Evidence of SIR STEPHEN WALL, GCMG, LVO

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Welcome, everyone, and welcome to our witness, Sir Stephen Wall.

At this session we are hearing from Sir Stephen Wall, who served as the Prime Minister's advisor on European issues and head of the Cabinet Office's European Secretariat from 2000 to 2004. You had also served in Number 10 as a Private Secretary to the Prime Minister from 1991 to 1993 and in the private office of several foreign secretaries.

We are going to explore first the way government worked and then how foreign policy decisions were made during Mr Blair's time as Prime Minister and Sir Stephen's direct responsibilities in relation to Europe and more general issues of policy on Iraq.

As I say on each occasion we recognise witnesses give evidence based on their recollection of events and we, of course, check what we hear against the papers to which we have access, some of which are still arriving.

I remind each witness on each occasion you will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence given to the effect that the evidence is truthful, fair and accurate.
With those preliminaries out of the way can I ask Sir Stephen some general questions about the way the government worked and foreign policy decisions were made under Mr Blair and then we want to turn more specifically to the policy on Iraq? I understand you worked in Number 10 under three Prime Ministers?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. I worked for a year in the press office when Jim Callaghan was Prime Minister, because I had been in the Foreign Office News Department and when the head of that department, Tom McCaffrey moved to Number 10, I moved with him. Then, as you said, Chairman, I worked for two years for John Major as his Foreign Office Private Secretary and then for Tony Blair as his EU advisor.

When Tony Blair became Prime Minister, he inherited within Number 10 the traditional system whereby there was a Foreign Policy Private Secretary who did foreign policy, defence and Northern Ireland. That changed after the 2001 election and although I had been in the job as head of the European Secretariat since September 2000, my job changed as part of that overall change.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. You had also served in the private office of I think four foreign secretaries.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I served in the -- yes. David Owen, Peter Carrington and then Geoffrey Howe, John Major and
Douglas Hurd.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Five.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Five.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: There can be few, if any, officials in modern times who have had experience of working both sides of Downing Street than yourself.

To set the scene could you give us a thumbnail sketch of the different roles both in the Foreign Secretary's private office but most particularly in the Prime Minister's office on Foreign Affairs?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. I mean, the role of a private Secretary anywhere and obviously the role of the Private Secretary or Private Secretarial team, because there were obviously more than one, in my first incarnation I was an Assistant Private Secretary responsible for a particular area of activity, in this particular case mostly Africa and Commonwealth issues, working to the Principal Private Secretary, but the job of the Private Office obviously is to be the interface between the Secretary of State and the rest of the department, and indeed between the department and the rest of Whitehall and particularly in the case of the Foreign Office Private Office between the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister at one remove.

There's a hotline between the Foreign Office, the
desk of the Principal Private Secretary in the Foreign Office and the desk of what was then the Foreign Policy Private Secretary in Number 10, and that hotline was used a lot. I mean, not for exciting communications, for routine communications, and the rule that had applied, certainly since Jim Callaghan's day as Foreign Secretary, was that when one of the Foreign Office Private Secretaries wrote to Number 10 on a matter of policy that had to be cleared with the Foreign Secretary. In other words, you could not express a view as the Private Secretary, purporting to be the view of the Secretary of State, unless that had been cleared with him.

There had been a particular incident where that had gone wrong and Jim Callaghan felt his name had been taken in vain.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Is it possible to draw any general contrast between the arrangements for conducting foreign policy under different Prime Ministers or are they each one sui generis.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Well, I think until the changes that were made in the foreign policy structure in Number 10 under Tony Blair there had been a consistent pattern. There was one person, a Foreign Office nominee, who was the Private Secretary for Foreign Policy, Defence and
Northern Ireland. That meant that there was a very short line of authority, as it were. If you were doing that job, you knew the Prime Minister's wishes across the board on the issues for which you were responsible. When I worked for John Major I knew that if I wasn't doing something, then nobody else was doing it. I was the one person who had that responsibility.

It also meant that, however much you tried, there were not enough hours in the day to be anything more than a Private Secretary. If you had it in mind to build a power base, which I personally never did, it was quite difficult to do so. In other words, the authority for giving advice to the Prime Minister rested with the Foreign Secretary as far as foreign policy was concerned. You were very often its channel.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could you speak a little more slowly.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I will try. You were very often its channel and clearly, as with any Private Secretary, because you have access, you are quite often a confidant and a sounding board, but you weren't in a position to make the policy. You were a transmitter of policy and a transmitter of information in both directions.

That did change under Tony Blair, more I think on the side of the house that was run by David Manning and then by Nigel Sheinwald than by me.
Very briefly, there had been a European Secretariat in the Cabinet Office responsible for the coordination of Whitehall policy on the European Community, later the European Union, since we joined in 1973. The primary job of that outfit was to coordinate the policy. In other words, when the European Commission put forward a proposal the Secretariat got together the key players in Whitehall to give advice to Ministers as to what the British response should be and then to ensure that instructions were carried out, and when eventually EU legislation was adopted that it was implemented and legislation passed and so on.

That role was the role that I undertook when I came back from Brussels in the year 2000. Before the 2001 election Tony Blair said to me that if he won the election he wanted me to move into Number 10 and work from within Number 10 and at the same time he was setting up a rather equivalent structure which David Manning was the first head of on the foreign policy side.

My understanding of the reason that he wanted to move away from the more traditional model was that he felt that rather than have one person who was a channel for other people's expertise, why not have available to the Prime Minister the people who were actually the
experts?

As far as the job I was doing was concerned, that was in a way a slight misunderstanding of it in that traditionally the head of the European Secretariat had been the Prime Minister's principal advisor other than Foreign Secretary on European Community issues. For example, under Margaret Thatcher, David Williamson, now Lord Williamson, was a huge influence on her thinking. In 1997, when New Labour came to power, Brian Bender was doing that job as head of the European Secretariat. Similarly he was used just as much by Tony Blair as I was subsequently.

So in my perception I mean the job got a bit grander in rank simply as a reflection of the job I had done in Brussels before, and I was physically placed inside Number 10, which had one advantage, which was that I had access to the Number 10 e-mail system, because otherwise there was a firewall between Number 10 and the Cabinet Office. So we weren't part of that internal system. I had the advantage that I was that little bit closer to hand. I was half a minute away rather than two minutes away. It had the disadvantage, of course, that I was physically cut off from the rest of my team.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Do you want to offer any kind
of qualitative comparative judgment about the former and
the then later set of arrangements or -- you talked of
disadvantage and advantage from your standpoint.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. I think the changes that the Prime
Minister made were viewed with some suspicion in the
rest of Whitehall. As far as my job was concerned there
was suspicion because for the first time in the history
of our membership of the European Union the coordinating
role was being done by somebody from the Foreign Office
rather than from a domestic department. There was
obviously concern that this was going to be the creation
of a Prime Minister's department and that, therefore,
the Prime Minister would have not just more sources of
independent advice, but the capacity for action, as it
were, which didn't pass through the Foreign Office or
the Ministry of Defence.

I think there is some truth in that. On the other
hand, having done the job of Foreign Office Private
Secretary in its previous manifestation, I mean, it was
one of those jobs where you worked seven days a week and
you worked 90 hour weeks. So there was a huge burden on
one person, so it wasn't necessarily an ideal system.
So it was understandable that Tony Blair wanted to make
some change.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I think with that I will ask
1 Baroness Prashar to pick up the questions.
2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Stephen, I want to look at the
3 arrangements for providing advice to the Prime Minister
5 Perhaps you can begin by telling me which officials
6 and special advisers were most influential with the
7 Prime Minister on foreign policy during that period?
8 SIR STEPHEN WALL: If you take foreign policy across --
9 I should also explain, because I think it is germane. My
10 job as head of the European Secretariat and as the Prime
11 Minister's EU advisor was to coordinate Whitehall
12 activity and advice to him and give advice to him on all
13 those things which we normally think of as the European
14 Community's activities, ie, changes to the treaties on
15 the one hand, and there were a lot of negotiations on
16 that score, economic and monetary union and more
17 particularly the whole day to day range of issues, like
18 the Working Time Directive, the Agency Workers Directive
19 and so on, which were enormously sensitive in UK
20 domestic terms and important and where a view had to be
21 formed and where the Prime Minister might need to take
22 a view.
23 There was a subcommittee of the Cabinet
24 traditionally chaired by the Foreign Secretary which was
25 the arbiter of most of those issues if there was
Ministerial disagreement. It was rare, therefore, for those things to come to the Prime Minister.

What I didn't do, and this is relevant to your point, was what we might call strictly foreign policy issues, even if they related to the countries of the European Union. Those fell very much to David Manning and later Nigel Sheinwald and to the Political Director, Peter Ricketts, for most of this period in the Foreign Office.

That said, very often there was not an absolute distinction between these things. If you take policy towards Russia for example, quite a lot of that was energy policy or climate change policy or trade policy, which I did have some say in.

So against that background in terms of on the European side I would say that I, Roger Liddle, who was a political special advisor, one or two others from the Policy Unit were influential. On foreign policy the key players were undoubtedly David Manning, Matthew Rycroft and Jonathan Powell.

Jeremy Heywood didn't play much part in foreign policy. He played quite a part in European policy, particularly policy towards the Euro.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: He as Principal Private Secretary?
SIR STEPHEN WALL: Exactly. Because he had -- I mean, it has become almost illegal to have a government that doesn't have Jeremy Heyward in Number 10 to help run it. Because of his past experience he was a key figure, but not on the foreign policy side.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Slow down.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Any observation on the relationship between the Civil Servants and special advisors and how that dynamic worked?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: From my perspective the one thing that I did find when I came into working in Number 10 was that quite often on an issue, let us say agricultural prices, there would be possibly three separate bits of advice going to the Prime Minister, one from myself and the other officials and maybe two from different policy advisers. Tony Blair never to me seemed to object to that and I certainly didn't seek to suppress other people's views but, it did seem to me that on the whole it made more sense for the Prime Minister to read one piece of paper containing different views rather than find in his box one piece of paper, deal with it and then five minutes later find another.

As regards the foreign policy side of things I am not aware that David Manning or Nigel Sheinwald encountered
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you have any sense that the advice from the Foreign Office or ambassadors had any impact on the Prime Minister? Was the channel from the Foreign Office and ambassadors?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. The traditional route of advice to the Prime Minister on most foreign policy subjects continued to be either directly from the Foreign Secretary or a minute from the Foreign Secretary's Private Secretary reporting his views and that would go to the Prime Minister perhaps with a covering note from David Manning or Nigel Sheinwald summarising if there were lots of documents, and it is very much the traditional role of the Number 10 Private Secretary or the Manning figure or myself to actually produce a synthesis of different bits of advice and try to pull it together so that the Prime Minister doesn't necessarily have to read all of the background documents, and in that respect I think Prime Ministers vary.

I mean, I didn't work directly for Margaret Thatcher, but one was very aware sitting in the Foreign Office that she liked to read a lot of background material. Certainly I found when I worked for John Major that he was intellectually curious about issues.
and would read the background material.

As far as Europe was concerned I don't recall Tony Blair reading the background material as opposed to the advice that I gave to him. He was economical with the use of his time in that respect, very -- I mean, we would have, for example, a meeting with the Prime Minister of let's say Denmark for the sake of argument, and on some issues the Prime Minister of Denmark would say "Tony, what do you think about so and so?" and the Prime Minister would turn to me and say "Stephen, what do I think about so and so?". I am obviously not talking about the biggest issues clearly.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I understand that.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: If you said to the Prime Minister: you need to focus on X and Y, he would read voraciously and then you were running to keep up. If you said to him, "We have a bit of trouble with the following four EU countries" he worked the telephones or worked the room. He always had very quickly both a grasp of the subject and a very clear idea of what he wanted to do.

I remember at one stage at a European Council venturing to suggest to him how he might handle some particular issues with a head of government and he said to me, "You know, Stephen I haven't got where I am today without knowing how to do this". In other words, "This
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, from what you saw did the quality of advice -- I mean, how did it compare to what happened previously?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I don't think there was a difference in the quality of advice.

I mean, I think there's a difference historically over time in the way that advice to the Prime Minister and other Ministers is dealt with in terms of discussion, but I think that's a slightly separate issue from the way in which the day-to-day advice from the Foreign Office would have been handled.

I mean, I was never aware of any significant advice from another department that I dealt with not being shown to the Prime Minister, and I am sure the same was true for David Manning, and there was the usual correspondence -- with one exception, which I will come to -- there was the usual correspondence from Number 10 to the rest of Whitehall saying "The Prime Minister's view is X or Y".

One exception to that was on my side of the house on European matters where it became impossible to have correspondence of that kind with the Treasury, because Gordon Brown didn't want his officials to communicate
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What about the quality of advice? I mean, how did that compare? Was there a change in the quality toward what happened previously or was there a sustained --

SIR STEPHEN WALL: No. I never detected a change. There were experts in the Foreign Office providing advice to the Foreign Secretary. The Foreign Secretary, whoever it might be, had their own views, which would obviously be reflected in the material that came across and was shown to the Prime Minister.

So I never -- I mean, the quality of individuals changes over time, but if you look at it in the round, I don't recall thinking there's been a falling off in either the quantity or the quality of advice available to me and then through me to the Prime Minister.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the role of Cabinet Secretaries? Were successive Cabinet Secretaries involved significantly in foreign and security policy?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: In my time in Number 10 I can't -- when I was in the Press Office I wouldn't have been that much aware of it. When I worked for John Major, I would say on the whole no, but at that stage there was a senior figure in Number 10, Sir Percy Cradock at the time, who was the kind of wise person with experience who was that
In my subsequent incarnation under Tony Blair I was never aware of the Cabinet Secretary playing, certainly on my side of things, a very significant role, the one exception being that Richard Wilson as Cabinet Secretary was very much involved in the advice that I was preparing and clearing with him, Richard Wilson, on how we handled the issue of the Euro and a possible referendum on the Euro.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you observe Wilson's successors, Andrew Turnbull.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. Certainly my impression was, and obviously you have spoken to others about this, but my impression, partly because you did have in the person doing my job and the person doing the job done by David Manning two people rather more senior than you'd had before, and to that extent that probably created a situation where the Cabinet Secretary -- I am not sure the Cabinet Secretary would have felt inhibited but perhaps felt there was not the need if he didn't feel so inclined to take as close an interest as he might otherwise have done.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think the role had been defined differently? Do you think there was understanding the role had been restricted, defined
SIR STEPHEN WALL: I don't think this was ever defined in any formal sense. I mean, Tony Blair was not a person who sat down with you and described the job that he wanted you to do. I mean, in the four years that I was there I never had a one-to-one conversation with him about Europe or my role in it other than perhaps in the back of a car going to the airport. So I don't think he would have on the whole set down with people and said "This is how I want you to do it and these are the areas where I want you to intervene or not".

I mean, I clearly had a sense of what his priorities were, but not that kind of job description, if you like, and I think that for any Cabinet Secretary recognising the issues that were top of the Prime Minister's mind, very often crises, and gripping a crises like foot and mouth, say, gripping a crisis in Whitehall terms, putting the Whitehall machine together, that was very important.

The Prime Minister did feel quite strongly that if things were to be well done that mattered he had to handle them. I never felt that he had a very clear sense of the role of the big departments of state, not least because he had never been in government before. I remember somebody saying to me, you know, his view of
junior ministers was that they were there to appear on
The Today programme. That was sort of trivial, but
that's an illustration of I think some of his approach,
which was that he had to focus on things and drive them
and make sure they were happening for them to happen
properly.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This was a question of delegation?
SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How did the access and influence of
the SIS chief, Sir Richard Dearlove compare to what had
been the case previously?
SIR STEPHEN WALL: I am not in a position to comment on
that, because although I had some dealings with him in
my role there was never an occasion when I was with him
at a meeting with the Prime Minister and so I didn't
observe his comings and goings.

We did, all of us I think, operate on the so-called
need to know principle. You didn't nose around asking
about things that didn't immediately concern you.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think that 9/11 had an impact
on their relationship and was he looking for advice to
the SIS, policy advice?
SIR STEPHEN WALL: I can't say that I saw that from my
perspective. 9/11 changed a lot. It is relevant when
we come on to talk about the European story in respect
of Iraq. It was obviously a sea change moment in Tony Blair's view of his role I think as Prime Minister and his international role.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the role of Cabinet Ministers? Were Cabinet Ministers, not just the Foreign Secretary, consulted sufficiently on major foreign policy decisions?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Well, here I think again there have been changes over the years and I don't know whether at this moment you want to go back a bit on that?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I would like you to, yes.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I start not from experience but for the work I am doing now as an official historian in the Cabinet Office, looking at Britain's relations with the European Community starting in 1963. I have been looking recently at the period of 1967 when Harold Wilson and his Cabinet decided to relaunch our bid to join the European Community, and over a period of many weeks the Cabinet met frequently on the issue, taking very often a paper by the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, commenting on the paper, the paper taken away, rewritten, brought back to Cabinet, discussed in detail. Harold Wilson had a week-end Cabinet, Saturday and Sunday, at Chequers where the whole Cabinet met to discuss the issues.
So after a period of very intensive discussion in Cabinet where it is clear from the records -- obviously you can't tell who said what, but you can see that those who are basically hostile are expressing their views and in the end you get a real sense that the Cabinet had united around that policy.

That practice continued under Jim Callaghan when I was involved working first of all in the Number 10 Press Office, because we used to see the papers that went to Cabinet, and then when I went back after a year and was one of the Private Secretaries working for David Owen, I was involved in the writing of papers that went to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

David Owen himself as Foreign Secretary had a special advisor specifically on economic issues so that he felt he was competent to take part in the discussions in Cabinet on economic issues, ie, outside his own immediate sphere, and there was the rule that papers for Cabinet had to be circulated at least 48 hours in advance so that people were ready to speak about them, having that basis of knowledge.

I don't think this is just nostalgia on my part. I do think there is a very important issue here, which is that one of the things I noticed sitting at the back of the room at Cabinet under Tony Blair's Prime
Ministership, I think it is quite difficult for -- you
know, unless you are a Clare Short and she got very
little thanks for doing it, although very often in my
judgment she was spot on on the things she put her
finger on, you have to be quite brave I think if you are
Secretary of State for Health or Education to intervene
on a subject that's not your own subject.

The advantage of having a document that sets out all
the issues is you have the basis for doing that. You
don't feel an idiot putting up your hand saying "How
about so and so?". That was not lost under Tony Blair.
That was lost under Margaret Thatcher, that habit of
Cabinet papers. It wasn't revived under John Major.
There was more discussion in Cabinet reflecting I think
not so much a change of -- a difference of style --
well, there obviously was a difference of style between
him and Tony Blair, but perhaps reflecting more the fact
that he had, especially after the '92 election,
virtually no majority, and he had difficult contending
characters in the Cabinet he had to balance.

What was happening, however, at that time was --
which didn't happen under Tony Blair -- very frequent
meetings of the committee that was then called OPD, the
Overseas and Defence Policy Committee. I worked in
Downing Street from 91 to '93 for John Major and so was
involved in aspects of the Bosnia crisis then.

Looking back to prepare for this afternoon, I mean, between the start of the crisis in May '91 and the end of December that year there were 19 reports to Cabinet and some debate. In the following year between January and December out of 40 Cabinet meetings, there were 28 reports to the Cabinet with one paper.

In August 1992 OPD in the absence of Cabinet meetings because it was the summer break, OPD met and decided to send 1,800 British troops to the former Yugoslavia in a peacekeeping role. So it didn't go to Cabinet until it met in September when it was reported to Cabinet and endorsed by Cabinet.

If you take the period January to December 1992, there were 13 meetings of OPD, seven of them about Yugoslavia and all of them with documents and I think all but two of those meetings had memoranda from the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary or both.

So you have seven OPD discussions about Yugoslavia with a total of 13 papers to OPD, and between January and July '93, which is coming to the end of my period, in that six-month period OPD met 13 times and six of those meetings were about Bosnia and there were papers from Ministers to each of those meetings.

So although Cabinet was not on a whole taking
papers, there was a formal Ministerial Committee chaired
by the Prime Minister with the Chancellor of the
Exchequer, the Defence Secretary, the Foreign Secretary,
all present and looking at documents.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Against that background did that
surprise you, that the Cabinet Committee on Overseas and
Defence met so rarely under Mr Blair?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: It didn't surprise me but I think, you
know, I do think that because of the importance of the
issues which the Cabinet and the Cabinet committees
take, that degree of formality is important, both
because of the significance of the issues and for the
reasons we have talked about, ie enabling people to form
a view on the basis of the best possible assemblage of
information and advice.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, we know that a lot of sort
of informal meetings took place. Do you think they were
an effective forum for discussions?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think they are effective obviously and,
as I understand it, the key Ministerial players were
there. It is not that people were excluded, but Jim
Callaghan used to say when he had his Principal Private
Secretary present at a political meeting and the special
advisor said "What's he doing there?" Jim Callaghan would
say "This is my wait a minute man", in other words
"I want someone who can say 'hang on a minute'."

If you only have the people who are directly engaged in something it is very easy to get into a situation where you don't necessarily see the wood for the trees, and Number 10 is a strange place. It is a mixture of sort of hothouse and bunker. It is an odd place to work in and particularly when things get intense.

I think if you have a very convinced and persuasive and charismatic Prime Minister, which Tony Blair was, absolutely confident in his own judgment, and I think one of the characteristics of Tony Blair is I always found him a very nice person to work for. He is a decent and conscientious man, but of all the politicians I have ever dealt with, including Margaret Thatcher, he was the one with the most self-assurance.

So in that situation the Prime Minister obviously has a better prospect of carrying his view than in a situation where there is a more formal setting which allows for a greater degree of debate. Not that he would stifle debate, but I -- I mean, I went -- I didn't go to all the meetings of Cabinet during the period we are talking about, but I went to a lot of them, and although there was debate and the record shows that, generally speaking, the Prime Minister was making a powerful case to his colleagues about the course of
action to be followed, and I only recall one meeting,
which I think was the meeting on -- I wasn't at the
meeting -- I think where Peter Goldsmith presented his
advice. I think it was the week before, 13th March
I think, where it was clear that the second resolution
wasn't going to happen, and the old tradition of Cabinet
used to be that because it is the Prime Minister's
Cabinet he sits at the table and others come into the
room and join them. Tony Blair didn't do that. They
all came in and sat down and then he would come in last.

On this particular occasion the buzz around the
Cabinet Room before he came in was quite sort of
febrile. Obviously in the life of the government it was
a very tense moment. That's the only time I can
remember that sort of feeling of unease clearly related
to Iraq.

As Tony Blair came into the room John Prescott stood
up and saluted. It was a sort of funny moment but in
I think in a rather characteristic way John Prescott
was doing something quite clever. He was saying "You
are the Commander-in-Chief and this is the time to rally
to the flag". People laughed but interestingly the
atmosphere changed. Sitting at the back I had
thought to myself "This is going to be a difficult
Cabinet", and it wasn't.
That's the only occasion where I can recall thinking to myself, "This is difficult for the Prime Minister or could be difficult for the Prime Minister".

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In his book Mr Blair has described at length his difficult relationship with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. You yourself have been quoted by Andrew Rawnsley saying you are unable to recall a time when there was such a relationship of non-communication between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor.

Did these divisions at the heart of government mean the Prime Minister could not confide with senior Cabinet colleagues on foreign policy issues?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I can't be sure of that, because obviously I wasn't aware of all the meetings that he would be having with colleagues.

I don't think he was a man who confided in the sense that you mean with a lot of people. My kind of sense when I worked for him was that there was probably two people, Alastair Campbell and Anji Hunter, and to an extent subsequently Sally Morgan, whom he did confide in a lot. There was a sort of circle beyond that which certainly included Jonathan and probably Jeremy Heywood, and then there was a circle or more than one circle quite a long distance away from that which included people like myself.
He also had a rather interesting view of the
distinction between the politicians and the officials to
the extent I don't just mean it would be improper to ask
officials to do party political things, but things which
I would have regarded as political in the kind of
ordinary sense he would sometimes say "This is not to
discuss".

I remember on an aeroplane journey, John Kerr, who
was the Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Office, and
myself trying to suggest to him that it might be a good
idea to sup with a slightly longer spoon with Silvio
Berlusconi than we were doing. Tony Blair listened
politely and then said "Leave the politics to me". In
other words "Enough" kind of thing.

His relationship with Gordon Brown was such that on
very big issues they obviously did talk to each other.
Quite often it was heated and nobody else was present at
those meetings, but those who worked next door could
hear the sound of voices, and they had a modus vivendi
which enabled them to reach conclusions.

If you are saying was it a huge drain on the Prime
Minister's energies, I mean, my perception, and this is
not just in retrospect, I remember thinking at the time
this relationship is taking up a huge amount of the
energy of the Prime Minister because it was
fundamentally down to him, or he took the role, to keep that particular show on the road.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: One final question from me. Just give me some idea how did Mr Blair treat the Cabinet meetings? Were they for proper discussion or just consultation? I mean, how did he treat the Cabinet meetings?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: He certainly had a view, which I think he is on record about, that the last thing he wanted was the kind of era where the Cabinet met for two days. He wasn't going to have that. He did have a feeling I think, and this relates to Iraq, on some very sensitive issues you couldn't trust some members of the Cabinet not to leak stuff. As it happened, when it came to the discussion in the spring and summer, early summer of 2003 about the Euro, arrangements were made, first of all, for members of the Cabinet to see the 18 studies of the whole issues that were done by the Treasury and subsequently the actual result of the five tests. Each member of the Cabinet was shown that document on a restrictive basis and as far as I know it didn't leak. So there are ways that that could have been got round.

I think one has to remember, you know because he had never been in government before he had no governmental points of reference. There was no Prime Minister under
whom he had served who was a role model in his head for how
to conduct a Cabinet. So -- and having dragged his own
party sort of kicking and screaming into the
21st century, 20th/21st century, I think he felt that
his job was to set out for the benefit of the Cabinet
members the direction and obviously it was up to them to
respond if they wanted to.

So for quite a lot of the time that was the nature
of the discussion. I think, and the records bear it
out, there was debate about Iraq. It wasn't just that
people came and said "Yes, Sir, No Sir", but his
approach to Cabinet was one of advocacy for a course of
action and very much steering the government.

Quite often -- I mean, there were some issues where
certainly on my side of the house I would be kind of
waiting for the summing-up and the summing-up would be
"On verra", "We shall see". He wanted to keep his options
as open as he possibly could. So we would record it
that 'the Cabinet took note with approval' or whatever the
appropriate turn of phrase was.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Before Sir Lawrence sharpens the focus on
Iraq, I think Sir Roderic might have one or two.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just a couple of supplementaries before
we move from the general to the specific.
I mean, just picking up what you were saying about the contrast between formal OPD meetings and informal meetings, you said that in these informal meetings so far as you were aware the right people were there, but in an OPD traditionally you would have some senior Cabinet Ministers who were not directly departmental Ministers for Foreign Affairs. I mean, you mentioned on Bosnia the Chancellor of the Exchequer used to attend OPDs on Bosnia.

In this style of working were you lacking these outside but heavyweight senior Ministerial voices such as the Chancellor or a Deputy Prime Minister or it could be another heavyweight, a big beast as Michael Heseltine once called them, challenging or stress testing a policy and able to do so because of their personal weight and seniority in the way that an advisor or official or more junior minister might not be able to do?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I mean, I share the implicit view, and indeed it is more what I expressed -- I have to say I didn't attend any of the meetings on Iraq, where Iraq specifically was discussed. Europe was a slightly different case, because there the more traditional system applied whereby there was Ministerial correspondence about particular issues, the Foreign Secretary summed-up in a letter at the end, reaching a conclusion. If that
didn't find acceptance then Ministers met under his chairmanship and thrashed it out. So that was very much the traditional method by which, you know, government works, and continued to apply, which was why it was rather rare on those kind of issues, not unique but relatively rare, for the Prime Minister to have to take a view. If he did take a view, generally speaking on these European matters it would be me consulting him, telling him what the state of opinion was among the Ministers and him reaching a view which was then either expressed directly by me to the rest of Whitehall or possibly conveyed to the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Secretary trying to get a result which reflected the Prime Minister's wishes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mentioned Alastair Campbell and Sally Morgan. Were either of them people who had influence on foreign policy issues?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: That's hard to say. I would think in Sally Morgan's case no. I think Alastair Campbell was a very big influence across the board. I mean, the only person I ever saw Tony Blair regularly in a huddle with was Alastair Campbell, and Alastair Campbell had views and obviously didn't hesitate to express them.

I don't think Alastair Campbell would have seen himself as a source of distinct advice in the sense of
wanting to give rival advice and certainly I found on my side of the house on Europe he was a very cooperative person to work with, not a difficult person to work with at all, but he was one of those people who, you know, saw his job as being to do the best possible job he could for the success of the Prime Minister's premiership and for Tony Blair as a person, and that I think governed his approach.

One point that does occur to me, because I think, if I remember rightly, it came up in your session with Alastair Campbell, which is the question of the presence of the Press Secretary at sensitive meetings.

I mean, in my experience certainly when I worked for Tom McCaffrey as Jim Callaghan's Press Secretary and I observed it again when I worked for John Major and Gus O'Donnell was the Press Secretary, that the basic rule was that the Press Secretary had a right of access to any meeting involving the Prime Minister; in other words, the Press Secretary would have to be specifically excluded rather than specifically included. The obvious reason being the Press Secretary needed to know what was going on. The more you knew the less likely you were to say something inadvertently that was mistaken. The Press Secretary had to know the Prime Minister's mind intimately in order to be able to do the job.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just finally from me at this stage to make sure we correctly understood how much visibility you had of the Iraq issues, from what you have said you were frequently but not always in Cabinet?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So when it was discussed in Cabinet, you would hear it there. You wouldn't have been involved in meetings specifically on the subject of Iraq. Did you see papers on Iraq? Would you be a copy addressee of at least some of the papers and the telegrams and that sort of thing?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I would have seen telegrams. David Manning quite often, more often than not I think copied to me -- for example, if he went to Washington to talk to Condi Rice, he would usually copy me in on the records he did of those meetings.

I don't think I saw the specific intelligence analysis, but I would have seen the weekly JIC summary books. I would have had a broad picture of the intelligence and I had one specific conversation with John Scarlett, which may be worth recording. We went to --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we might stop you there actually.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Sure.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You would also have been around the Prime
Minister and other officials at times when Iraq came up as a subject in the course of meetings or journeys or wherever when all sorts of things were being discussed.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Oh, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you would have been reasonably well in the flow, but given, as you said, there is a need to know principle?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, and obviously I was present at specific meetings with European leaders, in the bilaterals particularly with President Chirac and one particular meeting with Chancellor Schroeder in March 2002, where I was the only official present. So yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And you had a network of counterparts in the offices of every other European leader with whom you would be discussing all sorts of issues on the phone from time to time, and sometimes Iraq might come up. Might you be used as a channel between, say, the Dutch Prime Minister and British Prime Minister because you were talking to his European advisor?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: On the whole, no. The only specific occasion I do recall doing that was the beginning of 2003 when we with the Spanish put together the letter, the letter which is sometimes known as the letter of the great eight, where I think I talked to certainly Polish, Dutch and Danes I think specifically to line up what we
were doing. Occasionally it would come up in other meetings, but David Manning and Matthew Rycroft had their own links to those people if they needed to talk to them, and obviously our embassies were a channel, and the Foreign Office particularly in the person of Peter Ricketts and others wouldn't have been talking to Prime Minister's offices but they were talking to their own contacts, but it terms of access to Prime Minister's offices both David Manning and Matthew Rycroft had those contacts.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Lawrence, over to you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Really following on just to clarify what your role was in all of this, anything to do with the European Union in some ways would come through you, but the policies of individual member states not necessarily so?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Correct, and if I think back about my European role insofar as it affected Iraq, the things that I was thinking about immediately before and then certainly after the invasion were how do we manage our European relationships? How do we put together again the relationship with France and Germany, particularly France, and there is some more that can be said about that and the relationship with President Chirac. Do we
try -- there was a big discussion which had started in October -- after October 2002 about how we manage relationships within Europe, because at the European Council in late October 2002 the Prime Minister and President Chirac had a tremendous bust-up. The bust-up was not about Iraq. It was about European agriculture and enlargement and the financing thereof.

Basically Tony Blair had to take on President Chirac single handed in the European Council and effectively won the point, and President Chirac was angry and the summit that had been due to take place, bilateral summit was first of all cancelled and then subsequently deferred, and there was as part of the bilateral meeting between the two of them on the margins of that European Council there was a discussion of Iraq, which was not the first time President Chirac had expressed his strong views about the course of Iraq policy, but it was one of the occasions and one where it was pretty starkly expressed. You may want to talk about President Chirac separately. I do have a fairly clear picture of how that developed.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just because you raised it, it is an interesting question. Do you think the fallout from that particular meeting, and you mentioned the cancellation and deferment of the summit, undermined the
possibilities at that time for the greater coordination between London and Paris on Iraq, that at a time that it would have been helpful to have more communication with each other we had less?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think there was a basic fundamental difference of approach that was probably unbridgeable regardless of particular variations in the mood and the temperature, and that was based around the fact that President Chirac was consistently of the view that there were two separate issues. One was getting inspectors back into Iraq and a resolution that achieved that, which, as he told the Prime Minister, would have unanimity, because even Syria, the Vice President of Syria had told him would support it, and trying to do two things in one resolution, which he thought would first of all not get you nine votes in favour of getting the inspectors back in and, secondly, was effectively, he put it, saying to Saddam Hussein, "There are two ways you can choose to be killed and here they both are". So his view was pretty consistently that you had to approach it, if you were going to do so, in two bites, as it were.

That was -- and it became even more so as time went on, but that was such a basic divide really, exacerbated by the differences of views about the kind of policies
the Americans were pursuing, which I think made it hard.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I am sure we will come back to that particular period. I want to just go back to pre-9/11. What sense did you have at the time of the views around Europe about how to deal with the Iraq problem?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: It was a non-issue really I think is my recollection. Interestingly -- I mean, there was -- the first I think of the Bush presidency -- in June 2001 there was an EU/US summit dinner in the margins of the European Council in Sweden. Just looking back at the files I notice that the notes prepared by officials for Tony Blair make no mention of Iraq but his own manuscript notes do. Written in them is the word "Iraq" as well "Security, Middle East peace process, Bosnia, Kosovo".

So it was certainly on his mind at that time. I don't think it was discussed at the meeting. The meeting was reported -- officials weren't present -- on the basis of subsequent briefings and so on, the meeting was reported by the UK representation as having been success.

My recollection is neither Tony Blair or President Bush, and I think they compared notes before and after, did think it was a big success. Although President Bush
played his part, I think being surrounded by lesser states, as he saw many of them, wasn't his idea of fun. There had been rumour beforehand that President Chirac was going to tackle him on the subject of capital punishment and climate change. I think he did in the event raise climate change but not capital punishment. I don't that kind of event led President Bush to think that Europe was where he wanted to be.

I think it is also true to say that probably most EU member states, I wouldn't say they are natural Democrats but on their whole most of their leaders feel more at home with the Obama, Clinton, George Bush Seniors, than with the Reagan, George W Bush type of President. So there were those suspicions around.

9/11 did change that. I mean, there was, as you know, a tremendous upsurge of fellow feeling for the United States, of which -- I mean, my recollection is very strongly that Tony Blair was the person who most articulated that and articulated a vision of a changed world in those early days, and I notice that David Manning described him as travelling "like a bat out of hell" during that period. There was a huge programme of travel around the world immediately on the back of 9/11 and in advance of a special European Council which the Belgian Presidency called for 21st September, where
there was very strong unanimous support for the
Americans, support for military action in Afghanistan,
and Tony Blair did say to that meeting -- I don't think
he, as far as I know, referred to Iraq specifically, but
he did talk about there being people in the world
wanting to acquire and use biological and nuclear
weapons if they could.

He certainly spoke about there being an opening for
Iran and Syria to kind of reform themselves and come
back into the international community. Iraq didn't feature in
that list, so maybe in his own mind Iraq was in a different
category.

The fact that this became his number one
pre-occupation -- I wrote him a minute the following
month before a further meeting of the European Council.
I had just come back from the European Parliament and
I said to him, "When I was at the European Parliament
last week, I found them much more interested in the
future of Europe than the future of the world. So what
I am about to tell you in my minute might all seem a bit
kind of virtual compared to what you have been doing".

So there was in a sense a little bit of: we had
a world view and perhaps some elsewhere in the European
Union, even though they were quite supportive, didn't
have that same view of the seismic significance of what
had happened.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's very important. I think we would like to talk a bit more about that after a short break. Just before that pre-9/11, can you recall much consultation by the UK, for example, when we had the policy review in early 2001 about Iraq, much consultation with our European partners?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I can't, no. I don't recall, but that doesn't mean to say it didn't happen. I certainly don't recall it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So basically before 9/11 as far as most of Europe was concerned, Iraq was sort of second order rather than first order?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, very much so.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we will take a short break now and then come back for 9/11 and what follows.

(A short break)

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's resume. I think you had just about got to 9/11. Lawrence.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We were getting through 9/11 after one day. You indicated that there was this sense of solidarity with the United States afterwards, that sort of global response the Prime Minister had been trying to articulate was not necessarily being followed by other
states in the European Union. Is that a correct interpretation of what you were saying?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, and I think that -- I mean, certainly when you get towards the end of the year the Prime Minister and President Chirac had a conversation. I think it was person to person. It wasn't on the phone, but I can't remember where it took place, in November, which was mostly about Afghanistan, but -- and indeed it was in the run-up to what became the Security Council Resolution 1382 on Iraq. So Iraq was part of the conversation, the Prime Minister saying "We need to get that resolution", and President Chirac said he hoped the Americans were not planning to bomb Iraq. The Prime Minister said he thought that was unlikely but that the next two or three weeks were crucial, and that if the military campaign [in Afghanistan] stalled, and the humanitarian situation worsened and if there was no progress in the Middle East, there would be mounting pressure in the United States for a different strategy. So Iraq is kind of there as an issue.

In the December European Council, mid-December 2001 in Laeken, which was preoccupied with the whole question of setting up a Convention which then became the negotiation on the Constitutional Treaty, and interestingly in terms of the relationship between Blair
and Chirac, everybody had expected that Tony Blair would support the Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok to be the chair of the Convention, and in fact Tony Blair agreed with Chirac and because of his support for Chirac, which is how Giscard d'Estaing became the chair of the convention. So they were very much working together and Tony Blair saw it as casting bread upon the waters in terms of his relationship with Chirac.

In the drafting of the conclusions of that meeting the Belgian Presidency did try and include a reference to the need to seek approval of the international community before any -- before there was any geographical extension of operations from Afghanistan to, for example, Iraq and the Prime Minister and Schroeder and Berlusconi and Aznar and Prime Minister Van Aartsen got that deleted. Interestingly Schroeder was part of that group at that point.

So there were already a kind of few straws in the wind, as it were, about some unease, which I think then were reflected a bit more in March. There were -- I don't know what was happening in March, what had prompted it, whether it was something Dick Cheney had been saying or what was coming out of Washington, because at the General Affairs Council, the Foreign Ministers meeting, on 11th March, the Italians asked
whether their partners had any insights into US thinking on Iraq. The Luxembourgers said that Colin Powell, had recently talked to Jean-Claude Juncker, their Prime Minister, and told him that there was no programme to attack Iraq. The Spanish presidency concluded that present speculation that military action was imminent was wide of the mark.

Then at the European Council in Barcelona in the middle of March there was a conversation which I think I mentioned earlier between the Prime Minister and Chancellor Schroeder, where apart from the interpreter I was the only other person present, where Schroeder basically said that given the German political situation there was no way anybody was going to ask Germany to participate in military action in Iraq. There would have to be prior Security Council authorisation. He didn't think it would be forthcoming, but that Germany did have in Kuwait Fox tanks, ie vehicles that could detect fall out and they would leave those in place. He didn't want there to be a war but that was the least amount of solidarity he should show and he didn't want to make Germany persona non grata in the United States by not offering that degree of cooperation if it came to it.

There was also in the margins of that European
Council a breakfast meeting between the Prime Minister and Romano Prodi, the President of the Commission, at which Prodi expressed concern about Iraq and Matthew Rycroft's record has the Prime Minister -- it says:

"The Prime Minister reassured him that no military action was imminent."

So there was clearly a kind of feeling it was nonetheless there as something that was being contemplated.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, there are two things going on here, aren't there? There is a question of are the Americans about to do something dramatic and military.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the fact that President Bush had put Iraq very firmly on the table.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, yes. Absolutely.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In 2001. Was the Prime Minister in these sorts of discussions, were other European countries focusing at all on the issue about how therefore you get Iraq back into accepting inspectors?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Not that I recall at that stage. I mean, trying to think back about my own -- it is very difficult to detach what one thinks now from what one thought and knew then -- I can't remember thinking that there was a moment when there was a real sort of
step change. To me it was more a progression like that over the period of a year maybe with occasional -- I don't remember, for example, kind of thinking that after Crawford things were dramatically different than before Crawford.

I do remember vividly David Manning when he came back from the meeting he went to in July in Washington and he was wheeled in to see the President and I remember David Manning telling me, and I really did say to him "Look if you are going to do this you can do it on your own, but if you want to do it with coalition and international support you have got to go the UN route". That has always stuck in my mind as one kind of defining movement. That was very much Tony Blair's policy.

Nigel Sheinwald, as the Permanent Representative in Brussels, was reporting in July at that same time that Iraq had been deliberately kept off the EU agenda. So there was clearly a sense that there was a capacity for divergence ostensibly between us, and the French probably having a different view and therefore that the safe thing was not to talk about it in any formal sense. Nigel was told by Chris Patten's Cabinet -- Chris Patten was the Commissioner responsible for external relations -- that there had not been a formal discussion
of Iraq in the General Affairs Council for three years,
and Nigel was saying at the time "We and the Americans
must obviously deny people the satisfaction of exposing
splits within the European Union", which does suggest
that there was already then in people's minds an issue that we
and the Americans were in a different position certainly
from the French. A question mark at that point how many
others. As we know, later there was a Franco-German
attempt to coalesce people around their view, and
an effort by us to do the opposite.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's moving ahead a bit. Just on
this period in terms of the unease that you were
describing around you, how much of that have was because
of a sense that their populations would be unhappy and
the goodwill towards the United States that had been
built up after 9/11 would be dissipated and so much of
it was a sense of the dangers to the Middle East and the
consequences for international order?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think more of the latter. I think it
came more manifest in the autumn I think, a feeling
that the Americans weren't taking the Middle East peace
process seriously enough, which was constantly the
central pre-occupation of the European Union countries,
that the administration's view of the world was one
which might unwittingly encourage terrorism, because it
kind of split the world into kind of white hats and black hats, as it were, good and bad and so on. I think that was the unease, in other words, that this kind of new-found unity after 9/11 which had coalesced in terms of action in Afghanistan was being dissipated and that we were on divergent courses. I think that was the course.

I mean, it was probably fed by public opinion, but I don't think it was primarily driven by public opinion, as I recall.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You described how the official parts of the European Union were not really dealing with Iraq. It was too difficult and too divisive to have statements emanating from the Council and the Commission on this subject, but what about generally in terms of trying to build support for a stronger line on Iraq? Was there discussion with individual member states, perhaps even around Council meetings?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. I mean again I can't put my finger on it and I wasn't directly involved as the person doing that. It would certainly have been done by Tony Blair and by the Foreign Secretary and obviously by Peter Ricketts in the Foreign Office. My sense is that although it happened over time, there was quite early on a common line between the Prime Minister and the Prime
Minister Aznar of Spain, who anyway had formed a kind of coalition of views on economic reform within the European Union rather to the irritation of President Chirac in particular, one of whose pet themes was how you could fly over Spain and see all the railway lines that France and Germany had paid for going nowhere.

So the fact that there was this sort of British/Spanish axis, promoting an economic view of Europe which was not necessarily very congenial to Chirac, was a factor.

My recollection is that Berlusconi in Italy was more kind of nervous, probably because public opinion there was always quite opposed. He was strongly Atlanticist and became a kind of stronger supporter over time, and then the Dutch, the Portuguese, Finns and Danes and to a lesser extent the Swedes, were kind of broadly thought to be of an Atlanticist persuasion, let us say. I wouldn't put it more strongly at that stage.

Then over time, probably more from late 2002 onwards, the future accession countries were seen by us from one side of the argument and by the French from another as being very much supportive of a strong Transatlantic Relationship and therefore support for the United States, against the background where they had all obviously emerged from the former Soviet Union, still
very fearful that Russia represented the main threat to
their continued existence. That was still a real factor
in their minds and therefore support from the United
States through NATO was their number one Foreign Policy
priority. I think their position on Iraq, as I saw it,
was a product of that view really.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What you are describing is the
filter through which this issue was being viewed is the
degrees of the Atlanticism.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is suggested the wording
President Bush agreed in September -- announced in
September that he was taking the issue to the Security
Council, a sort of collective sigh of relief. Would you
say that was a general European view that this was the
right course of action and might well be the way by
which war was avoided?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, I think that is the case, although
I think that people may have been misreading it in this
sense, that clearly the UN route pointed in two
directions. It was indeed the means by which Saddam
Hussein could peacefully comply with the wishes of the
International Community, but because the Security
Council was acting under Chapter 7 and had acted under
Chapter 7, there was already once you started down the
UN route an implicit threat that if you did not comply, then
...., then consequences would follow. It is at that
stage President Chirac started to articulate what became
a very consistent view from him after that that there
had to be a two-resolution approach if there was going
to be war, but basically that war was not the answer.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was there very much active interest
in the negotiation of 1441? Obviously France was very
involved in that but other European countries did they?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think apart from those directly
involved as members of the Security Council -- I mean,
there is a sort of feature of life in the European
Union, which is that on big foreign policy issues there
aren't many key players. I mean, during the whole of
the 2002 Iraq/Pakistan nuclear crisis when we really did
think that those two countries were on the brink of
nuclear war --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: India and Pakistan.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I beg your pardon India and Pakistan,
when we really did think they were on the verge of war
and were prepared to take huge sacrifices in numbers of
civilian casualties, the European Union discussed it but
there was, I remember this vividly, the sense that these
were far away countries of which we knew nothing. The
British were doing something and the French were doing
something but primarily, insofar as it was not the two
countries themselves pulling back from the brink, it was
the Americans who were putting pressure on. There are
not that many European countries who have a proactive
foreign policy in the way -- I think if you ask most
member states they would say that the prime movers are
France and Britain with others, Spain, Portugal,
Netherlands, Italy to an extent, Germany with the
caveats around its constitution, you know, much less
a role.

So generally speaking the attitude of other member
states would be one of watching nervously and hoping
that agreement could be reached between the big beasts,
if you like. When the European Union on occasions did
address the issue collectively the language is always
very nuanced. It has to satisfy both a French view and
a British view and therefore other than saying "The
United Nations should be allowed to do its job, it
doesn't really say anything very concrete at any point".

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So really the logic of what you are
saying is the effectiveness of Europe as a whole depends
on the degree to which the British and the French can
reach a common position. If they can't reach a common
position, then Europe is bound almost then to be
divided?
SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, and I think that particularly applies where we are engaged, which obviously applies to most big international issues, where we are engaged as a permanent member of the Security Council.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In a BBC series in 2007 you said that President Chirac had argued that "While Saddam Hussein could be overthrown, subsequent consequences would be disastrous". You mentioned that earlier I think. What specific warnings was President Chirac giving about the aftermath of an invasion?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think there are quite a lot of them starting in September 2002 and then probably three or four occasions in conversation with the Prime Minister.

I think my own view then and now was that whatever else you may say about President Chirac, one of the driving motives in his view was a view about war and about the undesirability of war. One of the things that is not in any of the records but I recall him saying probably at Le Touquet at the beginning of 2003 was "I was a young soldier doing my National Service in Algeria. I know what war is like."

If you look at Chirac's memoirs, he talks about a 14 year old Algerian boy blown up by a mine dying in his arms. I think Chirac was 24 when that happened. So I think that was real for him. When he talked about
“Shia majority is not the same as democracy”; “You will win the war and lose the peace”; “There will be”, as he said at the European Council in February 2003, in the British record with quotes around it "tens of thousands of dead", and I think that was -- that wasn't just rhetoric. I think that was a serious view, and whatever else one may think about him as a politician, he did have considerable knowledge of the region. When he told Tony Blair that a resolution that didn't seek to get rid of Saddam Hussein would get the votes of Syrians, it was because the Vice President of Syria had told him that in a telephone conversation. So all that was for real.

I don't think we took it seriously, and one of my personal regrets is that I never said to Tony Blair -- I wish I had; I didn't -- "Should we not be looking at this more seriously". I think it was viewed partly through the prism that Chirac kept questioning whether Saddam Hussein had WMD and because we were convinced that he did have WMD we kind of wrote that off a bit.

Then I think because of all the traditions of Anglo-French rivalry and Chirac's own personality -- he was quite a volatile person and so on and so forth -- we didn't give the things that he said the weight that they deserved, but the thing that struck -- in my recollections, borne out by going back through the
records, is how consistent he was over quite a long
period in expressing that view.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What you said just fits in with your
comment on that same television programme:
"Tony Blair never paid any attention to what Chirac
said."

Was that particularly on Iraq or was that --

SIR STEPHEN WALL: In that context I meant specifically on
Iraq and what I was talking about was those -- were
those kind of views. I mean, I never felt that they
kind of resonated with Tony Blair. He just thought that
Chirac was plain wrong.

At one point in, I can't remember whether it was the
summer or autumn of 2002 when Chirac floated the
possibility of a second resolution because he was trying
to avoid a resolution that kind of tried to do both
things, and Tony Blair asked him whether he would
support a second resolution, and Chirac not surprisingly
didn't answer that directly, but he had a feeling which
quintessentially Tony Blair did not share, that the
American world view was one that was kind of departing
from the European view. He said at one point "These
guys have never been outside the ranch. What do they
know?"

He was much more critical of Cheney than of Bush.
He wasn't as hostile to Bush, but he was very hostile to that Americana approach. He thought it would be much more devastating in the wider region than it turned out to be in terms of the fall of the Saudi Royal Family and so on, but in terms of his predictions as to what might happen on Iraq he was pretty close to what subsequently happened.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So when Mr Blair told the House of Commons before the invasion that the EU should have spoken with one voice, that really was going to be very difficult?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think there is another issue here, which is Tony Blair's view of the US relationship. I mean, there is a precedent in fairly recent history for a European foreign policy view on a very important issue which is divergent from that in the United States and that is Bosnia in the 1990s where the British Government shared the European view, rightly or wrongly, that it was wrong to arm the Bosnian Muslims because that would create a killing field. That view was maintained, including by the British Government, and led to quite tricky relationships with the US for a period of time.

On a lesser issue, after the first invasion of Iraq, when John Major decided to try to do something about the plight of the Kurds through the safe havens policy --
this is talking about April 1991 -- we were on our way
to a European Council, where he was going to try to get
European support for the idea of safe havens.
I remember saying to him before we went into the
meeting, "Would you like me to call Brent Scowcroft, the
National Security Adviser, and tell him what we are
going to do?", and John Major said to me, "No. I want
to get the support of the European Union behind it and
then we will take it to the United States."

So that is not an inconceivable way to approach
things, but I don't think that was in Tony Blair's mind.
I think he saw -- I mean, it starts before 9/11, but it
kind of crystallised after 9/11, as there was a vital
role in support of the United States. He was the person
who could embody that. He was the person who could
deliver it to Europe. It was very much delivering
a view which he had formed himself and then with
President Bush and trying to persuade others of it
rather than trying to find common ground with others on
a halfway house.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: An example of that might be the
article which I think you mentioned before that appeared
at the end of January 2003 with the Prime Ministers of
the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Poland,
Portugal, Spain as well as the UK, which was entitled
"America and Europe Must Stand United". This was a Spanish initiative.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: It was a Spanish initiative, strongly supported by us. At that point relations had got -- relations between Blair and Schroeder never really broke down at this time. They broke down subsequently over European issues at the end of 2003, but over Iraq they didn't. I mean, they met on the eve of the war over dinner in Downing Street and had a perfectly amicable conversation, but things did get rather more tense with President Chirac, not least because the French were in a strong position as Permanent Members of the Security Council, and there was a concerted effort by France and Germany to say, "Our view is the European view"; in other words, there is a European view and there's a British view.

Part of that was to demonstrate that actually there were two European views, and in those terms and in the short-term -- and I remember there was a story around that when President Chirac had read that letter, he threw his coffee cup at the wall of his office in the Elysee. I don't know whether it is true or not, but it was illustrative of the kind of atmosphere at that particular moment.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The French, Germans and Russians
responded on 10th February with a declaration of their own, suggesting that the possibilities of disarmament through 1441 had not yet been thoroughly explored and just allow every opportunity for peaceful disarmament of Iraq.

So how are these two statements affecting the broad generality of European Union members? Were they nervous about the polarisation within the organisation?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, but there was a -- the meeting we talked about earlier in late October 2002, where Tony Blair had taken on Chirac on agriculture and enlargement and so on, at the General Affairs Council the week following Jack Straw felt in the room that there was a sort of hostility towards Britain, and Nigel Sheinwald wrote about it, basically saying -- I am not sure I can find it -- anyway Nigel's basic point was, "This is correct. Our partners are not so much giving us credit for bringing the US along the UN route; they see us as having veered westward and being more traditionally British in our alliance with America than European."

You have to bear in mind that we are talking about a Prime Minister in Tony Blair of whom the European Union as a whole had had very high hopes in 1997. He was a kind of superstar. I remember the first European meeting he went to at Noordwijk on the Dutch coast.
They were all kind of lining up to have their photograph taken with him as the guy everybody wanted to be seen with, and even at this stage there were still hopes that Britain might join the Euro.

Just before the war with Iraq when Tony Blair met with Schroeder in March, Tony Blair says, "I have two ambitions for Europe. One is to repair the breach between the EU and the US and the other is to take Britain into the Euro. I need your help", and Schroeder said, "Of course you will have my help".

So there was a sort of feeling that the man they had high hopes of perhaps transforming British European policy had proved to be yet another British Prime Minister in the traditional mould. I think that accounted for the sense of hostility that Jack Straw detected.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: From the British point of view the objection is to the idea, as I think the Prime Minister put it on 18th March in the Commons, of rival poles of power with the US in one corner and France, Germany and Russia in the other.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I am not sure. I mean, I think there was certainly a moment when I think that a number of things combined and that was possibly a gleam in President Chirac's eye, and there was certainly a feeling, you
know, around that period of real -- reports were reaching us that he was basically saying, "I am determined to destroy Tony Blair politically", but, I mean, I don't think that there was a really kind of thought-out plan.

I mean, Chirac is an interesting person. He is a man who can lose his rag very easily, as we know, telling the Central Eastern Europeans they should kind of "put up or shut up" and, "Why are we letting you in if you don't support the European line?", and then a month later apologising to them and saying, "Sorry. That's just the kind of guy I am. I lose it occasionally".

Tony Blair told Cabinet just before the war that he thought the whole row back in October on agriculture had been kind of manufactured as part of this kind of move. I think that was a product of the very heightened atmosphere at the time. I have no doubt back in October that what the French were doing was in a very classic Chirac way pursuing French interests on enlargement, the budget, the British rebate and the common agriculture policy, I mean, absolutely. In fairness to Chirac and to our dismay he was very good at it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally from me -- and it follows from what you just said -- Sir John Holmes told
us that France and Germany misjudged European support
for their positions and the consequence of that was that
they made the divisions worse.

I would be interested in your comment on that.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think that's true. I think because
France and Germany had for so long, particularly in the
Kohl/Mitterrand era in the 1980s, been the leaders of
European thought on so many issues, on classic European
issues like political and monetary union, but also in
terms of the development of a European security identity
and so on. I think they were looking at the world, and
particularly pre-enlargement, not really calculating that
countries like Spain in particular and Italy --
Berlusconi was a very untraditional Italian Prime
Minister in his European views. He was the first
Italian --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Many others, yes.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Exactly, and then completely
underestimating the views of the Central Eastern
Europeans. I think it was a miscalculation. I think
they did believe that if they laid down a position,
particularly, of course, because for both of them it was
hugely popular at home -- you know, Schroeder shifted
his ground on Iraq in order to win an election. Chirac,
reelected in those bizarre circumstances in April 2002
because of the Le Pen factor with an enormous majority,
but not a huge amount of popular support, found this was
an issue. I think he reached his view on it for very
genuine reasons, but found it also resonated with French
public opinion. I think they were probably misled by
the strength of their domestic opinion to think that
that would be something that they could take to the rest
of Europe.

That said, of course, in terms of their estimation
of public opinion in countries like Italy and Spain or
indeed Britain there was a difference between public
opinion, on the one hand, in those countries and
government policy, on the other.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Sir Martin Gilbert is going to take us
into the proposed Second Resolution in a moment.

You mentioned earlier that you were going to tell us
about a conversation you had with John Scarlett. Are we
getting to the right chronological point?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Not completely, but near enough. You
will see why I say it. We went to Madrid in early March
I think 2003 for a meeting with Aznar, and for various
reasons, which I will not bore you with, we had to go
commercially rather than on an RAF plane. So I found
myself sitting next to John Scarlett.
John Scarlett said to me, "I really do" -- I can't remember whether he said, "I lie awake at night" or "I rack my brains over whether we have got this right", in other words, whether we have got the intelligence assessments right. He said, "I really do think we have. I really do think we have got it right."

It stuck in my mind, because my thought at the time was, "Here is the guy who is the sort of supreme professional and they have really worked on this. Whatever else is said ..." -- I mean, all of us who worked on this issue in any way or in Number 10, and because I had worked on it before for John Major, we never had any doubts that the WMD was there. There are all kinds of criticisms you can make, but that was the given.

I can remember the shock, genuine -- I mean, Tony Blair could not have acted the shock I remember when it became apparent after the invasion that it simply wasn't there.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Martin, over to you.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could turn to the proposed Second Resolution, US, Spain and us tabled it on 24th February, and it was to conclude that Iraq had failed to take the last opportunity to comply.

Could you tell us what role you personally took in
the lobbying strategy for trying to secure maximum support from the EU?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: None. I mean, I took -- rightly or wrongly, I took the view that I was there. If they wanted -- if David -- David Manning and I had adjacent offices. If he or Matthew had said, "Look, we want you to do X or Y", then I would have willingly done it, but they were the people who had the contacts. David Manning was as much in touch with President Chirac's diplomatic advisor as I was, slightly more so, in fact, because he had a separate European advisor who was dealing with the kind of issues that I was dealing with.

So although obviously I kind of watched what was happening and the eventual failure to get the resolution, I wasn't involved in any of the lobbying.

I can see why it kind of seems -- I mean, I would no more have thought that I should do that unasked then David Manning would have thought that he should lobby on the Agency Workers Directive unasked by me. Even though it was Europe, it didn't mean that I was doing it.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So though there was a period of intense lobbying, in a sense there wasn't a place for you or you weren't called upon to participate?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I wasn't called upon, no.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have seen quite a lot of evidence at
this time that the French and German media were both oscillating between support for their leaders and concern that the strident position which they were taking on Iraq was leaving Germany and France in some way out in the cold, out on a limb.

Do you think there ever was a possibility, there ever was an opportunity that President Chirac could have been persuaded to support military action in Iraq with or without a Second Resolution?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Not at that time. I mean, there was a conversation at Chirac's initiative between him and Prime Minister Blair on 14th March, where I think President Chirac was looking for some compromise and said that, provided there was no ultimatum or automaticity, he was open to a Second Resolution, but that was, of course, the whole difference between us, and we had got beyond the point in our own policy where that was possible for us to contemplate, but I think it is probably an indication of the fact that he didn't want there to be a complete sort of bust-up over it.

That said, there had been a period before in January where the bid was put in by Number 10 for the Prime Minister to speak to Chirac, and it took three weeks for the call to go through. So it wasn't all one-sided.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of Gerhard Schroeder, I see
the dinner you referred to took place on 12th March, two
days before the --

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. There was always a difference --
there was a difference in -- I remember Tony Blair
saying this, rather surprisingly in a way, that George
Bush sounded -- George Bush had a much dimmer view of
Chirac than of Schroeder, which is surprising, because
in a sense Chirac had been consistent throughout, but
Schroeder hadn't, but as it turned out relations were
more reparable after on the American side than with
France.

Interestingly Iraq didn't affect the personal
relationship between Prime Minister Blair and Schroeder
in the way that, in the relatively short-term - because
it was repaired - it did with Chirac.

I mean, Matthew Rycroft's sort of briefing note to
the Prime Minister before that meeting of things he
might say says, "One of the things you might say to him
is he has almost brought about the downfall of your
government".

The two of them met privately before the dinner. So
something may have passed between them privately, but
the record -- I wasn't at the dinner. David Manning was
at the dinner, but the record of the dinner suggests it
was pretty amicable. Certainly when they get on to the
discussion of the Euro, Schroeder is offering very strong support and implicit in that means, "When it comes to actually settling the rate between the pound and the Euro zone, I will help you", which is quite a significant thing to say if you are cross with somebody.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You told the BBC that you'd been in the corridor in Number 10 when Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell, and I quote:

"... decided effectively to play the anti-French card on the day after President Chirac's television interview."

Did you interpret Chirac's words as ruling out the possibility of future French support for Iraq?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: No, I didn't. I was absolutely clear he had said "ce soir", "this evening". I can't remember the precise nature of the conversation other than the Prime Minister was giving Alastair his marching orders to play the anti-French card with the Sun and others, but I do recall after Alastair had started doing that, so probably about lunchtime on that day, getting a call from Joyce Quinn, now Baroness Quinn, former Europe Minister, who said to me, "Stephen, do the Prime Minister and Alastair know that what they are claiming Chirac said is not what he actually said?" and I said
"Joyce, I believe they do know, yes".

So that was certainly my view at the time. I think it's borne out by a telegram that John Holmes sent a day or two later when he talks about "the interpretation we had chosen to put on Chirac's words", and I think if you look back at the text of the interview, what Chirac is saying in response to the question, "Are you going to veto?", he says, "Look there are two issues here. In the Security Council you have to have nine affirmative votes for a resolution and I don't think those votes are there, but even if they are, if one of the permanent members votes "No", then the resolution can't go through. So whatever the circumstances", ie those circumstances, "this evening France will vote "No" because we do not believe that the conditions for justifying a war with there."

So, you know, one can pussyfoot around this, but I think there is no doubt that Tony Blair and Jack Straw knew what they were doing. Certainly by the time Jack Straw told Cabinet later in the week about Chirac's outrageous behaviour, he would have known precisely what Chirac had said.

You have to remember at this point the government was fighting for its life. I remember about that time Tony Blair coming into my room, because he was looking
for David Manning, and I said to him something fatuous
like, "You are going through the mill" or something, and
he said, "I am like a man walking across a precipice on
a tightrope with only a straw to balance with". That
was a reflection of how dire the domestic situation was,
because they did not know whether they would win the
vote in the House of Commons. As you know better than
me, in British politics playing the anti-French card is
a pretty sure fire successful card to play.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I with like to turn to something you
touched on with Sir Lawrence and that is the extent to
which EU member states in their own perception of our
policy considered that we were more interested in our
relationship with the United States than with Europe and
to what extent we were able to attempt to redress that
perception at this rather crucial time.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: It was certainly a pre-occupation, and to
his credit Nigel Sheinwald then in Brussels said on
a number of occasions that we should be doing more to
brief our partners, keep them informed, you know, and
there were always positive responses to that, in
particular from Peter Rickettts in the Foreign Office.

I can't remember that issue ever being discussed at
one of my coordination meetings, although insofar as the
issue arose out of, say, European Council, we might have
done, but I was seeing the correspondence, so I would have seen Peter Ricketts' response, or if I was worried about it, I might have said something to David Manning, but it never became an issue in terms of my being involved in how we addressed it rather than seeing from the exchanges that it was being addressed. I think efforts were made to brief people on the intelligence and so on, but by the time you get to October 2002 and the big bust-up which then led Jack Straw to detect a feeling of hostility I think the different camps had been formed and it would have been quite difficult to shift things at that point.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to come back to the Prime Minister's remarks in the House of Commons on 18th March. I have two questions on them. I would like to just read the whole passage, if I may:

"What Europe should have said last September to the United States is this. With one voice it should have said, 'We understand your strategic anxiety over terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and we will help you meet it. We will mean what we say in any UN resolution we pass and will back it with action if Saddam fails to disarm voluntarily. However in return', Europe should have said, says the Prime Minister, 'we ask two things of you: that the US should indeed choose
the UN path and you should recognise the fundamental overriding importance of restarting the Middle East peace process, which we will hold you to'. That would have been the right and responsible way for Europe and America to treat each other as partners and it is a tragedy that this has not happened."

My two questions are. First of all, do you think it is a realistic perception of what could have happened and, secondly, in September 2002 was this something which efforts were being made to put on the agenda?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think it wasn't, and that's -- I mean, the proximate cause of that is the difference of view between ourselves and the French, and the French obviously having a very decisive role in influencing quite a lot of other members of the EU, if by no means all or even necessarily half.

I think the flaw in that argument to my mind anyway is the one that dismisses implicitly the Chirac view as being an irresponsible view. I mean, although we chose to interpret Chirac's view as there was no way he was ever going to be prepared to go to war, that's not what he said. What he was consistently saying was, "You have to do this in two different ways" and, being strongly against war, he said he was against war unless Saddam Hussein did something disastrous.
So a more realistic European policy would have been
to say to the Americans, "Yes, we are with you, but in
our view war has to be the last resort, and while the
inspectors are there and the inspections are working we
have not got to that point. Therefore, this is not the
moment to go to war".

Now because we never entertained, or at least we got
ourselves into a situation where, even if we wanted to
entertain it, we couldn't, because we were on a kind of
rollercoaster leading to war, that would have been
a perfectly respectable view. It might not have got the
American -- the other shoe to drop in terms of the
Americans actively engaging on the Middle East peace
process, but their performance on that was not that
impressive anyway. I am not sure even if we had
followed Tony Blair's route that the Americans would
have made that deal in a way that they could have
delivered on.

The thing that -- I mentioned one thing I regretted
not saying. The other thing I regret never saying to
this day to Tony Blair was: "Are you really, really
convinced that we have got to the point of last
resort?", because -- I mean, I said it to others in
Number 10, because I didn't myself believe we had got to
that point actually. We could do enough to continue
disrupting Saddam Hussein for him not to represent an immediate threat, and, you know, the fact remains -- this is slightly departing from your question -- my personal view is this is not a matter of good faith or anything of those things. Tony Blair, as you know, is an honourable and decent man who had the interests of his country at heart, but I do think that that issue of judgment and the way that issue of judgment was tested or not tested rigorously in the kind of way it might have been is to me at the heart of it.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much. That is very helpful indeed.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Across to Sir Roderic Lyne.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just to wind up on the effects of Iraq on our relations with Europe, you wrote in the Independent in 2005 after your -- were you retired by then?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. I wouldn't have been writing in the Independent if I had not been retired by then.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I assume not.

"The division of Europe over the Iraq war had turned a crack into a fracture",

which you describe as "hugely damaging".

You also talked about how the Prime Minister was able to repair -- he didn't fracture his personal relationship with Schroeder and you said he eventually
repaired his personal relationship with Chirac.

How long-lasting was this damage and particularly obviously within the context of our relationship with France and Germany?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Well, we had -- there was -- I mean, starting really with the October bust-up and then carrying on and before the war started there was something of a debate in Whitehall certainly between Number 10 and the Foreign Office at official level about what our stance should be after the war.

I did a minute to Tony Blair shortly before the war in which I -- because I claim no foresight -- although I was not in favour of going to war, I claim no foresight in thinking if we did go to a war, it would be a disaster. I did not foresee that in any way.

I thought quite quickly people would see that the French view wasn't as dire as -- sorry -- what was happening was not as dire as the French predicted, and that we ought to construct a relationship which, while obviously including good relations with France and Germany, paid some regard to those who had been our allies, notably the Spanish, Italians and Dutch and so on.

That was quite a common -- it was a sort of shared view, I would say, with the Foreign Office, and I think
John Holmes, as Ambassador in Paris, bought into it.

Clearly we had to repair relations with France, and France and Germany would always be important, but the idea of trying to construct a tripartite group that would run Europe was simply not realistic. At that stage I think that was also in Tony Blair's mind.

What actually happened, in a very Chirac way, Chirac quite quickly said to the Prime Minister as early as the first European Council in March, where they met kind of privately -- the record says that he wanted a relationship of a partnership and cooperation with the US. I am sure it is a misprint. I am sure it means the UK. The context is clear. He is talking about the UK.

I think what had happened in Chirac's mind -- and this was certainly Tony Blair's view -- was that he had actually kind of tried the idea of going back to a Europe run by France and Germany, and however wrong we might be over Iraq, it clearly had not worked in European terms. Therefore if he couldn't beat us, he had to join himself to us in some way.

There was a kind of 

There was a kind of diner de reconciliatio in Paris in June. David Manning and I went there, but we had a separate meeting with officials while the two of them met on their own. At that dinner President Chirac basically said to Tony Blair, "Look, this enlarged European Union is
going to be completely unmanageable. The only people who can run it are you, the Germans and ourselves. That's the way we want to do it. We want to have the closest possible relationship with you".

Tony Blair was very taken with that. I have to say, having lived all my life as a civil servant being envious of this Franco-German relationship, I didn't disagree. We all saw the dangers -- how do you square Aznar? How do you square Berlusconi and so on -- but we thought that was manageable. It did lead for a period to a very concerted effort by the three countries to reach agreement on a whole range of issues.

In particular, there had been a move by France, Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands\(^1\) earlier in the year to offer their kind of facilities for European headquarters for the European security operations, ie not NATO, not national, but kind of EU headquarters. We were virulently opposed to that. It was one of the issues which was reflected in the draft of the European Constitutional Treaty, and division between us and some of our supporters like the Dutch and the Poles, on the one hand, and France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, on the other, was holding up that very crucial bit of the constitution. We were then under the Italian Presidency.

\(^{1}\) Sir Stephen Wall subsequently confirmed that this should be “Luxembourg”.
As a result really of this meeting between the Prime Minister and Chirac, Nigel Sheinwald and I on the Prime Minister's instructions were sent to negotiate with France and Germany a way through on this particular issue, which we did, and which was endorsed -- the final negotiation had to be done by Tony Blair and it was endorsed by a meeting between the three of them in September in Germany.

I mean, two things happened. One, I think that it put the kibosh on Tony Blair's relationship with Aznar, although Aznar lost office not long afterwards. It didn't put the kibosh on his relationship with Berlusconi, but Berlusconi was extremely and almost sort of personally upset, and we went to Rome, and I remember Tony Blair coming out of the dinner saying he was quite sure when we got back to the hotel he would find a horse's head in the bed, so upset was Silvio Berlusconi. So that was a factor which made it more difficult.

There was also the factor that France and Germany had a decades-long history of cooperation across a whole range of issues and were prepared to make real sacrifices one to the other, which we in the British system, partly because we are so intensively coordinated, found it difficult to do.
So it started to get a bit scratchy quite early on, but it was still there at the end of 2003 when Silvio Berlusconi, as Chairman of the European Council, was trying to put together the deal on the Constitutional Treaty, and Chirac and Tony Blair and Schroeder met for breakfast on the first morning, and it was absolutely clear that Chirac and Schroeder were not prepared to do a deal under Berlusconi's chairmanship.

That was not Tony Blair's view, but in a sense he became the person who had to say to Berlusconi, "In terms of Realpolitik you have simply got to recognise that this is not going to happen".

So they were working together and they also kind of reached a sort of informal understanding at that stage that none of the three countries was going to have a referendum on the eventual Constitutional Treaty when it emerged.

So it was pretty close, but it came completely unstuck in the first part of the following year, because there was a big disagreement, which was more than about personalities. It was about the direction of the EU, over who should be the next President of the Commission. Basically Berlusconi and Tony Blair led a group which set out to defeat the candidature for the presidency put forward by Schroeder and Chirac and that did lead to bad
blood, but, of course, subsequently personalities changed and I think by the time I left Angela Merkel was really kind of on the horizon, as it were. Although Tony Blair had got on well with Schroeder, he was beginning to think he would have to start afresh, as it were, with a new German Chancellor.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So effectively then Iraq as a divisive issue was fading into the background.

If I can now just look across the Atlantic briefly, you talked earlier about the European disappointment that in the end like previous British Prime Ministers, Tony Blair had actually aligned himself with the United States.

You have been quoted by Andrew Rawnsley as saying: "Mr Blair was seduced, as most British Prime Ministers are, by the relationship with the United States and also his preference", and here you were referring to discussing disputed trade issues in a meeting with President Bush, "was to duck and weave rather than have a confrontation."

Do you have feel that having declared after 9/11 in particular and then consistently from then on that he would be with the Americans, he would stand shoulder to shoulder with them, he would support them in military action, if that's what it came to, that Tony Blair
failed to use that influence to influence the Americans on points that really mattered to us, including the Middle East peace process, including planning of the aftermath? Obviously he did achieve agreement with them on going down the UN route?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes. I wasn't at those meetings.

I think my particular comment did relate to trade issues where from the records it seemed to me -- it seemed to me that very occasionally in politics there is a moment where you do need to say "Get your tanks off my lawn", as it were, and there were moments in terms of the American trade policy particularly when they were taking retaliatory action against the European steel when that was such a moment but, in general I think that within the constraints of a policy that committed ourselves to support of the United States, Tony Blair did try to use his influence both in terms of the Middle East peace process, certainly in terms of the aftermath. I mean, I was not involved in any of the aftermath events, but I can recall the intensity of the effort he made to try to get a view across to the United States of what needed to be done, and again in fairness, and slightly against what I have said in that thing you quoted, on the issue I mentioned earlier, namely the deal that we with the French and Germans over European headquarters in the
context of security policy, they then rightly left it to
us to sell it to the United States and in particular to
Tony Blair to sell it to President Bush.

A lot of the British press, British conservative
press were desperate to get the Americans to say "The
British have abandoned the true path". I did sit in on
a video link conference between Tony Blair and President
Bush where Tony Blair did have to use all his very
considerable powers of persuasion to get George Bush to
agree this was the right way forward, and in the end
President Bush said: "I don't agree with you, I think
you are wrong but we just have to trust you on this
one".

In the end I think they subsequently thought they
were right to do so because the events that unfolded
were less dire than they feared in terms of primacy of
NATO and so on and so forth.

I don't want to -- I think the remarks you quoted
were probably too dismissive in that sense, but it is
certainly true that by comparison with some of his
predecessors Tony Blair was not a man who used tough
language in dealing with people, and certainly on the
whole tried to avoid confrontation.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Finally from me I would just like to go
back over some of the ground we were actually discussing
this morning with Tom McKane about his perception of the
decision-making process leading up towards the conflict
at Cabinet level.

Now you were able to observe from a very experienced
viewpoint those Cabinet discussions. Again you've been
quoted as saying that Tony Blair made up his mind in the
middle of 2002 that he was going to go to war. He
conducted the whole of the subsequent Cabinet meetings
very skilfully, but on the basis that he was driving the
policy and others were acquiescing.

That's a quotation from Andrew Rawnsley's book
again. Is it an accurate quotation?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, it is, and I think that Tony Blair's
view was never that it's war, come what may. I mean,
it's absolutely the case that his view was consistently
that if Saddam Hussein complied and came clean about his
weapons of mass destruction and allowed them to be
dismantled, then there would be no war, and that was as
true on 18th March 2003 as at any time previously, which
is not to say he was not in favour of regime change, but
the objective of regime change was not the primary
objective.

I think from roughly speaking the middle of 2002
and, as I said before, in a way the espousal of the UN
route is part of that, I think we were committed to
military action if by peaceful means Saddam Hussein
could not be persuaded to give up his weapons of mass
destruction.

Alistair Campbell in his diary records Tony Blair
saying at the beginning of September he, Tony Blair, was
developing the line that the UN route was fine if it was
clearly a means to resolving the issue but not if it
means to duck the issue. I think that was always part
of his perception, and the letter of eight -- the
eight countries later on carries within it that
implication that the UN has to step up to the plate, but
if the UN doesn't step up to the plate, then there is
an obligation on those of us who take this issue
seriously and see its danger to do something about it
and in a sense we will become the bearers of the
responsibility of the international community.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: A point that really came out of our
conversation with Tom McKane this morning was that
through 2002 -- he left that particular post in the
autumn of 2002 -- you had an evolving process, but one
in which it is difficult to point to -- to identify
clear points -- points or point of decision.

Where you talk about the Prime Minister driving the
policy through Cabinet and others acquiescing in it, did
you feel, sitting in Cabinet meetings, that the Cabinet
were being briefed and carried along or were they
actually being asked tacitly or actively to give
approval, positively to endorse what was happening?
Were they being told "You don't have to decide now", or
were they being asked to decide, before you obviously
got to the very last moment in March 2003?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Well, I think that at that stage you have
got -- you have got an approach which is saying here is
somebody who is a threat, a threat which has grown
considerably in the new circumstances post-9/11, and
whether you accept that or not that was very much Tony
Blair's view and on the whole, as I recall it, it was
not disputed in Cabinet, and therefore there is a very
important British and international interest in ensuring
that he cannot continue to develop those weapons of mass
destruction, which represent a threat, and if they fell
into the hands of terrorists, an even greater threat.
Something has to be done about that, and clearly what we
want to do is get the inspectors back in and use that
route to disarm him, but I think as soon as -- once you
are on that UN route you are very clearly also talking
about the enforcement of the will of the international
community.

So I think that while people were not -- people were
not being asked to take a decision, "Are you prepared to
embark on a route that could lead us to war?", because although that was there in the background, what we were striving to do was to achieve disarmament by peace.

I mean, I don't know. You would have to ask individual Cabinet members, but I think it sort of -- it didn't come on us by stealth in the sense something dishonest was going on but there was never a moment when Cabinet sat down and actually examined the issues one by one. What is the real nature of the threat to the United Kingdom interests? Is it so great that war is a prospect that we should now be contemplating? Is our approach of commitment to the United States the right approach or is there a different approach? What are the legalities? Those kind of structured discussions never happened. At least as far as I am aware they didn't happen.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. We have been told the subject came up in Cabinet in a series of meetings, over 20 meetings, but what is much less clear and is not terribly clear from the opaque way that Cabinet meetings are written is that these were substantive discussions of the kind you describe.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I can't -- I certainly can't remember such a discussion, but that doesn't mean to say that -- that in itself is not an indication that it didn't
happen.

I think even reading the Cabinet minutes, knowing the way these things are written, and having written Cabinet minutes myself on Europe, not on this issue self-evidently, you can see where dissenting or at least doubting views are expressed and I think occasionally you can -- at least you can think you hear the voice of Clare Short or the voice of Robin Cook in those: ‘On the other hand, it was thought that ...’ I don’t think it was more than that.

There is a factor here about the influence, or to be honest, the lack of it within Cabinet of Clare Short and Robin Cook. Very early on in the New Labour administration when I came back from Brussels and I was an ex officio member of the Europe sub-committee of the Cabinet which Robin Cook as Foreign Secretary chaired, there was an issue, which I will not bore you with, that divided views. I from Brussels took the side of, as it happened, the view which has been promoted by Robin Cook and Clare Short in that meeting and Robin Cook summed-up in that sense.

Peter Mandelson, who was a Minister in the Cabinet Office and was at that meeting, said to me afterwards "You should never intervene in meetings like that ever again", and I said "Well, my job is to tell you how it
looks it me from Brussels". He said "No, no, you must not forget that Clare Short and Robin Cook", and I can't remember the precise phrase he used: it was not "They are not one of us." but "They are not part of the inner circle." He said "If you have a view in the future, give it to me or you give it to Tony Blair". If I knew that and other people knew that, you could see when Clare Short intervened on something, which, as I say, was usually rather germane. She put her finger on things generally which were politically significant, but not necessarily on the agenda. People kind of rolled their eyes. Robin Cook having been effectively dismissed as Foreign Secretary in 2001 and was kind of in a backwater effectively. However important the job of Leader of the House is, in political terms he was in a kind of a bit of a backwater.

So in a Cabinet of people who looked to Tony Blair as the man who had led them to a massive victory in 2001 and was seen as a huge success, the fact that they\(^2\) were giving a contrary view would not have resonated as much as might have been the case -- certainly would have been the case, if say, in March Jack Straw had been expressing in Cabinet opposition to the war going ahead.

\(^2\) Robin Cook and Clare Short
members appreciated that they had endorsed a policy that was very likely to lead us to war for which they would share collective responsibility?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I would say probably not before January 2003.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did we by then have -- did they have options at that point or had the dye been cast?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: They didn't have an option I think at that point of going in the direction -- a different -- well, if Tony Blair had gone to the Cabinet -- and it would still have been possible for Tony Blair to go to Cabinet on the back of the failure of the second resolution and say "This requires us to take a different course". Indeed, as we know, that was what Rumsfeld was kind of offering. It never, I think, entered Tony Blair's head for a second to do something. He was very determined.

Let's say for the sake of argument he had decided to do that, I think he would have carried the Cabinet; because of his majority, he would have carried the House of Commons. It would have obviously been a huge political issue in terms of his general standing, but if you are asking me could he have done that and survived, I think he could, but that was -- I mean, he had formed a view with absolute conviction. He was convinced that
his view was the right view, and if that meant the end
of his career as Prime Minister, then that was the basis
on which -- it wasn't just gamesmanship. For him that
was really -- he saw these things as really fundamental
issues. So the notion for him of compromising in the
way I have suggested I don't think he entertained it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. I think we want to turn in our
last set of questions to the reconstruction issues.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Before I do that can I just ask
a question, because earlier on you said that you wish
you had sort of challenged him.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Not so much challenged him. It is just
that, you know, this has turned out to be the biggest
foreign policy issue of my lifetime with a huge, huge
loss of human life. It was my view at the time
expressed to colleagues within Downing Street that I did
not think that war was justified at that point, because
I thought that war should be the last resort and we had
not reached the point of last resort.

Now I am not suggesting for one second that if I had
said that to Tony Blair it would have influenced him,
but I just wish that I had had the courage of my
convictions to do so, given what subsequently happened.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you don't think he would have changed his mind?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: No, I am sure he wouldn't have changed his mind. I mean, he was -- he was not a man impervious to argument, but he was a man who made up his own mind, didn't on the whole take you into his confidence. I felt he had confidence in me to do what he wanted me to do, but I never felt, for example, on the Euro, although I knew he wanted -- his expressed view was that he wanted to do it, I never really felt I was privy to the innermost workings of his mind. Ditto when he decided in the end to offer a referendum on the constitution.

I recall one meeting where Jonathan Powell asked him something about strategy of a fairly basic kind and he said "That's for me to know and you to find out", which was a fairly odd way to respond. That was very much -- you know, once he had made up his mind, then he drove with great conviction and great determination and skill to the end that he had set out.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Let's now turn to the EU's involvement in the reconstruction of Iraq.

How accurate do you think was UK's analysis of whether EU member states and the EU institutions would help in the aftermath?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I think fairly so. We had all kind of
frightened ourselves in terms of the bad blood between European members. Even at the first European Council in March there was on Day Two the beginnings of a sort of thaw, both at personal level and in terms of the EU as a whole wanting very much, with the UN in the lead and an important role for the UN, to support the aftermath process, and I think Chris Patten as the Commissioner responsible for Foreign Policy had already started to do some sub rosa work on that. There were particular issues I was not directly involved in as to how far the French in particular and the Germans were prepared to go and how far the UN was involved on the ground doing support out of Iraq and so on.

I mean, I think there were two factors. One was the genuine factor of wanting to help rebuild Iraq, and the UN -- sorry -- the EU's humanitarian effort worldwide is second to none in general, and I think also the fact of the matter is that most EU member states are members of NATO. The Transatlantic Relationship is hugely important to them for all kinds of reasons, defence policy, policy more generally, economics and commerce. So a desire to find some common ground with the United States where relations could be repaired. I think all those factors were at work, and it would certainly have been very much part of Chris Patten's mindset and Javier
Solano as High Representative to make that work.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think we were effective on the way we consulted the member states and the EU institutions on proposals as to what became the EU Security Council Resolution 1483?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Again I wasn't directly involved. I think so. In that kind of operation particularly in kind of actually putting together something which can work in terms of the way the institutions can respond, you know, on the whole the British machine has been good at doing that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think the resolution 1483 had an impact on the attitude of members towards contributing to the reconstruction effort and did that translate into any tangible support?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I can't say. I don't know. I am afraid I don't know.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you have any idea what the views of the EU were on the role of the United Nations in post-invasion Iraq?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Well, the EU wanted -- I can't remember. I mean, there was a debate about the exact formula, as you know, but the common point of agreement within the EU in the run-up to war had been the role of the UN and the UN Security Council that had to be expressed in
words that could embrace both us on the one hand and the French on the other, but that was a focal point for most member states.

So coalescing round the language of a resolution that embraced that and that did put the UN upfront, because that then was -- that gave everybody something around which they could form without kind of losing face or without sacrificing a point of principle, because the UN was obviously the responsible organisation, seen to be impartial, have the wherewithal to do it, etc, etc.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did we convey that to the US in were we acting as a proper conduit in terms of building that bridge post aftermath?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: My recollection is yes. It was important for us. I mean, one of the consistent points of British policy, and this was very much Tony Blair's view, was always to try and have an international coalition. That was the main reason why, starting with David Manning's visit in July 2002, he had argued for the UN route, that was the obvious way in which you built a coalition, or possibly the only way you could build a coalition.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The fact that the EU, and we wanted the UN to have an important role after the invasion, did that make any difference to the US's attitude towards the UN role? Did that influence how the US viewed the
UN role?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: Yes, I think so. I mean, as you know, there were divided views within the administration, and the UN generally was not the flavour of the month. I think from an American perspective also it was quite important to get -- once the invasion happened - to get the international community engaged, I mean, for political reasons as well as economic reasons. So I think they could see that the UN route, even if it might not be their preferred route if they could have found another way, was the way you had to go. In terms of realistic assessment my recollection is that they were certainly persuaded of that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: A number of military witnesses have spoken about assuming that other nations would contribute militarily to Iraq after the invasion and the rapid withdrawal of UK military troops was in part based on this.

From your perspective to what extent was the expectation of military contribution from others among the EU member states well founded?

SIR STEPHEN WALL: I find it hard to remember. I have admittedly a rather vague recollection that our hopes were higher than the reality, but beyond that I can't at this distance recall I am afraid.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Okay. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, I think we have come pretty much to
the end of this session. I would like to ask you, Stephan, whether there are any final reflections you
want to share. We have heard a great deal I think in
the course of this afternoon, but if there is something
that's particularly at the front of your mind that we
have not gone through, now would be a opportunity.

SIR STEPHEN WALL: No. I made a note of the things I wanted
to say and I think I have said them. Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In that case thanks to you, Sir Stephen
Wall, as our witness and to all who have been present
throughout this afternoon's session.

We will resume again at 9.30 am on Friday this week,
Friday, 21st January, when our witness will be the
former Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair.

I need to emphasise that entrance is limited to
those who have been allocated seats by the ballot.
There will be no admittance to the QE2 Centre for the
public in general on Friday.

With that I'll close the session. Thank you.

(Hearing concluded)

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