK views are listened to, like nobody else’s; all doors are open (but it doesn’t mean that we can easily get our way or secure our interests);

“... if we want our advice to be heeded on general pol/mil [political/military] issues, we need to place it in the context of counter-terrorism post 11 September ... everything needs to relate back to the war in some way if we are to catch their ear; and

“... there is a widespread and bipartisan sense, extending well beyond Administration ‘hawks’ that Iraq will need to be dealt with sooner rather than later. This rationale is not quite as simplistic as we like to think. They do not suspect Saddam of complicity in 11 September. But they regard it as all too likely that he will make WMD available to terrorist groups without much warning. Our success in dissuading the Administration from military action without proper political and diplomatic preparation (though there was no sense that a military move was imminent) will depend on our ability to engage constructively on the strategy and tactics.”

385. The report was also sent to the FCO, Sir Christopher Meyer, and to Sir David Manning.

386. While Mr Tebbit was in Washington, an attempt was made by a senior Republican close to the Pentagon to persuade him that the Iraqi National Congress could be a force to be reckoned with sufficient to cause an Iraqi response and enable the US to take supportive military action. Mr Tebbit commissioned an analysis of that thesis which he expected would “show it to be flawed”.¹⁸¹

387. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that the desire in the US State Department was to move down the UN track, but the mood in Secretary Rumsfeld’s Office was “much tougher”.¹⁸² Mr Richard Perle, Chairman of the Defence Advisory Board, whom Sir Kevin regarded as one of the “most influential figures” on Secretary Rumsfeld’s thinking, was “very clearly talking of trying to encourage a sort of Northern Alliance of Iraq”.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Telegram 1684 Washington to FCO London, 8 December 2001, ‘Tebbit’s Visit to Washington: Wider War Against Terrorism’.

¹⁸⁰ Minute Tebbit to Secretary of State [MOD], 10 December 2001, ‘Visit to Washington 5-7 December’.

¹⁸¹ Minute Wilson to PS/CDI, 13 December 2001, ‘Iraq: Is there a “Northern Alliance”?’

¹⁸² Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 4.

¹⁸³ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 4.

388. Sir Kevin confirmed he considered Mr Perle's thinking to be "flawed" and that the UK had not been challenging it sufficiently strongly.¹⁸⁴

389. The MOD subsequently concluded that there was "no Northern Alliance equivalent ... who could take advantage of precision bombing" in Iraq.¹⁸⁵

390. On 7 December, Kandahar fell to anti-Taliban forces led by Mr Hamid Karzai, supported by US Marines.¹⁸⁶

391. Sir Richard Dearlove advised No.10 at the end of December that it would be very much in the Government's interest to work with the US and that the outcome of US thinking would be of "enormous significance" to the national interest.

392. Following the discussion in Washington on 5 December, Sir Richard Dearlove asked SIS4 and SIS7 to hold follow up talks on Iraq.¹⁸⁷ He reported the outcome of the talks to Sir David Manning on 27 December, with details of the discussions between SIS and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

393. SIS4 had suggested a "middle ground" option should be examined. That would be to create conditions within Iraq which, with air support, could act as a catalyst for a coup which would bring Saddam Hussein down within the next one to two years.

394. Sir Richard advised that the outcome of US thinking was likely to be "an intelligent and co-ordinated push for regime change, but a more aggressive military campaign cannot be ruled out". If it were the former, the US would look for UK support. There had been no discussion about what the US would expect from the UK in the event of a military campaign.

395. Sir Richard suggested that if a US policy decision went "the right way" he believed that it would be:

"... very much in HMG's interest to work with the Americans. We have a contribution to make and the outcome is of enormous significance for our national interest."

396. As Section 3.2 shows, Mr Straw does not seem to have been informed of SIS discussions with the US until 19 February 2002.

397. While Sir David Manning had confirmed in early December that the US was conducting a full review of all its options, there are no indications that the UK was aware that President Bush had specifically commissioned General Franks to look at military options for removing Saddam Hussein; and that that would include options for a conventional land invasion.

¹⁸⁴ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 5.

¹⁸⁵ Minute Cholerton to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 24 January 2002, 'Iraq: No Fly Zones'.

¹⁸⁶ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Letter Dearlove to Manning, 27 December 2001, 'Iraq Policy'.

398. General Franks visited Crawford on 28 December 2001 to brief President Bush on Iraq.¹⁸⁸ Other members of the national security team were linked by video to the briefing. General Franks informed President Bush that the plan on the shelf required a six month build up and 400,000 troops; he was looking at whether as a result of lessons from Afghanistan fewer conventional ground forces would be needed. He had “envisioned a fast invasion from Kuwait in the south, Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the west, and Turkey in the north”.

399. Secretary Rumsfeld recorded that General Franks’ plan called for “an invasion force of 145,000 ... which would be increased to 275,000 if and as needed”.¹⁸⁹

400. The report from the US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons*, stated that the concept of operations briefed to President Bush had been devised in four video conferences between Thanksgiving (22 November 2001) and late December 2001. It focused chiefly on the combat phase and “anticipated a rapid post war handoff to a provisional Iraqi government and a minimal continuing military footprint”.¹⁹⁰

401. President Bush wrote that after the 28 December briefing he had “asked the team to keep working on the plan”, while observing that:

“... we should remain optimistic that diplomacy and international pressure will succeed in disarming the regime ... But we cannot allow weapons of mass destruction to fall into the hands of terrorists. I will not allow that to happen.”¹⁹¹

402. General Franks wrote that he gave a further briefing on the developing plan to President Bush and US Principals on 7 February 2002, in which he identified the “optimum operational timing” as “December-mid-March” [2003].¹⁹²

Developments in January 2002

403. Following an inter-departmental meeting chaired by the Cabinet Office on 14 January 2002, Mr McKane reported to Sir David Manning that the UK continued to push for the introduction of the Goods Review List by 30 May 2002 as authorised by resolution 1382 (2001).¹⁹³ The prospects for agreement on implementation of resolution 1284 (i.e. the return of weapons inspectors) were “slim”. There was a continued discussion about whether the introduction of the GRL should take place before, or in parallel with, clarification of what Iraq had to do to get sanctions suspended and the regime which would be put in place thereafter.

¹⁸⁸ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

¹⁸⁹ Rumsfeld D. *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*. Sentinel, 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Bowen SW Jr. *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*. U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009.

¹⁹¹ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

¹⁹² Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

¹⁹³ Minute McKane to Manning, 15 January 2002, ‘Iraq’.

404. Sir David Manning and Sir Richard Dearlove visited Washington again on 21 January 2002.¹⁹⁴

405. In relation to discussions on Iraq, Sir David reported that there was an expectation that Saddam Hussein would “make a display of renewed co-operation” in the coming weeks. That would “probably include some kind of offer on inspections”. The US would “resist sham inspections” which took the pressure off Saddam Hussein and “did nothing to further our interests”. One senior US individual had suggested that it would be easier if Saddam Hussein “remained completely obdurate so that we were not faced with predictable arguments about giving him another chance”. That was “just what he wanted”.

406. Sir David added that the US Administration’s “view remained that we should be pushing ahead for regime change”. He had said that Mr Blair:

“... favoured regime change but wanted a carefully constructed strategy. We must not rush in and fail. It seemed to me very unlikely that we would be in a position to take serious action before Saddam made a move on inspectors. We would have to factor this in.”

407. Sir David reported that the timing of a strategy for dealing with Saddam Hussein was vague and there was “no sign that Washington has a clear plan that would allow early action”. Any UK contribution would need Mr Blair’s endorsement and “might have to be processed through the Attorney”. The US and UK would look at options. There were some doubts about whether a strategy for regime change would be viable.

408. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that the visit took place:

“... in the knowledge that Iraq had been the subject of considerable debate in Washington ... and I recall saying to Dr Rice that if there was a review ... it would certainly ... have to include the whole question of how to incorporate inspections ...”¹⁹⁵

409. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that Sir David had told Dr Rice that the UK would need the advice of the Attorney General before any action at any stage would be possible.¹⁹⁶

410. Following a visit to Baghdad by Mr Amre Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League, on 18 and 19 January, Mr John Sawers, British Ambassador to Egypt, reported that Mr Moussa had told him Saddam Hussein had:

- shown “the seeds of flexibility” during the visit and professed a desire to re-open a dialogue with Mr Annan, without pre-conditions and with an open agenda,

¹⁹⁴ Minute Manning to Powell, 22 January 2002, ‘Talks with Condi Rice, 21 January: Iraq’.

¹⁹⁵ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, page 10.

¹⁹⁶ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 100.

although Iraq would not make the first move and the initiative would have to come from the UN; and

- accepted that the time had come for Iraq to start talking about the return of inspectors and asked Mr Moussa to contact Dr Blix on his behalf.¹⁹⁷

411. Mr Powell drew the telegram to Mr Blair's attention, commenting:

"This ties in with other indications that Saddam is wriggling, trying to get off the hook. The US will want to ignore these talks and keep open the possibility of regime change instead of inspectors."¹⁹⁸

412. Mr Blair responded: "We shd keep up the pressure."¹⁹⁹

Conclusions

413. After the attacks on the US on 9/11, which was widely accepted as having changed the nature of the threat and the way in which Governments should address calculations about the risks being faced, Mr Blair declared that the UK would stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the US to defeat and eradicate international terrorism.

414. Throughout the autumn of 2001, Mr Blair took an active and leading role in building a coalition to act against that threat, including military action against Al Qaida and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. He also emphasised the potential risk of terrorists acquiring and using a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon, and the dangers of inaction.

415. In November 2001, the JIC assessed that Iraq had played no role in the 9/11 attacks on the US and that practical co-operation between Iraq and Al Qaida was unlikely. There was no credible evidence of covert transfers of WMD-related technology and expertise to terrorist groups. It was possible that Iraq might use WMD in terrorist attacks, but only if the regime was under serious and imminent threat of collapse.

416. In relation to Iraq, Mr Blair sought to influence US policy and prevent precipitate military action by the US which would undermine the success of the coalition which had been established for action against international terrorism. He recommended identifying an alternative policy which would command widespread international support.

¹⁹⁷ [Telegram 21 Cairo to FCO London, 24 January 2002, 'Iraq/Arab League: Moussa's Visit to Baghdad'](#).

¹⁹⁸ [Manuscript comment Powell to Prime Minister, \[undated\], on Telegram 21 Cairo to FCO London, 24 January 2002, 'Iraq/Arab League: Moussa's Visit to Baghdad'](#).

¹⁹⁹ [Manuscript comment Prime Minister to Powell, \[undated\], on Telegram 21 Cairo to FCO London, 24 January 2002, 'Iraq/Arab League: Moussa's Visit to Baghdad'](#).

417. While recognising the difficulties, the UK continued actively to pursue the policy framework agreed earlier in 2001 of strengthening the policy of containing Iraq, through a revised and more targeted sanctions regime and seeking Iraq's agreement to the return of inspectors as required by resolution 1284 (1999).

418. The adoption of resolution 1382 (2001) went some way towards that objective. But support for economic sanctions was eroding and whether Iraq would ever agree to re-admit weapons inspectors and allow them to operate without obstruction was in doubt.

419. Following President Bush's remarks on 26 November, there were renewed UK concerns that US attention was turning towards military action on Iraq.

420. Mr Blair's discussion with President Bush on 3 December and the paper he sent to President Bush the following day represented a significant development of the UK's approach. Mr Blair suggested a "clever strategy" for regime change in Iraq that built over time, until the point was reached where "military action could be taken if necessary", without losing international support.

421. Mr Blair also emphasised the threat which Iraq might pose in the future, which remained a key part his position in the months that followed.

422. Mr Blair was offering President Bush the UK's support in an effort to influence his decisions on Iraq while seeking to devise a strategy which would command international support.

423. The proposals represented a significant departure from the UK's previous approach. In essence the strategy entailed renewed demands for Iraq to comply with the obligations imposed by the Security Council and the re-admission of weapons inspectors, and a readiness to respond firmly if Saddam Hussein failed to comply.

424. The strategy had multiple diplomatic strands and Mr Blair did not, at that stage, have a ground invasion of Iraq or immediate military action of any sort in mind. But he did state that when a rebellion occurred, the US and UK should "back it militarily". That was the first step towards a policy of possible intervention in Iraq.

425. There is no evidence of any formal consideration of the detailed terms of the strategy for Iraq Mr Blair proposed to President Bush, which went beyond the strategy proposed by the FCO, or its potential implications.

426. The paper Mr Blair sent to President Bush on 4 December was not seen in advance by Mr Straw or Mr Hoon although it was sent to them subsequently.

427. A number of issues, including the legal basis for any military action, would need to be resolved as part of developing the "clever strategy".

428. The evidence indicates that Mr Straw and Mr Hoon were unaware that, with No.10's knowledge, a dialogue had subsequently been initiated between SIS and the CIA.

