(9.30 am)

RT HON TONY BLAIR

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. Today the Iraq Inquiry will be hearing from the Rt Hon Tony Blair, the Prime Minister until June 2007. We have much to cover today and the Committee hopes we can go about our business in an orderly way and, in fairness to all, not be distracted by disruptions. As in all our hearings, the right of our witness to respond must be respected and those here today were selected through a free public ballot overseen by an independent arbiter. We remind them of the behaviour they are expected to observe.

Mr Blair will be giving evidence in two sessions, this morning and this afternoon, with a lunch break of about one and a half hours. This will help to ensure that all those who will be coming for the afternoon session are able to take their places before we start proceedings.

Good morning.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to start by welcoming our witness and the others who join us at the QE2 Conference Centre here today, as well as all those
who are watching this session, either on television or through the Internet.

Today's hearing is, understandably, much anticipated, and in the circumstances, the Committee thinks it important to set out what this hearing will and will not cover.

The UK's involvement in Iraq remains a divisive subject. It is one that provokes strong emotions, especially for those who have lost loved ones in Iraq, and some of them are here today.

They and others are looking for answers as to why the UK committed to military action in Iraq and whether we did so on the best possible footing.

Our questions aim to get to the heart of those issues.

Now, the purpose of the Iraq Inquiry is to establish a reliable account of the UK's involvement in Iraq between 2001 and 2009 and to identify lessons for future governments facing similar circumstances. That is our remit.

The Inquiry is not a trial.

The committee before you is independent and non-political. We come to our work with no preconceptions and we are committed to doing a thorough job based on the evidence. We aim to deliver our report
around the end of this year.

Now, this is the first time Mr Blair is appearing before us and we are currently holding our first round of public hearings. We shall be holding further hearings later in the year when we can return to subjects we wish to explore further. If necessary, we can speak to Mr Blair again.

Today's session covers six years of events that were complex and controversial. It would be impossible to do them all justice in the time we have available today. The Committee has, therefore, made a decision to centre its questioning on a number of specific areas. If necessary, we shall come back to other issues at a later date.

We plan to focus our questions, first, on the evolution of strategy towards Iraq up to 2002, including key meetings such as those with President Bush in April and September 2002, as well as the complex diplomatic processes at the United Nations.

We will then look at how the policy was presented to Parliament and the British people. That will be followed by the later stages of diplomacy in early 2003. We will then move on to the planning for the invasion of Iraq in March and April 2003, its aftermath, and the reality that confronted the coalition on the ground in
Iraq.

We plan to conclude with the deterioration of the security situation in Iraq, the high levels of sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007 and how the United Kingdom responded to this, followed, lastly, by how the British Government provided strategic direction.

I say, as I do on every occasion, we recognise that witnesses giving evidence based in part on their recollection of events, and we can cross-check what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

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

I would like to begin the proceedings just by observing that the broad question by many people who have spoken and written to us so far is: why, really, did we invade Iraq, why Saddam, and why now in March 2003?

There have been many public speeches, statements, interviews and Parliamentary Committee hearings about Iraq. But in fairness to everyone concerned, and to our witness, we shall want, throughout today, to pursue this broad question which lies behind many of the very specific issues we shall be examining in the course of today's hearing.
I shall now turn to Sir Roderic Lyne to open the questions. Sir Roderic?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Mr Blair, I would like to start with the first of the areas that Sir John has just mentioned, the way that the government, under your leadership, developed its broad strategy on Iraq in 2001 and into the early months of 2002, and if I can just summarise the situation at the beginning of this, since 1991, a strategy of containment operated internationally and with UN backing through an arms embargo, trade sanctions, No Fly Zones, Naval embargo, and stationing of coalition forces in the region, had prevented Saddam Hussein from threatening his neighbours or from developing nuclear weapons.

But at the same time, there were concerns by 2001, as there had been all along in many ways, about his aspirations, his efforts to break out, his missile development programme, intelligence about his CW, his chemical weapons and biological weapons capabilities, the leakage and the growing unpopularity of sanctions, which we have heard from number of previous witnesses, and the enforcement of the No Fly Zones.

We will come in detail on to the WMD issues later on. The policy that your government and the United States administration under the newly elected
President Bush adopted in 2001 through parallel reviews of Iraq policy was to reinforce this strategy of containment, to strengthen it, and the two governments led the way in putting forward what was called a smart sanctions resolution at the United Nations, didn't succeed in getting the UN Security Council to adopt that in the summer of 2001, though it was eventually adopted in May of 2002, as Security Council Resolution 1409.

Now, in that period, what was the view that you took of this strategy of containment, or perhaps I could divide the period: before 9/11, how did you view containment?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is absolutely right to divide our policies, Sir Roderic, up into two separate parts; up to September 11, after September 11.

Up to September 11, Saddam was still a problem, a major problem, the sanctions framework was eroding, there were continual breaches of the No Fly Zone, we were actually worried about enforcing the No Fly Zone. You have probably seen correspondence from Robin Cook at the time to me about that. There was an attempt to put in place a different form of sanctions, these so-called smart sanctions, and perhaps we can come to that in a detail a little later, and, of course, the very first military action I had taken was from President Clinton,
back in 1998, against Saddam.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back to that later too.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. That's actually a very important
moment as well, but, however, I think I would fairly
describe our policy up to September 11 as doing our
best, hoping for the best, but with a different calculus
of risk assessment; in other words, up to September 11,
we thought he was a risk but we thought it was worth
trying to contain it. The crucial thing
after September 11 is that the calculus of risk changed.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I will come on to that in just a minute
but in the period up to September 11, effectively, would
it be right to say that containment, as a broad
strategy, had been effective, was still sustainable,
needed reinforcing, was expensive and difficult?

That's, roughly speaking, what we have heard from
some earlier witnesses, including Sir John Sawers, who
was working for you at the time. He said:

"I think it was working, but the costs of it were
quite high and there were risks to the various elements
of our policy that we wanted to reduce."

Would that be a fair summary?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the way I would put it is this:
that the sanctions were obviously eroding, we couldn't
get support for them. This so-called smart sanctions
framework, we actually, prior to September 11, couldn't
get support for at that time. So we were in a bit of
a difficulty there, and, of course, the fact is that
Saddam -- as I say, we had taken military action in
1998. There was a very long history, of course, of the
dealings with Saddam. One of the things I have done for
the purpose of the Inquiry is go back through my
speeches prior to September 11 and -- I mean, I have
actually got one or two of them here, but it is actually
quite interesting.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I want to refer back to one or two of
them later, as I am sure colleagues will.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me summarise their impact then.
Their impact is, regularly, through 1997, 1998, 1999,
2000 and 2001, I am saying Saddam must comply with the
UN Resolutions and force is an option, but all of this,
frankly, was in circumstances where this wasn't the top
priority for us, and I remember at the very first
meeting that we had, myself and President Bush,
in February 2001, just after he had come to power as
President of the United States, we dealt with Iraq with
Colin Powell, but it was very much in the context of
trying to get a different sanctions framework in place.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So if I put it in rather simple terms: he
hadn't, at this point, broken out of the box that he had
been put in, although there were some holes in the box.

Would that be --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but the holes were quite

substantial.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, they needed attention.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but the critical thing --

Sir Roderic, forgive me for interrupting, but it is

absolutely essential to realise this: if September 11

hadn't happened, our assessment of the risk of allowing

Saddam any possibility of him reconstituting his

programmes would not have been the same. But

after September 11 -- and if you would like me to now,

I will explain what a difference that made to the

thinking -- after September 11, our view, the American

view, changed, and changed dramatically.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's precisely what I would now like to

come on to, because we have heard from many witnesses --

and I don't think anybody is in doubt about this,

I don't think it is a point in question -- that 9/11 was

a massive shock, which changed the international

environment, and particularly, with regard to this

question -- and your former Foreign Secretary spoke

about this in detail, so we probably don't need to go

over all this ground again -- it changed the way that

the United States perceived the world. It changed the
perception of risk. It changed attitudes towards perceived threats, and, as Jack Straw was later on to put it to you in his minute of 25 March 2002, summarising the situation with regard to Iraq:

"Objectively, the threat from Iraq has not worsened as a result of 11 September. What has, however, changed, is the tolerance of the international community, especially that of the United States."

I wonder if you could just tell us how your attitude to Iraq, not that of the United States, evolved in these months after 9/11?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Straight after 9/11, in the statement of made to the House of Commons, just a few days after, I think on 14 September, I specifically deal with this issue, to do with weapons of mass destruction and the danger of the link with terrorism. Here is what changed for me the whole calculus of risk. It was my view then, it remains my view now.

The point about this terrorist act was that over 3,000 people had been killed on the streets of New York, an absolutely horrific event, but this is what really changed my perception of risk, the calculus of risk for me: if those people, inspired by this religious fanaticism could have killed 30,000, they would have.

For those of us who dealt with terrorism from the
IRA, and, incidentally, I don't want to minimise the impact of that terrorism; each act of terrorism is wicked and wrong and to be deplored. But the terrorism that an organisation like the IRA were engaged in was terrorism directed towards a political purpose, maybe unjustified, but it was within a certain framework that you could understand.

The point about this act in New York was that, had they been able to kill even more people than those 3,000, they would have, and so, after that time, my view was you could not take risks with this issue at all, and one dimension of it, because we were advised, obviously, that these people would use chemical or biological weapons or a nuclear device, if they could get hold of them -- that completely changed our assessment of where the risks for security lay, and just so that we make this absolutely clear, this was not an American position, this was my position and the British position, very, very clearly, and so, from September 11 onwards -- we obviously had to deal with Afghanistan, but from that moment, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Iraq, the machinery, as you know, of AQ Khan, who was the former Pakistani nuclear scientist and who had been engaged in illicit activities and in distributing this material, all of this had to be brought to an end.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: So that was your perception of the way in general the risks, the global risks, had changed; that one had to think about them differently. But Saddam himself was not a sponsor of Al-Qaeda, he hadn't been involved in 9/11 in any shape or form.

Had Saddam Hussein, at this point, become more of a threat than he was before 9/11?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think Jack puts it absolutely accurately in his letter to me. It wasn't that objectively he had done more, it is that our perception of the risk had shifted, and the reason for dealing with Iraq -- and I think I said this at the time -- was because it was Iraq that was in breach of the United Nations Resolutions, had ten years of defiance and I felt, we felt, it was important that we make it absolutely clear he has to come back into compliance.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back obviously to the details of this later on. I just want to follow the evolution of your strategy through a little further, if I may, and then I will hand over to colleagues.

At this point, now, let's say, in the first half of 2002, where did that leave containment? Was it still, if one could reinforce it, a sustainable strategy?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think this is a really important point, actually, and I have looked at it quite
carefully, because I did at the time -- and it is really
worth reflecting on for a moment now -- and that is the
nature of this replacement sanctions framework.

We know Saddam had effectively corroded his support
for the previous sanctions. He was -- on some accounts
the sums of money varied, but there were billions of
dollars that were basically being illicitly used by
Iraq. Frankly, what he had done -- because we gave him
the money to buy food and medicines for his people, but
he was deliberately not giving them the food or the
medicines in the way he should have, and this meant, for
example, as I think Clare Short pointed out to me in
early 2003, the mortality rate for children under five
in Iraq was worse than the Congo.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, the sanctions had become very, very
unpopular.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Extremely unpopular, and he had been
successful -- wholly dishonestly, I may say, but
successful in blaming the west for the sanctions.

Now, the issue was whether this successor, so-called
smart sanctions regime or framework would be a valid way
of containing him. It is worth just going to the -- and
I think -- but forgive me if I mention a document and if
you haven't -- but I think you have got the options
paper we got before --
SIR RODERIC LYNE: The March options paper is in the public domain. You can get it on the Internet. I'm not certain offhand whether or not it has been declassified --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Right. Maybe I will just say what it told me.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- by the government which was elected under your leadership.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me just then summarise the effect of it, because it dealt specifically, as one of the options, with this issue of containment, and it described it as a least worst option.

If you read the paper, what they are saying is, it is possible it might work, but, equally, it is possible it won't. But here is a point that I think is really, really important on the so-called smart sanctions, that there was then, following that paper, a whole series of government discussions about these smart sanctions. Each of them were indicating that they might work but they could give no guarantee of it working. The previous regime had obviously not yielded -- the previous sanctions framework had not yielded the benefits that we thought, in terms of sustainability, and the thing that I think is very important about this is the paper which I think has been declassified,
because I think that was done just yesterday, which is
about Iraq, the new policy framework. This is the paper
on 7 March 2001.

The Iraq new policy framework describes the
arrangements that would apply on this so-called smart
sanctions framework and, I just want to draw attention
to one, because the whole issue about the previous
sanctions eroding had been Saddam's ability to get stuff
in through the borders of the surrounding countries,
and, therefore, one very important part of this new
sanctions framework was for border monitoring, a limited
number of border crossings into Iraq from Jordan, Syria,
Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran. So the idea was, in this
new sanctions arrangement, to make sure that you sealed
off the borders around Iraq so that it was more
effective.

The important thing to realise is that, when we then
came, post-September 11 and finally adopted this
United Nations Resolution -- and I think it is
United Nations Resolution 1409 -- the tightening of the
borders had been dropped. We couldn't get the Russians
on board unless we dropped it. So the very thing that,
even back then, people were warning me, even with this
tightening of the borders, it might work, it might not,
that tightening restriction had been dropped by the time
you get to May 2002.

Therefore, you can still argue, I guess, that this sanctions framework would have been successful, but I think I would say it is as least as persuasive an argument that it wouldn't have been.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Trade sanctions were only, as I described earlier, one of many elements that comprised containment that were keeping Saddam in his box. You had some forces stationed in neighbouring countries in the region, the Americans had a lot of forces as a deterrent. We had the No Fly Zones. The arms embargo had been fairly effective, the trade sanctions were leaking. Parts of the border monitoring was effective, in the sense that there was a Naval embargo which we helped to operate through the Armilla patrol, I think. Other parts were leaking.

Was the totality of this containment -- I mean, this, I think, remained the official policy of your government in at least the first half of 2002, but, as a strategy -- and I'm still trying to stay on the strategic level -- did you see this as something at that time, the first half of 2002, as a strategy which could be sustained over the medium term or did you feel that it was a goner?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: What I felt was exactly what I was being
advised, and I think the common sense of it might have worked, it might not have worked, but it was at least as likely, if not more likely, I would say, that it wouldn't work.

Sir Roderic, if I just make this point, because I think you very fairly draw attention to the range of different measures. The No Fly Zones were causing us difficulty and the trade sanctions were a vital part of stopping him getting material in to reconstitute WMD programmes, because, remember, the whole point about this new sanctions framework is that we were going to move from, effectively, "We will tell you what you can have in", to a different framework, which is actually, in many ways, much weaker, of course, which is to say, "You can have in whatever you like, apart from these 300 items on the so-called goods review list".

So the trade sanctions part of this, which we know he had been breaking under the previous regime was not a peripheral, but an essential part of that sanctions framework being valid, and so the problem was -- I mean, an accurate summary of the position -- I don't think anyone could really dispute this at the time -- is that containment through sanctions had basically been eroding, we now had a new sanctions framework, but this new sanctions framework, to get it through the UN had
been watered down in the absolutely vital component of
the trade restrictions.

I don't know whether it is maybe worth actually
sending you -- there's this book by someone called
Ken Pollock, who has written specifically on the
sanctions framework and Saddam, and what he does when he
comes to these so-called smart sanctions is he said
there were seven pre-conditions for the smart sanctions
to work, and then he goes on to explain why none of them
would actually have happened.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's just summarise that then, and by
all means send us the book, please. We have no shortage
of material to read, but we are always ready for more.

Containment, therefore, is a policy which is in
question at this point. You are clearly, as
Prime Minister in the first half of 2002, and based on
the advice coming to you, not very happy about the way
it is working.

So what are your other strategic options at this
point, and by what process did you review what your
options were?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That is the reason we called for the
options paper. I mean, the options were basically
these: we had taken a decision, post-September 11, that
this issue had been to be confronted and there were
a number of different ways it could be confronted. It could be confronted by an effective sanctions framework, it could be confronted by Saddam allowing the inspectors back in to do their work properly and compliance with the UN Resolutions, or, in the final analysis, if he was not prepared -- if sanctions could not contain him and he was not prepared to allow the UN inspectors back in, then the option of removing Saddam was there.

That option, incidentally, had always been there.

After September 11 what changed, as I say, was our calculation, mine and I think the Americans' as well, that we couldn't go on like this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the options paper, looked, as you say, at containment strengthened as one broad course. An alternative strategy, the possibility of regime change, which by then was being much talked about in the United States, and then three different ways in which that might be effected.

I do not want to go into each of those at this particular point. I am, as I say, trying to think about the process of formulating strategy.

Having got that paper, what did you do in order to have it discussed and reviewed and looked at? What kind of meetings did you hold about it? Whom did you consult?
Obviously we were talking -- I was speaking very closely with Jack Straw, with those who were advising me at the time, we were talking obviously to the Ministry of Defence people and the Defence Secretary as well, and we were trying to get an assessment -- that's why, as I say, there was a lot of discussion inside government: is this new sanctions framework really going to do it or not, is it going to be effective?

As I say, I think the conclusion was, in the end, you certainly couldn't rely on it.

Did you have an actual meeting to discuss the paper and take a decision on it?

We had a meeting, I think -- the options paper was given to us before the meeting with President Bush, and then I think -- I'm not sure whether it was before or shortly after, but I can look it up for you. I think we then had a meeting of the key people to decide where we were then going to go.

I think you got the paper in March, you were seeing President Bush in April, and before you went to see President Bush, you had a meeting at Chequers with number of people which was a sort of briefing meeting for Crawford, but you didn't have anything like a Cabinet Committee meeting which looked at this paper.
and had a sort of structured debate about it?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did have a very structured debate
with the people. I mean, the fact that it happened at
Chequers rather than Downing Street I don't think is
particularly relevant to it, but I think the simple
answer is: did we consider those other options?
Absolutely. That's why we had the paper drawn up.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you considered those options, how
diverse was the range of advice you were getting on
them? Were you getting advice fed into you from people
with a real knowledge of the Middle East and Iraq, and
were you having people challenging the paper and
pointing out some of the possible downsides, if you went
this way or that way?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The one thing I found throughout this
whole matter from a very early stage is that I was never
short of people challenging me on it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you identify who they were?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There were people within the Cabinet,
obviously; for example, Robin Cook and from time to time
Clare Short.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But they weren't at the Chequers meeting?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they weren't, but we discussed this,
obviously, prior to the invasion of Iraq. I think there
were no fewer than 24 different Cabinet meetings. This
was a topic that was right through the mainstream --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you didn't discuss the options paper
in Cabinet?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We didn't discuss the options paper
specifically in Cabinet.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It didn't even go to all the Cabinet.
I mean, Clare Short didn't get a paper. She complained
that she hadn't got it in the first place.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But the discussion that we had in
Cabinet was substantive discussion. We had it again and
again and again, and the options were very simple. The
options were: a sanctions framework that was effective;
alternatively, the UN inspectors doing the job;
alternatively, you have to remove Saddam.

Those were the options.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What were the downside arguments being
put to you about removing Saddam?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, the downside arguments -- and this
was partly from, for example -- you know, I was reading
telegrams coming in from ambassadors abroad and so on.
The downside arguments were obviously going to be that,
not merely is military action always something that you
should consider only as a last resort, but there were
issues to do with relationships in the Muslim world,
there were issues to do with what the effect would be in
the Arab world and so on.

But what you find in these situations is that you will get a range of different views. Some people were saying, "You must not, on any account, contemplate military action", other people were saying, "It is time you acted".

So, for example, in -- I think it was in mid-2002, the Conservative Party put out a paper saying, "This is why Saddam is a threat and we have to act". Other people were saying, I think the Liberal Democrats were saying, "He may be a threat but you should rule out military action".

So it is not as if we weren't getting the full range of views. We got the full range of views from the very beginning. The trouble was, we had to take a decision, and my decision was that we could not afford to have this situation go on. How we then dealt with it, however, was an open question.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were the views being put to you -- did they include people warning you that what happened after you toppled Saddam Hussein, if one did end up doing that, would raise some difficult questions and risks of sectarian strife within Iraq? How much was that spelt out in the advice from that time?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Most of the advice was a worry about
a humanitarian catastrophe if Saddam was removed. There
was advice -- and I actually called for papers on this,
I think a little bit later -- on what the Sunni Shia
relationship would be. That was obviously an issue. It
was an issue we raised within our own deliberations with
the Americans and elsewhere.
So all of these things were factors that we had to
take into account, but the primary consideration for me
was to send an absolutely powerful, clear and
unremitting message that, after September 11, if you
were a regime engaged in WMD, you had to stop.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: That brings me, I think, to the final
points that I want to ask, because from the evidence
that we have heard so far, from now a large number of
witnesses, and from the documents we have read, it does
begin to appear that by about March or April of 2002 you
were strongly attracted to the idea of changing the
regime in Iraq, and, in a sense, in doing so, you were
building on a philosophy of humanitarian intervention
that you had first, I think, set out in a very public
way in your Chicago speech of April 1999, and you
in April, of course, of 2002, after your meeting with
President Bush, returned to it in your speech at the
George Bush Presidential Library at College Station when
you said, talking in general of regime change, not
specifically in this paragraph about Iraq:

"If necessary, the action should be military, and, again, if necessary and justified, it should involve regime change. I have been involved, as British Prime Minister, in three conflicts involving regime change: Milosevic, the Taliban and Sierra Leone."

Had you reached the point where you regarded, within this philosophy, removing Saddam's regime -- and I do not think anybody was ever in any doubt about the evilness of Saddam's regime -- as a valid objective for the government's policy?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the absolutely key issue was the WMD issue, but I think it is just worth at this point -- and then I will come specifically to the text of this speech and deal with this notion that somehow in Crawford I shifted our position.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will talk about Crawford separately. I'm sticking on the strategy now. I'm referring to the speech.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Wasn't that the day after the Crawford meeting?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was the day after the Crawford meeting and it is in the context of your philosophy of regime change.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Okay. Let me make it quite clear. In
the Chicago speech, in 1999, what I was doing was setting out very clearly what I thought the consequences were of an interdependent world, and what I was really saying was this: that whereas in the past people might have thought that a security problem in one part of the world can be divorced from its impact on another part, in the world that was developing, we were no longer able to do that, not financially, not in terms of security, not in terms, actually, of the cultural issues.

In other words, as a result of an interdependent world, it then became in our self-interest, not as part simply of some moral cause, but in our self-interest to regard ourselves as affected by what was happening in a different part of the world.

I actually have the Chicago speech here if you want me to refer to it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I have it too, and I have referred to it.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is quite important to make this point.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is an important speech.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, because, if you read the speech, you will see very clearly that the basis for what I'm saying is not that I now believe that we should apply, rather than a test of national interest, a moral test -- I mean, I think there are moral issues to do with
dictators and so on. What I was saying was that, from
now on, in the new world that is developing, we should
realise that it is in our national interest to
understand that the problem in a different part of the
world can come back and hit us in ours.

The reason why I was so strongly in favour of action
in Kosovo, action, incidentally, to rescue an
essentially Muslim population from persecution by
a country that was a Christian country, was not simply
that I felt affronted, as I think people should and did
do, about the prospect of ethnic cleansing, but also
because I was convinced that the consequences of
allowing such an action to go unchecked would never stay
at the borders of the Balkans. So that's the basis of
it.

When we then come to the Texas speech, it is not
that I suddenly say, "Now it is regime change, rather
than WMD". On the contrary, you quoted a passage --
I then go on to say this:

"We cannot, of course, intervene in all cases, but
where countries are engaged in the terror or WMD
business, we should not shrink from confronting them.
Some can be offered a way out, a route to
respectability. I hope in time that Syria, Iran and
even North Korea can accept the need to change their
relationships with the outside world. A new relationship is on offer. But they must know that sponsoring terrorism or WMD is unacceptable."

Then I go on to deal with Iraq:

"As for Iraq, I know some fear precipitate action. They needn't. We will proceed, as we did after September 11, in a calm, measured, sensible but firm way ...

Then I go on:

"... but leaving Iraq to develop WMD in flagrant breech of no less than nine separate United Nations Resolutions, refusing still to allow weapons inspectors back to do their work properly, is not an option."

I then go on to describe the brutality of Saddam, but then I come back to the issue of WMD.

So, for me, the issue was very, very simple: it was about the need to make absolutely clear that from now on you did not defy the international community on WMD.

I would like, if I might, also to make one other point, because I have read obviously a lot of the evidence that has been given to you.

I think there is a danger that we end up with a very sort of binary distinction between regime change here and WMD here. The truth of the matter is that a regime that is brutal and oppressive, that, for example, has
used WMD against its own people, as Saddam did, and had
killed tens of thousands of people by the use of
chemical weapons, such a regime is a bigger threat, if
it has WMD, than one that is otherwise benign.

So if you were to look at Iran today, the reason why
I take, and still take, a very hard line on Iran and
nuclear weapons is not just because of nuclear
proliferation, it is because the nature of the Iranian
regime makes me even more worried about the prospect of
them with a nuclear device.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were making this dual argument at
the time with regard to Iraq, both about the nature of
the regime and about WMD, and as you quite rightly say,
when you got on to Iraq in that speech, as on other
occasions, you made that dual argument.

But, of course, in a recent television interview
with Fern Britton you were asked then, "If you had known
then that there were no WMDs, would you still have gone
on?" and you replied:

"I would still have thought it right to remove him."

So even without the WMDs, you were saying
in December, or very recently, that you would still have
thought it right to remove him. What I'm trying to
grope for is precisely that point.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me deal with the Fern Britton
interview. Sir Roderic, even with all my experience in
dealing with interviews, it still indicates that I have
got something to learn about it. This was an issue, let
me just explain, that was given some weeks before your
Inquiry began.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, we had been going for some weeks.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the actual interview was given some
time before.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was recorded.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was recorded some time --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was recorded before July of last year?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, not before July of last year, but
before you began your public hearings.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In November.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly. The point that I'm making is
very simply this: I did not use the words "regime
change" in that interview, and I did not in any sense
mean to change the basis. Obviously, all I was saying
was you couldn't describe the nature of the threat in
the same way, if you knew then what you know now,
because some of the intelligence about WMD was shown to
be wrong.

It was in no sense a change of the position, and
I just simply say to you, the position was that it was
the breach of the United Nations Resolutions on WMD.
That was the cause. It was then, and it remains.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in April -- this is my final point
before I hand over -- of 2002, you were not taking the
view that the need to change the regime in Iraq should
be the main driver of your strategy because the
situation on WMD essentially hadn't changed very much
over the previous three or more years?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, the position on WMD had changed
dramatically as a result of September 11.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: The facts on WMD had not changed; the
perception of the risk had changed, but not the risk
itself.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. Look, one of the things that you
always have to do in this situation -- you are
absolutely right to draw attention to it -- is you have
to, when you are charged with the responsibility of
trying to protect your country -- and that should be the
job of the Prime Minister -- you have to take an
assessment of risk.

Now, my assessment of risk prior to September 11 was
that Saddam was a menace, that he was a threat, he was
a monster, but we would have to try and make best.

If you had asked me prior to September 11, did
I have any real belief in his good faith. No, I didn't.
Did I really think that a new sanctions framework was
going to do the trick? No, I didn't.

On the other hand, precisely because the consequence of military action is so great, for me the calculus of risk was, "Look, we are just going to have to do the best we can".

After September 11, that changed, and that change, incidentally, I still believe is important for us today because it is the reason today, as I say, I do take such a strong line on Iran or any other nation that tries to develop WMD. We cannot afford, in my view -- look, other people may have different views, but in my view, we cannot afford the possibility that nations, particularly nations that are brutal, rogue states, states that take an attitude that is wholly contrary to our way of life, you cannot afford such states to be allowed to develop or proliferate WMD.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: My colleagues are going to come back in more detail to this later on, because it is crucially important, and I apologise for, as it were, interrupting the flow at this stage, but I think it is time that I pass the baton to Baroness Prashar so that she can carry the story forward before we get back in more detail to the theme of WMD, if you are content with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just before Baroness Prashar comes on, the
government last night declassified two documents. We weren't proposing to put them up on the website because in themselves they only tell a very small part of the story, but since our witness has referred to one of them, we shall now put both of them up on the website. They are declassified.

Baroness Prashar?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

Mr Blair, I want to pick up the more detailed developments in policy, particularly at the beginning of 2002, because it was, I think, eight years ago to date when President Bush told the Congress in his annual State of the Union address about the "Axis of Evil", and I think your two advisers, Mr Jonathan Powell and Sir David Manning, said that, in a sense, there was a shift in emphasis, particularly when regime change had actually become an active policy for the USA, because although it had been -- there had been the Iraq Liberation Act and it was a policy, but it wasn't an active policy. It actually became an active policy at that stage.

When you sensed this shift in policy, what was your response? If you can briefly tell me, and then I want to go on to the preparation for the Crawford meeting.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I would say that the shift really
happened straight after September 11. I mean, I think, if I may just quote from -- straight after September 11, what I actually said on this issue, when I reflected on the terrorism was:

"We know these groups of fanatics are capable of killing without discrimination. The limits on the numbers that they kill, and their methods of killing, are not governed by any sense of morality. The limits are only practical and technical. We know that they would, if they could, go further and use chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons. We know also that there are groups of people, occasionally states, who will trade the technology and capability of such weapons."

Then I go on to say that we have been warned and we should act on this warning. I would say it is not really about the President Bush "Axis of Evil" speech or anything else. I think, after September 11, it was clear that this whole thing was in a different framework.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But my point was: how did we intend to respond to the change, the shift in the American policy? Not the shift in your thinking, which we have heard earlier, but how did we intend to respond that?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We intended to respond by saying, "From
now on we have to deal with it.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So the preparation for the meeting at Crawford that took place at Chequers, I think was a preparation meeting for Crawford, and according to Alastair Campbell's diaries, you told the Chequers meeting it was regime change in part because of WMD, but more broadly because of a threat to the region and the world. That's true?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think these things were sort of conjoined, really. I mean, the fact is it was an appalling regime and we couldn't run the risk of such a regime being allowed to develop WMD. Can I just make one point which I think is quite important as well? Of course, it was President Clinton in 1998 that signed the Iraq Liberation Act and that policy of regime change became the policy of the government.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I am aware of that, because it became more active, as I said.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But can I just make this point? Because I think it is very important. If you study the detail of that Act, the reason he comes out for regime change, President Clinton, is because of the breach of the United Nations Resolutions on WMD. So there is a way you can get a sense -- and some of
this has come in the evidence. As it were, the
Americans are for regime change, we are for dealing with
WMD. It is more a different way of expressing the same
proposition. The Americans in a sense were saying, "We
are for regime change because we don't trust he is ever
going to give up his WMD ambitions". We were saying,
"We have to deal with his WMD ambitions. If that means
regime change, so be it".

So it wasn't that we kind of came at this from
completely different positions.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In preparation for this meeting at
Chequers, what kind of conclusions did you reach and
what advice were you being given by your advisers?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Basically, we were obviously now
going -- we had the military action in Afghanistan, it
was obvious that the American system, indeed our own
system, were now going to look at this WMD issue and
there was advice on options as to containment and regime
change and so on and so forth.

So all those options were being explored, and, as
I say, following that meeting and before I went to see
President Bush, there was quite an intense interaction
on this whole issue that Sir Roderic was raising with me
about smart sanctions, because I needed to get a sense
whether this policy was a -- was really going to be
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But why was the Chief of Defence Staff present at this meeting?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because it was very obvious that the American system certainly wasn't going to rule out military action, and, you know, from a very early stage, I could see coming down the track -- I mean straight after September 11, frankly -- that there were going to be some very difficult decisions about this in the future.

So one of the things that I always tried to do, particularly if we were -- if military action was even a possibility and the paper had made it clear it was a possibility, to get the Chief of the Defence Staff right alongside the discussion and the planning and the policy.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What advice did he give you at that meeting? Because I think you had asked the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary to produce papers.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, the defence --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: These papers were discussed, but what advice did the Chief of the Defence Staff give you at that meeting?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: He was laying out again various options on the military side. He was expressing his views.
I think Mike Boyce told you about this in his evidence.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Mike Boyce doesn't remember being at that meeting, although it is in Alastair Campbell's diary, so I am afraid we don't have that information.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I remember him being at it. As I say, we got the paper from the Ministry of Defence and that was looking at the various options, but, you know, one of the things that was happening at this time, and I think it is quite important to reflect on this, is that this was very quickly becoming the key issue. People were moving on from Afghanistan. It was always going to be on the agenda, once you had September 11, and, as I say, a different sense from everybody that we had to act, and so we had, you know, a perfectly good discussion about it, and obviously I think from the defence point of view, what CDS and the Ministry of Defence were concerned about was to make sure we got alongside any planning that was going on and did it as quickly as possible.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was the Foreign Secretary at that meeting?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I believe he was, but let me go back and check.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Because we heard from Jack Straw about the advice he gave you in advance of that meeting,
which is the one that has already been referred to, but
we have heard that, while there might have been some
private differences at the time between you and the
Foreign Secretary over the desired final objective,
where the regime change was the objective, you were
agreed on the tactics: namely, that it would be
essential to go through the United Nations, because,
without that, it would not be possible for the Cabinet
or anyone else to support military action. Is that
a correct --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, Baroness. I think the other
thing that was very important to me at this time was to
try to get the international community on the same page
with the threat and how we dealt with it.

You know, straight after September 11, people came
together behind America, but I was very aware, right
from the early stages of this, that, although the
American mindset had changed dramatically, and, frankly,
mine had as well, when I talked to other leaders,
particularly in Europe, I didn't get the same impression
really, and so one thing I was really anxious to do,
because we had put together a coalition on Afghanistan,
was to try and put together a coalition again to deal
with Saddam Hussein.

Therefore, the United Nations route, it wasn't just
that it was important for all sorts of political
reasons, legal reasons and so on, it was -- I mean to do
with the internal politics of the UK -- it was also
important to me because I didn't want America to feel
that it had no option but to do it on its own.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Are you saying to me that that was
the kind of agreed policy with which you went to
Crawford? On the eve of Crawford, is that what you
intended to achieve at Crawford?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we intended to achieve at Crawford,
frankly, was to get a real sense from the Americans as
to what they wanted to do, and this would be best done
between myself and President Bush, and really to get
a sense of how our own strategy was going to have to
evolve in the light of that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we then come to Crawford?

Because you had one-to-one discussions with
President Bush without any advisers present. Can you
tell us what was decided at these discussions?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was nothing actually decided, but
let me just make one thing clear about this: one thing
that is really important, I think, when you are dealing
with other leaders, is you establish -- and this is
particularly important, I think, for the Prime Minister
of the United Kingdom and the President of the
United States -- you establish a close and strong
relationship. You know, I had it with President Clinton
and I had it again with President Bush, and that's
important. So some of it you will do in a formal
meeting, but it is also important to be able to discuss
in a very frank way what the issues were.

As I recall that discussion, it was less to do with
specifics about what we were going to do on Iraq or,
indeed, the Middle East, because the Israel issue was
a big, big issue at the time. I think, in fact,
I remember, actually, there may have been conversations
that we had even with Israelis, the two of us, whilst we
were there. So that was a major part of all this.

But the principal part of my conversation was really
to try and say, "Look, in the end we have got to deal
with the various different dimensions of this whole
issue". I mean, for me, what had happened
after September 11 was that I was starting to look at
this whole issue to do with this unrepresentative
extremism within Islam in a different way, and I wanted
to persuade President Bush, but also get a sense from
him as to where he was on that broader issue.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what you are suggesting is that
you were having general discussions in terms of getting
views across to each other, trying to understand and
establish a rapport and a relationship?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but also, frankly --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: During the course of these discussions, do you think you gave many commitments?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The only commitment I gave, and I gave this very openly, at the meeting was a commitment to deal with Saddam.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were at one that you had to deal with --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and that wasn't a private commitment, that was a public one.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were agreed on the ends but not on the means?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were agreed on both, actually, as it came to finally, but we were agreed that we had to confront this issue, that Saddam had to come back into compliance with the international community, and, as I think I said in the press conference with President Bush, the method of doing that is open, and indeed he made the same point.

I just want to make one other point about this. This was about six months from September 11 and one major part of what President Bush was saying to me was just to express his fear, actually, that, if we weren't prepared to act in a really strong way, then we ran the
risk of sending a disastrous signal out to the world.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But there is -- so many people believed that you entered into a firm commitment because some undertakings were given that you would be with him no matter what, whatever the circumstances.

I mean, I think it is important, because these discussions were taking place without anybody being present, to understand what commitments did you make to him and why is there a feeling that this was quite a critical meeting?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I can't explain why people have come to a view that there was some different commitment given, because I read from time to time people saying things that this was what was agreed at this meeting.

What was agreed was actually set out in a very private note from David Manning afterwards, and what I was saying to President Bush -- and I wasn't saying this privately, incidentally, I was saying it publicly -- was: we are going to be with you in confronting and dealing with this threat. There was no -- the one thing I was not doing was dissembling in that position. In fact, I actually have here, at the press conference that President Bush and I gave afterwards, we talked about -- I think Israel actually came up first, but then we went on to Iraq and
President Bush says:

"The Prime Minister and I, of course, talked about Iraq. We both recognised the danger of a man who is willing to kill his own people and harbouring and developing weapons of mass destruction."

It then goes on to say that he has got to effectively prove that he is in compliance, and I then say:

"You know, it has always been our policy that Iraq would be a better place without Saddam. I don't think anybody should be in any doubt about that for all the reasons I have given", and, you know, the reasons are to do with weapons of mass destruction, also deal with the brutality and repression.

So what I say are the reasons are to do with weapons of mass destruction, also to do with the appalling brutality and repression of his own people, but how we proceed in this situation, how we make sure that the threat that is posed by WMD is dealt with. That is a matter that is open.

So -- and I go on to describe the UN Resolutions. So the position was not a covert position, it was an open position, and, of course, what subsequently the debate was about, in July and then in September at the crucial meeting --
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Before we move on to that, that's what you were saying, but what did President Bush understand, do you think, you meant by that? Because we heard from Alastair Campbell the tenor of your correspondence with him, but what was his understanding? What did he take it to mean?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think he took it to mean what I had said both at the press conference and in the meeting, which is that we would be with him in dealing with this threat, and how we dealt with it was an open question, and even at that stage, I was raising the issue of going the UN route.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Your Chief of Staff told us that at Crawford and subsequently you did not set any conditions for Britain's support for the US, but that your approach was to say, "We are with you in terms of what you are trying to do, but this is a sensible way to do it. We are offering you a partnership to try and get to a wide coalition."

But other witnesses who were also involved in the decision-making process have told us that you set a number of clear conditions for our support. Which was it?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was the former. Look, this is an alliance that we have with the United States of America.
It is not a contract. It is not, "We do this for you, you do this for us". It is an alliance and it is an alliance, I say to you very openly, I believe in passionately. I had been through with President Clinton, Kosovo, and just let me emphasise to you, 85 per cent of the assets we used in Kosovo were American assets. I had real difficulty persuading President Clinton that it was right to go all the way on Kosovo, and he was in a really difficult position and it was an immensely courageous decision he took, because the American people were saying to him, "Look, this place is thousands of miles away from America. Let the Europeans deal with it. It is on their doorstep". It is important to understand this.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Sir Christopher Meyer did say you were saying, "Yes, but", but the "but" was not being listened to.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't think he was there at the critical meeting.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But he had correspondence, he was briefed on all of that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He was talking about a wider period in 2002, not just about one meeting.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but the fact is, at that meeting -- and it is, I think, the other evidence that has been
given to you, particularly by David Manning, is very clear about this -- we were setting out a position, and, as I say, that position was not a private position, it was a public position, but I was just explaining about the American line, because it is important and it is important in understanding my thinking on this.

So I had been through this process with President Clinton. When he, with a lot of courage, had committed America. September 11 happened. I never regarded September 11 as an attack on America, I regarded it as an attack on us, and I had said we would stand shoulder to shoulder with them. We did in Afghanistan and I was determined to do that again.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Fine. Now, I think the term used by Jonathan Powell was that you said that, for tactical reasons -- so granted you -- partly for tactical reasons, you set out for the US the issues you believed needed to be tackled for the policy to be pursued successfully, but I think at Crawford you did discuss UK participation in US military planning.

Now, when you discussed that, what conclusions do you think President Bush took from the meeting about your commitment of dealing with Saddam Hussein through military action?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think what he took from that
exactly what he should have taken, which is that, if it
came to military action because there was no way of
dealing with this diplomatically, we would be with him,
and that was absolutely clear, because, as I had set out
publicly, not privately, we had to confront this issue,
it could be confronted by a sanctions framework that was
effective. For the reasons I have given, we didn't have
one. It could be confronted by a UN inspections
framework -- we will come to that -- or, alternatively,
it would have to be confronted by force. I was going
earlier -- but I won't do it, but I'm very happy to make
available the comments I had made, even prior
to September 11 2001, because we had been through this
with Saddam several times, 1997, 1998, and so on and so
forth. You know, the fact is force was always an
option. What changed after September 11 was that, if
necessary, and there was no other way of dealing with
this threat, we were going to remove him.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So would you say that the commitment
that you gave, let's say for tactical reasons, became an
assumption in Washington, and then to some extent that
reduced your leverage for negotiations?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you say -- did you say for tactical
reasons?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That is what Jonathan Powell said.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't so much for tactical reasons.

What I believed was, if you wanted to make a real change
to this whole issue -- again, this is very important to
understanding certainly my strategic thinking, but
I think the strategic thinking of many people who looked
at this issue. I would probably have a far greater
understanding of it today, actually, than even back
then.

What I believed we confronted was a new threat that
was based, not on political ideology, but on religious
fanaticism. It was a complete perversion of the proper
faith of Islam, but it was real and active, and they
demonstrated their intent to kill very large numbers of
us if they possibly could.

What I was trying to set out, not for tactical
reasons, but for deep, strategic reasons, is: what did
we need to do to make a successful assault on this
ideology that was so dangerous? Therefore, the
Middle East peace process for me was not a kind of
tactical thing, it was absolutely fundamental, still is
in my view, to dealing with this issue.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I think Sir Roderic wants to come
in.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said a moment or two ago that you had
agreed with President Bush, not only on the ends but
also on the means, but the Americans actually had
a different view of the means, in that they were already
planning military action, and they had an explicit
policy of seeking regime change.

Did you, at Crawford, actually have a complete
identity of view with President Bush on how to deal with
Saddam?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were of course pushing the UN route.
So the American view was regime change, as I say,
because they didn't believe Saddam would ever, in good
faith, give up his WMD ambitions or programmes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You were insisting, ultimately
successfully, that this should be done through the UN
route. So actually, your view of the means was actually
different from theirs because they would have been
prepared -- they weren’t that keen on the UN route. You
had to persuade them very hard.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did have to persuade them, although
I think it is fair to say that, even at that meeting,
President Bush made it clear that America would have to
adjust policy if Saddam let the inspectors back in and
the inspectors were able to function properly.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another thing --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Incidentally, if I can just point this
out, at several occasions over the next few months,
President Bush made it clear to me that, if the UN route worked, then it worked. We would have had to have taken yes for an answer.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You equally had said to him, as you have just repeated and as Alastair Campbell said earlier, that, if it came to military action and there had been no way of dealing with this diplomatically, that you would be with them.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: If we tried the UN route and it failed, then my view was it had to be dealt with.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will come back to the question of where that left you in terms of your legal base quite a lot later on, because I think it is best that we take that as a single subject in its own right. I think it will be easier for both of us.

Just one more point arising from Crawford, but not just from Crawford. You said -- you reminded us that the Arab/Israel problem was in a very hot state at Crawford. You said you may even have had some conversations with Israelis from there, and obviously it was something that was a large part of your conversations with President Bush.

I think it is right to say -- indeed, Jack Straw said it -- that you were relentless in trying to persuade the Americans to make more and faster progress
on the Middle East peace process. Ultimately,
Jack Straw said it was a matter of huge -- in his
evidence the other day -- it was a matter of huge
frustration that we weren't able to achieve something
which you had been seeking so strongly.

Now, given the support that you were giving to
President Bush, saying, "I stand shoulder to shoulder
with you", why didn't he repay that support by acting
more decisively on the crucial issue of the Middle East
peace process?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, first of all, as I say, I think we
should certainly, in order to understand my mindset,
avoid this language of trading this policy for that
policy. I would not have done Iraq, if I hadn't have
thought it was right, full stop, irrespective of the
Middle East.

However, I believe that resolving the Middle East --
this is what I work on now -- is immensely important,
and I think it was difficult -- and this is something
I have said before on several occasions -- it was
difficult to persuade President Bush, and, indeed,
America actually, that this was such a fundamental
question. The Americans tended to regard these issues
as somewhat separate.

Now, in mitigation of that, we did eventually,
although later than I wanted, get the road map adopted, and the road map was extremely important. Secondly, however -- and, again, I know more about this now probably than I would have known then, because of the work I do now -- I think, truthfully, with the Intifada still raging in Palestine, it would have been pretty difficult to have got this thing back together again.

However, having said that, no, I mean, I was relentless and I was always very frustrated about it, because I believed then, and I believe now, that these are not divisible problems; it is one problem with different facets, and one major facet of the whole problem is this Israel/Palestine conflict. Not because, incidentally, the existence of Israel has provoked this conflict. I totally disagree with people who say that. But the resolution of the conflict would have an enormously beneficial impact on relations with the Muslim world.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think, if I recall rightly, you were arguing very strongly throughout 2002 to the White House that making progress on this problem -- as you say, it wasn't a question of a trade-off, it was because achieving progress on this was going to make a huge difference to opinion in the region, to reactions in the region, to the reactions in the Muslim world if it came
to the point where you had to take military action
against Iraq.
So, as you have just said, these two things were
linked together, but the Americans were not able to see
the logic of this in the same way?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, it was a debate that continued,
and I think, you know, you have got a point actually,
Sir Roderic. I think that they never -- this is
something -- I think it is different with the American
system now, and I think it was different actually at the
end of President Bush's time, in fact. The reason he
launched the Annapolis peace process was because of
this.
But I think there was a tendency to see these things
separately, and I regarded them, as I say, as all part
of the one thing, and, you know, yes, I mean, I said
this at the time and I would say it now -- I mean,
I wished we would have made better and faster progress
on the Israel --
SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you didn't make it a pre-condition
with Bush?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, because it wouldn't be right to do
that either. You should only take the action in respect
of Iraq if you think it is intrinsically valid in its
own terms.
Having said that, my whole construct was to get as broad a coalition as possible, and I thought that if we managed to get the peace process really pushing forward, we were more likely to get a broader and deeper coalition.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But surely you must have said to him, "Look, this thing is only really going to have a chance of working well if we can make this progress down the Arab/Israel track before we get there"?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well I was certainly saying to him, "I think this is vital", and I mean, this was -- you could describe me as a broken record through that period, and actually, after September 11, I think that straight after September 11, again in the statement to the House of Commons in the speech I made to my party conference at the end of September 2001, you know, I had and I have a view.

It is why I think, if we want to deal with Iran today -- and you have got very similar issues to the ones we are discussing here, which is why learning the lessons of this is so important -- again, in my view, we are far better placed to deal with Iran if the Israel/Palestine issue is moving forward.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But was President Bush just then taking it for granted? When you said, "This is vital", was he
just taking it for granted that we were going to support
him on Iraq anyway? We were beginning now to join them
in military planning, you said you were going to stand
shoulder to shoulder with him, and so we would be there
anyway, even if he didn't push hard and get the progress
that you were asking for on the Arab/Israel question?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you say we would have been there
anyway, I mean, we were wanting to go down the UN route,
and I think, if we hadn't gone down the UN route, it
would have been very difficult indeed.
However, in respect of the Israel/Palestine issue,
you know, it is there and in the record, as to how
important I thought it was. To be fair to him, he would
say that getting the Israelis to agree to the road
map -- admittedly, this didn't happen until, I think,
April 2003 -- was a major step forward, and it was
a major step forward. It is still the governing
document for the peace process today, and I can assure
you it was a big push to get that agreed, me with him,
and him with the Israelis.

But there was also -- as I say, the Intifada was
going on, the Intifada being the uprising on the
Palestinian side. So Israel was -- you know, it was
a difficult situation. Israel was losing a lot of
people in terrorist attacks, there were retaliations
against the Palestinians. There was a very bloody situation.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: This was obviously inflaming emotions in the region, so when it actually came to the time that the coalition took action, did this disappointing lack of progress, notwithstanding the belated publications of the route map -- how much of an element was that in the difficult reactions, from the coalition's point of view in the region, and in the Muslim world, to the action that was actually taken? How much did it contribute, do you think?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is a difficult question. I don't know that it fundamentally would have altered things.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But if I put it the other way round, it would have been much better if you had got that progress?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That was why I was arguing for it at the time. But, having said that, I think that, had we -- once the conflict occurred and gone into Iraq, had we been able at that point to drive forward, I think that issue would have been taken care of and just to say really, because I may not get another chance to say it, about the reactions of Arab leaders in the region: most of them were glad to see the back of Saddam.

Now, what they worried about was the consequences of
doing so, but there was no great support. In fact, when, as he is now, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, when he was then the Crown Prince, had launched the Arab peace initiative in 2002, I think Saddam was the one leader to come out and denounce him. He paid monies to the families of the Palestinian suicide bombers. I mean, he was a menace on the Middle East peace process too.

But, having said all of that, yes, of course, it would have been better if we had the Middle East peace process moving forward. The only thing I say in defence of President Bush was that it was a very difficult moment in that process. If you were trying to do it today, it would have been a lot easier than 2002, right in the middle of the Intifada.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was pretty disappointing to you that we couldn't push that one further down the road?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was always disappointed and frustrated on this.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think this is probably the right moment to take a break. If we break now and maybe come back at just about five past.

(10.47 am)

(Short break)

(11.10 am)
THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you everyone. Let's resume and I'll ask Baroness Prashar to open the questions.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

Mr Blair, before the break, you said that the military options were discussed at Crawford.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was obviously a possibility that military action would be the outcome of what was going to happen, and so there was a general discussion of the possibility of going down the military route, but, obviously, we were arguing very much for that to be if the UN route failed.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I think, for reasons we will come to later, you were being pressed by the Ministry of Defence to decide in autumn 2002 what scale of package the UK would be prepared to contribute in the event of military action.

I think we have also heard that there were essentially four possible military packages under consideration, with the main discussion focused on the two larger possible packages, the key issue being whether we should contribute an armoured division.

I think your Chief of Staff told us that the MoD had advocated the largest package, the large land force option, because they felt this was important to their relations with the US military, and also because they
felt it would help army morale.

As you well know, a decision to commit troops to battle, put individual soldiers in harm's way, cannot be taken lightly. How do you weigh the risks of troops involved in a large-scale land operation as opposed to one of the other packages against the advice you were getting about the importance of military relations with the US and the morale?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Baroness, the first thing to do is to work out whether you believe that you are right to be in this at all. Then the next question is: if you are right to be in it, what is your level of support?

On any occasion -- and I ended up on several occasions taking military action -- Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq -- the first thing I do, in a sense, is to say to the military themselves --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we be specific about Iraq, because I'm asking: how did you weigh up the risks to the troops involved in the situation in Iraq?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: As I was just explaining, when I come to take this decision, the very first thing I do is I ask the military for their view, and their view in this instance was that they were up for doing it and that they preferred to be right at the centre of things. That, actually -- I'm not hiding behind them, because
that was my view too. I thought, if it was right for us
to be in it, we should be in it there alongside our
principal ally, the United States, I thought that in
Afghanistan and I thought that in Iraq also.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was your view too, so you were
at one with what you were being advised on?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did President Bush at any stage
request a particular form of scale of the UK
contribution.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. He very much left this to us, to
decide what we wanted to do, but I had taken a view that
this was something that, if it was right to do, actually
it mattered to have Britain there and it mattered not
simply for reasons to do with --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It mattered, but did the scale
matter? Because there were different ways in which we
could have contributed, but did it have to be on the
large scale that we committed ourselves to?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It didn't have to be. You could have
chosen one of the other two options. There were three
basic options.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why did you choose -- you were
advised, but you were of that view. Why were you of
that view?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because, if you believe it is right and you are going to do it, my view was that it is best for Britain to be in there, right alongside, and I say that because I regarded this whole issue as a threat to our security, as well as a threat to the security of the United States of America.

It is not simply that I valued the alliance, although I do value the alliance. As I always say to people: you can distance yourself from America, if you want to, but you will find it is a long way back. I believe it is a vital part of our security, and I also believe this: if we think it is right, we should be prepared to play our part fully.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the reasons given by the Chief of Defence Staff was about the relations and the morale. Was there a question of how much influence we would be able to exercise if we contributed on a large scale?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't so much that. It is a matter of common sense, obviously. If you are there with a bigger force alongside the Americans than otherwise, then, of course, you will be more intimately involved, but that's not really the reason.

The reason was to say: here we have this situation, in which we believe there is a threat, America believes there is a threat, we are going to act jointly. We have
acted jointly before, we are going to act jointly again, and it does in part derive from the importance that certainly I attach, and I hope the country does, to the American alliance, and also to the fact that our armed forces -- and the thing that is extraordinary about them and magnificent about them, they are prepared to do the difficult things.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you are saying it was driven by your sense of what was the proper UK contribution to policy?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Influence wasn't an important part of it?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: You didn't, and shouldn't, do it for influence. Although, as I say, it stands to reason, if you are making a bigger contribution, you are going to have more of a say.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Right. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Usha. Perhaps I can turn now to Sir Martin Gilbert. Martin?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Mr Blair, I would like to turn now to the issue of weapons of mass destruction. Once you decided, in 2002, that it was essential to pursue the UN route, it was weapons of mass destruction rather than human rights or any other issue that became
crucial in building the case and establishing a legal base for military action.

We have been told by earlier witnesses that the information available to you on Iraq's WMD in early 2002 showed that the WMD programmes, Saddam Hussein's WMD programmes, had changed very little since 1998 and also came with strong caveats about their reliability.

Was that your understanding?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, the principal intelligence -- I think this has been disclosed in the Butler Inquiry -- in March 2002, was that our knowledge was "sporadic" and "patchy", I think were the words, but it went on to say, "but it is clear that Saddam continues his programme".

Sir Martin, can I just say one thing, though, in respect again of this? Because it somewhat troubles me this, this absolutely -- as I say, almost binary distinction between regime change and WMD.

It was always relevant to me, because I think that it gives -- it gives a different sense of the threat of the nature of Saddam's regime. The fact that there were, on some accounts, a million casualties in the Iran/Iraq war, 100,000 Kurds that had been killed, 100,000 killed by political killing, we had had the Kuwait situation where, again, tens of thousands died. The actual use of chemical weapons against his own
people. So I think it is always important to remember from my perspective the nature of the regime did make a difference to the nature of the WMD threat.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That actually is my next question, and I put it in a slightly different way, that: given the information available to you, and given these caveats, was there no other aspect of the Iraqi regime that you felt could serve as a better basis for the UN route, as a better basis for the legality of action?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: You mean --

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of all the things that you had described in your speeches and about Saddam's brutality and what you were saying just now about his use of WMD on Kurds, on Shia?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think I actually said -- it may be in the Chicago speech, or it may be elsewhere -- that there are many regimes that I would like to see the back of, but you can't just go through, I am afraid, and remove all the dictatorships. People often used to say me about Mugabe in Zimbabwe and the Burma regime and so on, but you have to have a basis that is about a security threat.

So, yes, you are absolutely right, that -- my assessment of the security threat was intimately connected with the nature of the regime.
I don't know whether the members of the Committee understand this, but when you actually read the descriptions of what happened when Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons in the Halabja village, and by some accounts as many as 5,000 people died through chemical weapons, there are people in Iraq today still suffering the consequence of that, to me that indicated a mindset that was horrific.

It is horrific whether or not he then uses weapons of mass destruction, but if there is any possibility of him ever acquiring them or using them, it is a mindset that indicates this is a profoundly wicked -- I would say almost psychopathic man. We were obviously worried that, after him, his two sons seemed to be as bad, if not worse. So yes, it is absolutely true, this definitely impacted on our thinking.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So you were contrasting in a way what was known about Saddam's past use of WMD. You were sort of giving that a weight and not giving the same weight to the doubts and caveats about the actual situation in early 2002?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I would say very much that we did give weight to that, and that's why, by the time you get to September 2002, you have got a lot more information. But it is one of the things that is most difficult
sometimes, because people look at this in the light of what we know now. Saddam and weapons of mass destruction was not a counter-intuitive notion. You know, he had used them, he definitely had them. He was in breach of, I think, ten United Nations Resolutions on them, and so, in a sense, it would have required quite strong evidence the other way to have been doubting the fact that he had this programme.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Sir Lawrence Freedman will be asking you in a moment about the September dossier, but I would like to just move on for the moment to another aspect, and that is -- you said on a number of occasions in 2002, and, indeed, in early 2003, that Iraq was a test of the international community's ability to deal with both WMD and terrorism. If I could just quote from your monthly press conference on 18 February 2003:

"The stance that the world takes now against Saddam is not just vital in its own right, it is a huge test of our seriousness in dealing with the twin threats of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism."

Can you tell us how you saw those links, and, again, what evidence you had that there were links? Because, as you know, the Butler Committee has established that there weren't direct links at that time between Saddam and Al-Qaeda.
The link was, in my mind, at that time, this: that there was a proliferation threat that was potentially growing, because we had Iran, we had North Korea, we had Libya, we had Iraq, obviously. I would put a lot of emphasis on the AQ Khan activities. My fear was -- and I would say I hold this fear stronger today than I did back then as a result of what Iran particularly today is doing. My fear is that states that are highly repressive or failed, the danger of a WMD link is that they become porous, they construct all sorts of different alliances with people and, yes, it is true we did not have evidence that Saddam was, for example, behind the September 11 attacks, and part of the difference between ourselves and the Americans was we were always saying we don't accept that.

It is interesting -- and this is referred to in the Butler Report, however, that actually Zarqawi did go into Iraq, in fact, prior to the invasion. Now, when I look -- because I spent a lot of time obviously out in the region today. When I look at the way that Iran today links up with terror groups -- and this is a different topic for a different day, but I would say that a large part of the destabilisation in the Middle East at the present time comes from Iran. The link between Iran, having nuclear weapons
capability, and those types of terrorist organisations,
it is the combination of that that makes them
particularly dangerous.

So you are absolutely right, Sir Martin. We were in
a position back then where we were actually saying to
the Americans, "Look, Saddam and Al-Qaeda are two
separate things", but I always worried that at some
point these things would come together. Not Saddam and
Al-Qaeda simply, but the notion of states proliferating
WMD and terrorist groups. I still think that is a major
risk today.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were there indications in the
information you were getting that there were links, if
not between Al-Qaeda and Saddam, but there were somehow
links between other terrorist organisations and him and
his potential WMD?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was obviously Saddam and the
funding of Palestine -- the families of Palestinian
suicide bombers, and so on.

I think what’s very interesting -- and we will come
on to this later, but when you actually look at what
happened in Iraq and what happens, indeed, in
Afghanistan today, what happens in Yemen today, Somalia,
many different countries round the region, there are
very strong links between terrorist organisations and
states that will support or sponsor them.

The reason why I think this is a particular danger today is because there are these states, Iran in particular, that are linked to this extreme and, in my view, misguided view about Islam. So we still face this threat today, in my view, very powerfully.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Finally, in 2002, did you feel that this terror/WMD link was also a potential threat to the United Kingdom?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, because for the reasons that I have given, I think that these, as it happened before, if Saddam, freed from sanctions, was able to pursue WMD programmes, I was very sure that at some point we were going to be involved in the consequences of that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I just want to follow up this question. You have mentioned quite a lot about Iran. You were reminded before the break about President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in which Iran was mentioned along with North Korea, as well as Iraq.

I believe -- I think it's clearly in the documents and elsewhere -- that in presentations of the problem of WMD, certainly when you get to the nuclear issue, Iran, Libya, North Korea, were put far ahead of Iraq. So given what you are saying about the Iran issue now,
I wonder why Iraq was chosen rather than Iran?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely because they were the ones in breach of UN Resolutions. If you wanted -- I think I said this at the time. If you wanted to start somewhere on WMD, you started with the person who had used them and you started with the person who was in breach of UN Resolutions.

Now, we decided to take a very, very strong view on this back then, and, as a result of that, countries actually, I think, did adapt their behaviour, at least for a time. Iran certainly did change its behaviour to begin with in relevant of its nuclear weapons programme, Libya, as you know, at the end of 2003, gave up its WMD programme.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That had a long history before.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I had been working on this from President Clinton's time, but I think it is fair to say --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: They had been rumbled on the AQ Khan network.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: They had been rumbled on the AQ Khan network, but it was interesting, when they finally gave it up, and it was at the end of 2003, we then discovered that they actually had a more extensive programme than we had thought, and I think AQ Khan at some point within
the next couple of years was then put under house arrest. North Korea went back into six party talks.

One of the things that is most difficult in this whole area, is people sometimes say to me today, "It is not Iraq, it is Afghanistan", or someone else says, "It is Pakistan", or someone else says "It is Iran". Today, now -- yesterday, we had a conference on Yemen. I am afraid my view is they are all part of one picture.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I just want to clarify, because it is quite important what you have just said.

As I understand it, you basically said, of course, there were a number of countries that were serious threats and were further ahead, particularly on the nuclear side, indeed much further ahead, as it now turns out, on the nuclear side.

What was important about Iraq was we had a route to get at them through the United Nations. So it was partly for the exemplary effect that we had the route to deal with it, rather than necessarily it was the most important. In other circumstances, you might have got to deal, say, with Iraq.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had to deal with all of them, but you are absolutely right, the reason why we focused on Iraq was of the history of UN Resolutions being breached and also -- and I think this is a pretty important point --
he had used them. Probably not merely his own people,
but thousands of people in the Iran/Iraq war.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, and you have also indicated
that what had changed since 9/11 was the calculus more
than the specifics of intelligence. You now think you
can go down the UN route to get Iraq by focusing on the
weapons of mass destruction.

Does that not make the specifics of the intelligence
on WMD more important than if it was just sort of part
of this broader sense of the dangers of regime?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's absolutely correct, Sir Lawrence,
and that's why it was important obviously -- we came
under pressure in the lead-up to the publication of the
dossier in September 2002. We came under enormous
pressure to say what is our intelligence actually
telling us.

That's why, between March 2002 and the actual
publication on 24 September 2002, we had further
intelligence reports, and obviously the Joint
Intelligence Committee was incredibly active during that
period in assessing what the threat was and the evidence
was.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This leads us naturally to
the September dossier. We have heard a lot in these
hearings about the origins of the production of the
dossier, and I don't want to go into all of that now, but two issues do stand out: the particular question of the 45-minute claim; and the more general assertion that the intelligence was beyond doubt.

The 45-minute claim is very specific and very controversial. Is it fair to say that the intelligence referred to chemical, possibly biological, munitions for short-range battlefield use, but that specificity was lost in the document?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is absolutely right that that was what it was to do with. In respect of the 45 minutes, as you know -- and it is just worth pointing out. This was a headline I think in the Evening Standard newspaper the next day.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the Sun and the Express.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I have said on many occasions, not least to the Butler Inquiry, it would have been better to have corrected it in the light of the significance it later took on, but can I just point one thing out,

Sir Lawrence: she did an analysis between the publication of the dossier on 24 September 2002 and the BBC broadcast at the end of May 2003, which alleged that we, Downing Street, had inserted this into the dossier, probably knowing it was wrong. Then, of course, obviously that then kicked off a huge controversy that
goes on to this day.

Between September 2002 and the end of May 2003 there were 40,000 written Parliamentary questions on Iraq; it was mentioned twice. There were 5,000 oral questions; it was not mentioned at all. In the 18 March nobody mentions it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I can think of a speech by Jack Straw in February where he does mention it.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: All I'm saying is --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I appreciate --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- ex post facto this has taken on a far greater significance than it ever did at the time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it has taken on that significance possibly because it is taken as an indication of how evidence that may be pointed was given even more point in the way that the dossier was written.

So there is a question about its impact, and we may agree that it was an immediate impact that then declined, but the fact of the way that it was developed and reported was misleading. It suggested that it was something more than battlefield munitions.

Did you understand the difference between the 45 minutes relating to battlefield munitions and, say, a long-range missile?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I didn't focus on it a great deal at the
time, because it was mentioned by me, and then, as I say, it was never actually mentioned again by me.

As I indicated to the Butler Inquiry, in the light of what subsequently happened and the importance it subsequently took on, it would have most certainly been better to have corrected it.

However, if I could just make this point about the -- you know, where you quite rightly say, of course it is not surprising it takes on significance because of all the controversy, quite rightly, over the intelligence that was wrong. It was for that very reason that we held the Hutton Inquiry, which was a six-month Inquiry, precisely into whether we had inserted this from Downing Street into the dossier, and of course we didn't, and the JIC was the --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it has been established that, in that sense, the dossier wasn't doctored by any improper insertion of false intelligence. It is more a question of how a particular bit of intelligence was interpreted and presented, losing its specificity and gaining a broader meaning.

So just to clarify from what you said, you seem to be saying that you hadn't actually paid a lot of attention to this, so that, when it appeared in the foreword -- the phrase is well-known about the
45 minutes -- you weren't particularly aware yourself that you were saying something that went beyond what the intelligence would really allow?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct, and as I say, I mentioned it, I think, in my statement of 24 September, but I mentioned it without any great emphasis and I mentioned it, I think, in reasonably sensible terms.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have already mentioned, not just the Standard, but a number of newspaper reports the next day headlined this. It wasn't just a question of it appearing as one part of a long discussion. Presumably, at this point, it must have struck you that something had hit home. Were you at all concerned that in a issue of such moment that intelligence -- intelligence of a certain nature was getting an exaggerated sense of importance?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: You know, the thing that strikes me most now, when you go back and look at the dossier and how it was received, it was actually received as somewhat dull and cautious at the time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, we have been told.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It really assumed a vastly greater importance at a later time, precisely because of the allegation, which was an extraordinarily serious one, that we, Downing Street, had deliberately falsified the
intelligence, which of course we hadn't.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The importance of the dossier, of course, is in terms, in part, of its immediate political impact, and no doubt you are right to say that -- the general view that this was telling us what we already knew, but if it was, it was saying quite important; that we had detailed intelligence on Iraqi WMD that led you to certain conclusions, and, therefore, in a sense, if it was considered old news, it was because you had already been successful in establishing that point of view.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't think it was us that were successful in establishing that point of view. I think you would have been hard pushed to have found virtually anybody who doubted he had WMD and a WMD capability and programme, because we had been through this whole saga, ten years of military action.

As I say, I took the first military action in respect of Baghdad with President Clinton in 1998. So it wasn't that so much, and, incidentally, I just point out that in the statement with the dossier, which I think, to be frank, it was the statement people would have heard rather than the foreword, I actually say specifically:

"'Why now?' people ask. I agree, I cannot say that
this month or next, even this year or next, Saddam will use his weapons."

So the issue was not he is about to launch an attack --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I appreciate that. What I'm trying to get at is the quality of the intelligence, because just to take an example, President Chirac, certainly in September 2002, seemed to believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, but I think he also said, "But I have seen no proof".

The issue that is now important because you have decided to go down the UN route, is that that detail is going to be tested. Indeed, you had a press conference with President Yeltsin (sic) in October, where he said he didn't believe in it, and you said, "Well, that's for the inspectors to find out". I think you did.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I was merely reflecting on the fact that there was a whole issue to do with Russia and its view of how to proceed.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is indeed an issue, but the point -- just to keep focused on it at the moment -- is that the actual quality of the intelligence that the British had and the Americans had was more important about whether this was a shared assumption, because we were now proposing, or you were hoping, indeed, as the
dossier was published, the President had promised to take this through the UN route. So the quality of the information was important.

This brings us to the -- it has been pointed out to me I said "Yeltsin" rather than "Putin".

This is important -- we get to the foreword. You said in the foreword that:

"The assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt that Iraq has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons."

Now, you have already mentioned the JIC reports about "patchy", "sporadic", "limited", et cetera. Given that, was it wise to say that intelligence is ever beyond doubt? Wasn't this setting yourself up for a higher standard of proof than it might be possible to sustain?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think what I said in the foreword was that I believed it was beyond doubt. What:

"What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons."

I did believe it. I think that was the -- and I did believe it, frankly, beyond doubt.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Beyond your doubt, but beyond anybody's doubt?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: If you -- if I had taken, for example, the words out of -- even the 9 March 2002 or the March 2002 JIC assessment, it said, "It was clear that ..."

Now, if I said, "It was clear that" in the foreword, rather than "I believe, beyond doubt", it would have had the same impact. I actually think now -- and this is, incidentally, I think, a lesson that came out of the Butler Inquiry but I think it is relevant to this as well, and I said this at the time, now, I would take government right out of this altogether. I would simply have published, if the intelligence services had been willing, the JIC assessment, because they were absolutely strong enough on their own, and if you look at the dossier itself -- and, of course, the dossier itself, if you just take the executive summary -- I mean, I won't go through and read it, but this executive summary wasn't drawn up by me. It was drawn up by the Joint Intelligence Committee and they did it perfectly justifiably on the information they had before them.

It is hard to come to any other conclusion than that this person has a continuing WMD programme, and I mean, we will come at a later point in this to the issue of what the truth was about Saddam, because the
Iraq Survey Group, which is, in my view, an extremely important document, has actually resolved the conundrum and the riddle of what Saddam was up to, and we therefore can see what happened.

But if you go back to that time, if you read the executive summary and the information that follows, I can't see how anyone could come to a different conclusion.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is possibly a problem, maybe another lesson. Intelligence is often described as joining up the dots, because your information is limited, and there was a very powerful hypothesis that allowed you to join up the dots in a particular way, but there were alternative hypotheses and they were around at the time. So it is partly a question almost of due diligence. Was there a challenge to the intelligence? Are you absolutely sure that there isn't another way of explaining all this material?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you are Prime Minister and the JIC is giving this information, you have got to rely on the people doing it, with experience and with commitment and integrity, as they do. Of course, now, with the benefit of hindsight, we look back on the situation differently.

But let me say what was troubling me at the time was -- supposing we put it the other way round and it
was correct and I wasn't going to act on it, that was
the thing that worried me, and when I talked earlier
about the calculus of risk changing after
September 11th, it is really, really important, I think,
to understand this, so far as understanding the decision
I took, and, frankly, would take again: if there was any
possibility that he could develop weapons of mass
destruction, we should stop him. That was my view.
That was my view then and it's my view now.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this is a different standard to
the one that you are going to have to take to the
United Nations, and we will come to that in a moment.

Just to conclude on this for the moment, because we
have other questions to get to, I just want to put to
you -- and this is a comment made to us by
Sir David Omand -- he observed that:

"SIS overpromised and underdelivered."

In some ways were you too trusting of some of the
material you were getting?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The most difficult thing, when you are
faced with a situation like this, is that it all depends
what happens afterwards as to how people regard your
behaviour at the time, and I have also been in
situations where, for example, when we had the July 2005
bombings, where people were saying, "Well, look at this
So your worry is not simply: is the intelligence correct, so that I can act? Your worry is also: if it is correct, what am I going to do about it? So I don't disagree with you at all. I think these things obviously now look quite different and, as I say, the Iraq Survey Group has resolved some of these riddles, frankly, as to what Saddam was up to.

But I think it was at least reasonable for me at the time, given this evidence and given what the Joint Intelligence Committee were telling me, to say, "This is a threat that we should take very seriously."

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Finally just on this point, I think the Butler Committee referred to group think as a phenomenon which is quite well-known in these sort of discussions where the hypotheses that we have talked about is reinforced.

Did you get a sense that the intelligence community were also reinforcing your hypotheses as well as moving in the other direction?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I certainly got a sense that they were. I think John Scarlett, in his evidence to you, explained about he was firming up the assessments he made. But
when we actually came to the November UN Resolution, in fact nobody disputed the issue of Saddam's WMD. People disputed what we should do about it, we can come on to all of that. But it really wasn't something that people disputed at the time, and, you know, it is just interesting, I was looking back over the debates that we had on the publication of the dossier and just recognising that -- of course, everyone now has a different perception of this, but at the time there were people saying to me, "I don't want military action under any set of circumstances". There were also people saying, "You are wasting time. You are not acting fast enough".

For example, in the statement on the dossier of 24 September 2002, William Hague says:

"Does the Prime Minister recollect that in a half century of various states acquiring nuclear capabilities, in almost every case their ability to do so has been greatly underestimated and understated by intelligence sources. Estimates today of Iraq taking several years to acquire a nuclear device should be seen in that context within that margin of error, and, given that --"

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Firstly, could you go more slowly and, secondly, there is a difference between a statement
being made by a member of the opposition, and it is clear that the opposition at the time did take the threat very seriously.

I come back to -- and I'm going to stop at this point: by going to the UN, where the pressure would be for the inspectors to test this out, a higher standard of proof was now going to be required for these assertions. It was not good enough to have reasonable confidence on the basis of Saddam's past behaviour, but you really did now have to be very sure of your case.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. Of course we should have been very sure of our case. All I'm saying is that all the intelligence we received in, even after the September dossier, was to the same effect, that it wasn't against that.

The reason I simply was -- I won't -- I'll spare the stenographer and not go back over reading out the quotes. What I'm saying to you, however, is that there were people, perfectly justifiably and sensibly, also saying -- and this gives you some idea of the context of the time, "Look, you can't sit around and wait for this. You know, you have got to take action and to take action clearly and definitively", and so one of the most difficult aspects of all of this in Iraq is that people often say to political leaders, quite understandably,
"Listen to the people", and what you find in circumstances of great controversy is that actually there are different views, and in the end you have to decide, and I decided that this intelligence justified our considering Saddam as a significant and continuing WMD threat and that we had to act on it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, I think Sir Martin --

THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Could I just make a couple of quick requests to try to help us understand the, "Why Iraq? Why now?" questions?

Obviously we, like you, have read through the assessments of the JIC. Was the intelligence telling that you the WMD threat from Iraq was growing?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was telling me that in two respects, because I know you have asked other witnesses about this and I just want to make this clear as to why I believed it was growing.

First of all, there were the September JIC assessments that talked of continuing production of chemical weapons. In other words, this was a continuing process. But secondly -- and this did have an impact on me at the time, although this particular piece of intelligence turned out later to be wrong, but at the time, obviously, we didn't know that -- on 12 September,
in other words, after the 9 September JIC assessment but before we did the dossier, I was told and specifically briefed about these mobile production facilities for biological weapons. So this was an additional and new factor and this was very much linked to whether and how Saddam might conceal his activities.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In terms of his nuclear programme?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: In terms of the nuclear programme, what was set out in the dossier, and set out in very detailed form, incidentally, were all the different items that he had been trying to procure, which could indicate a continuing interest in nuclear weapons.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it would have taken quite a long time to get from that point to having a useable nuclear weapon.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Here is the problem, Sir Roderic, and we face again exactly the same problem in Iran today. If you say to people, "How long will it take them to get --"

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Iran is much further down the track.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There are debates about that, actually, but if you ask people about the nuclear weapons capability, for example, in respect of Iraq, some people would say, "Yes, if they are doing it on their own, it is going to take significant amount of time, but you can
foreshorten that time if you buy in the material".

So one of the reasons -- and I emphasise again this whole proliferation issue and AQ Khan in particular -- was that it always worried me that any of these countries, if they were so minded, could step up very quickly and get --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is these "ifs", isn't it? When Sir Martin Gilbert asked you about threat to the United Kingdom, you said that if Saddam, freed from sanctions, were to have been able to pursue WMD programmes, you were pretty sure that the United Kingdom would have been involved, in which obviously you are right.

But hadn't, at the time we are talking about, Saddam -- he hadn't been freed from sanctions or from a pretty effective arms embargo or from all the other apparatus of deterrence, and other countries, which were just as opposed to the idea of Saddam having WMD as us, and many of which were much closer to Iraq, clearly didn't agree that military action was needed or justified by the level of threat at that time. So they didn't accept the "Why Iraq? Why now?" questions, or at least they didn't give two yes's to that. I'm trying to work out why you did and they didn't.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There is a judgment you have to make,
and you are right in saying, "If this and if that", but you see, for me, because of the change after September 11, I wasn't prepared to run that risk. I really wasn't prepared to take the risk --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's up to them, but my view, the view of the US, I think the view of many other countries -- after all, when the Iraq action took place, half of the members of the European Union were also with America, Japan was with America, South Korea was with America, but I think there is an interesting point, I think you are absolutely right to raise the judgment. In the end, this is what it is.

As I sometimes say to people, this isn't about a lie or a conspiracy or a deceit or a deception, it is a decision, and the decision I had to take was, given Saddam's history, given his use of chemical weapons, given the over 1 million people whose deaths he had causes, given ten years of breaking UN Resolutions, could we take the risk of this man reconstituting his weapons programmes, or is that a risk it would be irresponsible to take?

I formed the judgment, and it is a judgment in the end. It is a decision. I had to take the decision, and I believed, and in the end so did the Cabinet, so did
Parliament incidentally, that we were right not to run
that risk, but you are completely right, in the end,
what this is all about are the risks.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The reason why it is so important, the
point you have made, is because, today, we are going to
be faced with exactly the same types of decisions and we
are going to have to make that judgment on risk, and my
judgment -- it may be other people don't take this view,
and that's for the leaders of today to decide -- my
judgment is you don't take any risks with this issue.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have made that, I think, very clear.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Martin?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have one more question of
intelligence. At the time of the September dossier,
were there aspects of Iraq's WMD programme that you knew
of that could not be revealed to the public at that
time?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think practically everything that was
relevant to this was in the JIC statement, you know, the
actual body of the dossier. So I can't think of
specific items, but there were various things.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the growing threat, this
was something which essentially rested upon the
information that was published in the dossier?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, and in particular the information that came in shortly before the dossier was published.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We are going to come shortly to the question of military planning. But I would like, before we do, to put a rather more general question to you about presentation of government policy in 2002.

When you were asked from mid-2002 whether the UK was preparing for possible military action, your public statements suggested that it was not; for example, you told the House of Commons Liaison Committee in July 2002, when they asked, "Are we preparing for possible military action against Iraq?" you replied, "No, there are no decisions that have been taken about military action", but we have heard from other witnesses that, while no operational decisions were taken on military action, a whole range of decisions were being taken about military options, including, of course, joint planning with the United States on a contingency basis.

My question is: would it not have been reasonable for you, and indeed expedient, to have explained publicly, much earlier than you did, that while the UK hoped for a peaceful outcome in disarming Saddam Hussein, we were also preparing for all eventualities including military action?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is a perfectly fair point, I think, Sir Martin. Let me just explain our problem, though. We had not decided we would take military action at that point. On the other hand, you couldn't say it wasn't a possibility. You know, in the part you have just read out, you will notice I choose the words quite carefully. I say, "No, no decisions have been taken", and the trouble was people kept writing, "They have decided. They are off on a military campaign and nothing is going to stop them".

So we were in this difficulty that, had I said -- and maybe, in retrospect, it is better just to say it -- but, had I said, "Yes, we are doing military planning", our fear was people would push you into a position where you appeared to be on a kind of irreversible path to military action, and that wasn't our position. Our position was we wanted to get America down the UN route and get a resolution through the United Nations.

Now, because it was so obvious with the history of this that you couldn't be sure that the United Nations route was going to work -- in fact, the likelihood is that it wouldn't -- nonetheless we had to do military planning for it.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yet several military witnesses have told us that the need for this secrecy was proving quite
an impediment to various aspects of preparation. Didn't you have the skill to explain to Parliament what you have just said to me, that we were still determined on the UN route and a peaceful resolution?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Parliament can be quite a tricky forum in which to engage in a nuanced exercise, is my experience after ten years of Prime Minister's Questions, but it is a perfectly fair point, and actually, towards the end of October, I think Geoff Hoon said to me, "You have got to come and take certain decisions".

I do want to emphasise this, because it is very important: if at any point the military had said, "Look, you are really going to inhibit our ability to do this if we can't have visible planning", then obviously -- and that's what happened in October -- we would have had to have changed that, but my worry was you are going to be in a situation where people assume that which has not, in fact, been decided.

So we had to, for prudent and sensible reasons, carry on doing this military planning. We were doing it kind of as much as we could under the radar, as it were, but I can't frankly say it made much difference in the end, so it is a perfectly fair point you are making.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to now move on to diplomacy.

Now, we have had a lot of evidence on the negotiation of Resolution 1441, clearly getting President Bush to agree to go to the United Nations was game changer in many ways because it meant that your basic need in taking it forward in British politics had been met. It had had to go through the United Nations. We have heard a lot about the difficulties of the negotiations, the work of Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and so on, and we have been through the resolution itself in what some might say is arcane detail. So we have done all of that.

I would like, therefore, to fast forward, if I may, to your meeting with President Bush in Washington on 31 January 2003. Was your main objective at that meeting to convince the President that, just as you had convinced him that it was important to go through the UN to get the first resolution, that now it was necessary to get a second resolution?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. The second resolution was obviously going to make life a lot easier politically in every respect. The difficulty was this: that 1441 had been very clear -- and I know you have gone through this in enormous detail with Peter Goldsmith, but just to emphasise the point, it was a very strong resolution.
It declared Iraq was in material breach, it said that it had fully and unconditionally and immediately to cooperate and cooperate with the inspectors and so on.

It was a strong resolution. It specifically mentioned the previous resolutions, 678, 687 and so on.

But, as you have heard, the truth is there was an unresolved issue, because some people -- some countries obviously wanted to come back and only have a decision for action with a specific UN Resolution specifically mandating that action. We took the view that that was not necessary, but, obviously, politically, it would have been far easier.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sir Roderic will be talking to you later about the legal case, but perhaps just to note from the evidence we heard from Lord Goldsmith, the last advice you had from him, before you went off from Washington, was that, at that time, he believed that the legal position was that we did need a second resolution.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct. So there was that issue as well and that was another reason why getting a second resolution would have been important, although Peter was not, I don't think, saying that that resolution had to be in those terms, but that we needed to come back for a further decision, as it were.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A further decision. Exactly.
We have also heard from Jack Straw that politically at home it seemed to be important to get it because it would make life easier for you and the Parliamentary party and the Cabinet and so on.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What was the President's view of the need for a second resolution?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: President Bush's view and the view of the entire American system was that, by that time, Saddam had been given an opportunity to comply. I think the Resolution 1441 said it was a final opportunity --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A final opportunity.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- to comply, and he hadn't taken it. Indeed, what we now know is that he was continuing to act in breach of the UN Resolutions even after the inspectors had gone back in there.

So the American view was -- the American view throughout had been, you know, "This leopard isn't going to change his spots. He is always going to be difficult". So that was their concern about the UN route, in a sense, that they'd get pulled into a UN process, you'd never get to a proper decision and then you'd never get the closure of the issue in the way that you should.

The problem, obviously, from our perspective, was
that we had gone down the UN route, we wanted to carry on going down the UN route, but the Americans had taken the view -- and in a sense we took the same view of the Iraqi behaviour up to that period at the end of January -- that they weren't complying.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So to be clear, the President's view was that it really wasn't necessary, but was he prepared to work for one?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: His view was that it wasn't necessary but he was prepared to work for one.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, it has been reported in the New York Times in 2006 that the President said at that meeting that the Americans would put the work behind the effort but, if it ultimately failed, military action would follow anyway. Is that correct?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The President's view was that if you can't get a second resolution because, in essence, France and Russia are going to say no, even though in fact I don't think they were really disputing that Iraq was in breach of Resolution 1441, then we were going to be faced with a choice I never wanted to be faced with: did you go then without a second resolution?

My view very strongly was that, if he was in breach of 1441, we should mean what we have said. It was a final opportunity to comply, he wasn't complying --
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So your position at the time was that, if couldn't get a second resolution, you would agree with the Americans, go with the Americans, on military action?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was then the legal question, which was very important, because Peter had drawn my attention to that. So there were all sorts of factors that were going to be in play there. There was the political question as to whether we would get the support for it. But my own view, and I was under absolutely no doubt about this, was that, if you backed away, when he was playing around with the inspectors in precisely the way he had done before, then you were going to send a very, very bad signal out to the world.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So your position at the time, end of January, was that politically, legally, for a variety of reasons, you would like a second resolution. You thought it was very important to work for it, but if you didn't get it, you were prepared with the Americans to take military action, supposing the legal and political issues --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct. My view was that, if, in the end, you could not get a second resolution, even in circumstances where there was plainly a breach of Resolution 1441, and there was, and at some point we can
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: You can see Blix himself was clear in each one of his reports there was not full and unconditional compliance.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come to that in a moment. It has also been reported, and I don't think it's a big secret, that you were informed that the proposed start date for military action at that time was March 10th.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Hm-mm.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Is that your recollection?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was at that meeting or around about that time, certainly, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the date eventually slipped back just over a week.

Is it also fair to say that the President was adamant that this military planning set the terms for the diplomatic strategy rather than the other way round?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, this was a debate that continued, frankly, and you see, what I tried to do, as you know, before the military action, is I had one last attempt to get a consensus in the Security Council around a resolution I drafted, effectively with Hans Blix, to lay down a series of tests that Saddam had to comply with.
You see, the problem was this: there was no doubt he
was in breach because he wasn't complying fully and
unconditionally and immediately. On the other hand,
people were saying, "Well, but give the inspectors more
time", which is perfectly -- you know, understandable.
I was thinking, "How do we actually get to the point
where you force people to understand and, in a sense,
Saddam finally to decide, whether he is going to comply
or not?"

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are getting a bit forward,
although you raise issues that are obviously important.
I think it is fair to say, at that time, the
American view was that the military timetable, with
a little bit of give, had to be adhered to. My point is
simply this -- this is the question -- from the end
of January, you had perhaps six weeks, maybe more, maybe
seven, how did you think you could get a resolution
through in such a short period of time? Wasn't the
danger of this situation that, in a sense, not only were
you giving Saddam an ultimatum, but you were almost
giving yourself an ultimatum as well?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that I was giving myself an
ultimatum, because our position had been clear. We had
to resolve this through the UN. If we couldn't resolve
it through the UN inspectors, we had to resolve it by
removing Saddam.

What actually happened was we had time enough to do
it. The problem was very simple: in the end, after
1441, in a sense France and Germany and Russia moved to
a different position and they formed their own power, in
a sense, essentially saying to America "We are not going
to be with you on this".

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come to that in a moment.

Just on the military timetable, we have heard from
a number of witnesses the American concern that it was
unrealistic to keep the troops, once mobilised and
deployed, out in Kuwait in the Gulf, the weather getting
hotter, for a prolonged period of time. So the military
planning was, one way or another, bearing down hard on
the diplomatic process.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that is correct, and in this sense:

I think it is fair to say that the only reason why
Saddam was having anything much to do with the
inspectors at all -- and they were getting dribs and
drabs of more cooperation -- was because we had 250,000
troops down there, with all their machinery, sitting on
his doorstep.

So you are always in a position where you have got
to be very careful then, and I think the -- many of the
witnesses have said this to your Inquiry. Not just the
Americans, I think our own military were concerned, if
you then had months with the troops down there, you
know, as inspections went on but nothing really was
being resolved, I think that would have been difficult
to have done. So in that sense you are right. Of
course, it is always -- you have got to -- you come to
a point of decision.

The only thing I would say to you is, and I think
this is absolutely vital in understanding again the
mindset at the time, had Saddam, after 1441, in a sense
done a Colonel Gaddafi, if he had come forward and said
"Right. I accept it. We are going to full and
unconditional compliance. Here is the declaration. It
covers everything we have. Come in, interview our
scientists, take them out of the country and interview
them, if you wish. We are going to completely
reposition ourselves", had he done that, we would have
been in a different situation. He didn't.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: He would have had a difficulty in
that though, wouldn't he? Because, if he had done that,
he would have said, "We have no weapons of mass
destruction", because that, in fact, turns out to have
been the case. But he wouldn't have been believed.

Indeed, when the head of IAEA said at the end,
"There is no evidence of a nuclear programme", 
Vice-President Cheney said, "You are wrong". There is still a problem here that, given the hypothesis and the mindset as you describe, it would have actually been quite difficult, given all his background, for Saddam Hussein to have been convincing on this score.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I totally understand the point you are making. Let me explain to you why, Sir Lawrence,
I don't believe it is correct.

If you look at Iraq Survey Group report now, this report -- we will get to the detail of it a bit later, but this report is very, very important indeed, because what it is effectively is what Hans Blix could have produced, had Saddam cooperated with him. What that report shows is actually the extent to which Saddam retained his nuclear, and, indeed, chemical warfare intent and intellectual know-how.

Now, what Saddam could have done perfectly easily is to have provided the proper documentation and he could have cooperated fully in the interviews of the scientists.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If you look at the report, one of the problems that the Iraqis had got themselves into is when they had dismantled a lot of this stuff, they had not maintained proper documentation. So you are almost in an audit trail problem here.
Indeed, Jack Straw raised this when he was talking about why he thought there was stuff there, and it goes back to the 1998 documents. Actually, it would have been quite hard in the circumstances and beliefs of the time for a convincing case to be made. I don't want to belabour this point, but --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But it is a very important point, if you don't mind me saying so.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is. I'm happy for you to respond.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because, actually, if you look, both at the Blix reports -- and we can come to the detail of that -- and the Iraq Survey Group, he was deliberately concealing documentation, and what is more, he was deliberately not allowing people to be interviewed properly.

Indeed, in December 2002 -- this is after Resolution 1441 -- we received information, and this information remains valid, that Saddam called together his key people and said that anybody who agreed to an interview outside of Iraq was to be treated as a spy.

Now, the reason for that is very simple, and it emerges from the Iraq Survey Group report. He retained full intent to restart his programme, and, therefore, it was very important for him that the interviews did not
take place, because the interviews with senior regime
members were precisely what would have indicated the
concealment and the intent.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, and this indicates, perhaps,
a problem going back to the dossier and the specificity
there. If it had been said that there was a continued
intent of Saddam Hussein to have a weapons of mass
destruction programme, then that might have -- that
would undoubtedly have had a degree of credibility, but
the problem was that the specificity was that it was
there, it had been reconstituted and the weapons were
there.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But this is, as I say -- and I think,
    Sir Lawrence, you are absolutely right. This is
absolutely at the crux of it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is a problem, and I do want to
get on to Dr Blix now because it is a problem -- and we
discussed this a lot with Lord Goldsmith as well -- that
it is true that the issue of material breach was around
the question of non-cooperation with the inspectors,
rather than hiding particular weapons --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, sorry. Just -- it is really very
important to get this right. It is absolutely clear
from the Iraq Survey Group, and indeed the Butler Report
deals with this, that he was concealing material he
should have delivered up to the UN, that he retained the
intent, not merely in theory, but was taking action on,
for example, dual-use facilities that were specifically
in breach of the United Nations Resolutions.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm not actually disagreeing that
there were significant elements of material breach in
Saddam's behaviour. This is really as much about the
diplomacy and what is going on in New York as it is
about what is going on in Iraq.

To get a second resolution, which is where our
discussion started, you needed the evidence that Saddam
had not taken up the final opportunity, the evidence of
material breach. Now, where was this going to come
from? Who was going to provide the statement?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Dr Blix and his reports are obviously
the key documents here, and you will see from his
reports -- he goes through them, I think, on
19 December, then he has got one on 9 January, I think
again on 27 January, then --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it is important that he is
providing his reports.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was the strategy, as you had
discussed it around the time of the White House meeting
at the end of January, dependent upon Dr Blix being
rather firm in his assertions of material breach, as he had appeared to be, in terms, at least, of talking about non-cooperation -- he didn't declare a material breach but his discussion of non-cooperation is the January 27 report. So were you sort of hoping, expecting, that he would reinforce your view by continuing to take that position?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, the whole point was that his view was that Iraq was complying somewhat, but not fully and unconditionally, and, as time went on, I became increasingly alarmed, actually, that we were just back into a game-playing situation with Saddam. I think we were, incidentally. I think it is very clear from what we know now that he never had any intention of his people cooperating fully with the inspectors.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is just worth noting, in terms of what the inspectors could do, that he was able to report that they were dealing with the Al Samoud missile, which, actually, if you go back to the intelligence, was the area where a step change in Iraqi capabilities had correctly been reported by British intelligence and put in the dossier, was the firmest bit of the threat, and that was actually dealt with by the inspectors in March. So it wasn't that this was necessarily a wholly passive role that they were playing?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, that's true, and obviously, as the prospect of military action and the troop build-up was there, he started to give more cooperation.

But I would just draw your attention to something that I think, as I say, is of fundamental importance and that is that Resolution 1441 -- it decided in paragraph 5, operational paragraph 5, not just that he had to give unrestricted access to all sites and so on, but it specifically focused on the issue to do with interviews and gave --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this was always a very controversial issue. Dr Blix was always very reluctant, precisely because of the risks he knew there would be in, to take them out. He was never himself that enthusiastic about that.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly, Sir Lawrence, but let me tell you -- this is a really important point here. He wasn't enthusiastic. I used to have these conversations with Hans Blix, where Hans would say to me, "I agree we should interview these people, but you don't understand, they may be killed, or their relatives may be killed", and I would say to him, "Well, what does that tell us about the nature of the person we are dealing with and the nature of his compliance?"

Yes, he was -- he kept saying to me, "I feel deeply
personally responsible if I ask for these interviews to be conducted outside of Iraq because I believe these people may be killed", but that, to me, was not --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was an illustration of the problems of dealing with Saddam Hussein.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: On 14 February, when Dr Blix gave a presentation to -- he gave a report, which was not long after Colin Powell's very significant speech of 5 February, were you disappointed by the line he was taking there, which seemed to row back somewhat from the position he had taken on 27 January?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that I was disappointed. I was getting confused as to what he was really trying to tell us. Because what he kept doing is saying, "Yes, there is a bit of cooperation here, but then there is not cooperation there", and what particularly struck me about the 14 February Blix report, and this then had a huge significance in what I then tried then to construct as a final way of avoiding the war, is, on page 26 of his briefing, he deals with this issue of interviews and he says that the Iraqi side of -- because they are starting to move on interviews because he is beginning to press on it -- they have made a commitment that they will allow it, but then, when he actually
comes to the interviews themselves, people are very
reluctant to do it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that's an inherent problem with
this regime, because of the reasons you have given, and
we knew that beforehand.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but it is precisely the reason,
therefore, why, even if Dr Blix had continued, the fact
is he would never have got the truth out of Saddam and
the leading people in the regime. The people who did
get the truth out of them were the Iraq Survey Group,
and what they found was that Saddam retained the
intent --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we have got --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I know, but it is incredibly important.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we have got the idea that
the intent was there --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: And the know-how.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- and the know-how, and this isn't
an issue of disagreement.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Blair, did you want to make more of that,
in fairness to you? I think we have taken the point.

It is not in contention.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is just sometimes -- I will do this
very briefly, but sometimes what is important is not to
ask the March 2003 question, but to ask the 2010
question. Supposing we had backed off this military
action, supposing we had left Saddam and his sons, who
were going to follow him, in charge of Iraq, people who
used chemical weapons, caused the death of over
1 million people, what we now know is that he retained
absolutely the intent and the intellectual know-how to
restart a nuclear and a chemical weapons programme when
the inspectors were out and the sanctions changed, which
they were going to be.

I think it is at least arguable that he was a threat
and that, had we taken that decision to leave him there
with the intent, with an oil price, not of $25, but of
$100 a barrel, he would have had the intent, he would
have had the financial means and we would have lost our
nerve.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You had a phone call with Dr Blix on
20 February. He has written about this and he has
written about it again this morning. We have obviously
seen the record.

Now, one of the things that people were commenting
on by this time was that this smoking gun, as it has
been called, that had been searched for, had not been
found. A number of sites had been suggested and nothing
had been turned up. I'm quoting what he said he said,
words to the effect:

"It would be paradoxical and absurd if 250,000 men were to invade Iraq and find very little."

What was your response to that?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: My response to that was to say, "What you have to tell us is as to whether he is complying with the resolution. Is he giving immediate compliance and full compliance or not?"

His answer to that was, "No, but, you never know, it may be that, if we are given more time, he will". It was re-arising out of that conversation that I worked with him to try and get a fresh UN Security Council Resolution. I kept working on that right up until the last moment.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: As we know. But four days later, in fact, on 24 February, you tabled a draft resolution, which stated that Iraq had failed to take the last opportunity to cooperate.

But at that point, Dr Blix was not saying to the United Nations, to the Security Council, that his -- let's compare the position of Richard Butler in December 1998 who was absolutely clear that he was not getting the cooperation he sought from Saddam Hussein. The last report that Dr Blix had given had been that he was getting, in principle, cooperation
on process. That's what he was saying.

Now, you may disagree with that and think it is not necessarily a proper interpretation of the evidence that you could see, but that's what he said.

So in a sense, you are having now to make the judgment to the Security Council on material breach at that time without the support of a statement by Hans Blix, that explicit support.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Whether he thought the action was justified or not, his reports were clear that the compliance was not immediate and the cooperation unconditional. It plainly wasn't. Indeed, actually, on his 7 March document, where he was obviously moving further along the road, he says this at page 31:

"It is obvious that while the numerous initiatives which are now taken by the Iraqi side with a view to resolving some longstanding, open disarmament issues can be seen as active or even proactive. These initiatives, three to four months into the new resolution, cannot be said to constitute immediate cooperation. Nor do they necessarily cover all areas of relevance. They are nonetheless welcome."

So what I felt was that we had got to a situation where he was very much, "On the one hand ... and on the other", and here was the decision we had to take really
at this point: and I think, in the light of what the
Iraqi Survey Group have found, I actually think this
judgment was right, which is why personally I don't
believe, if Hans Blix had another six months, it would
have come out any differently.

We had to reform this judgment. If you have got
a regime that you believe is a threat, in the end you
may choose -- you may change them through sanctions, but
they have to be sustainable. You may change them by
military force with all the problems there. The
simplest way of change is that there is a change of
heart on behalf of the regime.

Now, we had to decide: did all this that he was
doing with Dr Blix really indicate to us -- I mean, he
was definitely in material breach of the UN Resolution,
but did it really indicate that this was someone who had
had a change of heart?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think the issue, though, that was
now developing in the Security Council was that Dr Blix
did indeed seem to think more weeks and months would be
helpful, and because nothing had been found so far in
the inspections process other than the Al Samoud
missiles which were being dealt with, that confirmed the
intelligence picture that had been presented over the
previous months, that people did feel there was a need
for more time. It wasn't time an unreasonable request.

So was there a risk that by putting down the second resolution at this point, that it appeared as if you were trying to curtail this process because of the demands of the military planning?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was more, actually, Sir Lawrence, the other way round, that what we were trying to do was to say: how do you resolve what, on any basis, is a somewhat indistinct picture being painted by Dr Blix?

Because it is clear they are not cooperating fully, that they are giving a little bit of cooperation, and I come back to the fact that, of course, the only cooperation that was being given was because of this huge military force sitting on Saddam's doorstep.

What I tried to do was find a way -- and that's why I did this with Dr Blix himself. We sat down and we had a conversation -- I think actually we had a long conversation on the phone. I remember Jack Straw was very much involved in this. Jeremy Greenstock, I think, at the UN, was very much involved in this. We tried to construct these tests, and the most important one, to me, was this ability to get the scientists out of the country.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It seems to me that the issue -- and indeed, this was a very serious effort, but you didn't
have the time, because, if you were going to do that,
maybe it would have taken until April, maybe until May,
but the sense within the Security Council was that this
was indeed a way it could go forward, but that the view
of the United States is that you couldn't have much more
time. Jonathan Powell told us that you asked for more
time and you weren't given it.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The reason for constructing the
resolution was to try and get us into the situation of
having more time. The problem, however, was this: we
could have got the resolution together. I was having
discussions late into the night every evening with --
I think it was the Chileans and the Mexicans and I was
speaking to the French. We were speaking to everybody.
We were trying desperately to get this last route out,
and there were other things that were being talked about
at the time.

I had -- I won't go into the details of it, but
there was a group of Arab countries that came to us and
they were quite keen, I think, on actually, if we got
a fresh resolution, pushing Saddam out. So there were
ways, even then, when we could have tried to resolve
this.

The problem was it became very clear that, whatever
their position had been in November 2002, the position,
particularly of France and Russia, really changed. They had decided they weren't going to agree any new resolution that had in it any authority for action if Saddam didn't comply.

The reason why that then made our position very difficult was, if you tabled another resolution, but said, "Even if he doesn't comply with that resolution, we will come back and have yet other discussion --"

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we will probably want to explore that particular question after lunch in terms of whether the French were the absolute block on getting something, but I just want -- because time now is pressing and I think we have done quite a lot on this. Let me just sum up where it seems to me that we are as February is turning into March.

First, Sir Jeremy Greenstock has told us, through this time, he never felt that he was close to having nine positive votes in the bag. He had some at one point, some at another, but we never really lined them all up together, which would have put the pressure on the French and the Russians.

Despite the quality of our intelligence passed to UNMOVIC, there hasn't been a smoking gun. There hasn't been a real find of chemical or biological stocks, perhaps for reasons that have nothing to do with whether
it is there or not, but it hasn't been found.

The inspectors were not saying that they couldn't do their job. They were -- and El-Baradei was saying that his job was almost done and that there was no nuclear programme. So the view was moving away on this issue within the Security Council.

Was this not a good time to take stock and to question whether or not more time would have been helpful? Again, just to quote the evidence we have had from Sir David Manning and from Sir Jeremy Greenstock, both of whom have come to this conclusion: it would have been good to have more time.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's why we tried to construct this arrangement, in order to get us some more time. I think I would make two points, however.

First of all, I think we would have got the nine votes, were it not for the fact that those members in the middle group -- I mean, they were called the "undecided six" at a certain point -- they were getting such a clear and vehement message from France and Russia that they weren't going to accept any resolution that was an authority for action, that that's really what disintegrated that possibility.

The second thing is, though, even if we had got more time, Hans Blix would never have been able to conduct
the interviews with the key members of the regime and they be honest with him.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But if he had been given the chance and failed again, wouldn't you then have had more of a chance of having the Security Council behind you, which had been one of your objectives going back to 2002?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I'm not really sure about that, Sir Lawrence. By then, we had been four months with Saddam and, you know, you can take different views and -- of the Blix reports, and Hans Blix obviously takes a certain view now. I have to say in my conversations with him then it was a little different. But you have to make a judgment: is this person really seriously cooperating with the international community or not? As we now know, incidentally, he wasn't.

I do emphasise also the fact that he -- and there is also evidence in the Iraq Survey Group, which is actually quite important, about what Iraqi scientists were being told by the Vice-President of Iraq. He gathered them all together as the inspectors went in and, as you know, the inspectors were supposed to be given all the information, any materials they had. What he was saying was, "If you have any materials in your possession, you had better not have". Now --
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I understand -- you are right that this is indeed what happened. The question is whether or not it was -- it would be possible to create the consensus that would have been so much help behind you in the United Nations.

My final question: did you ask President Bush for more time and did he say, "No, military action has got to go ahead on 19 March"?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. What he actually did, much to the consternation of his system, was he said, "Okay, if you can get this new resolution down with the tests that I can" -- because I constructed them with Blix, so I thought "Here you are, you are constructing these tests with the UN inspector", so I thought that would give them a certain persuasive quality obviously with the other members of the Security Council.

What President Bush actually said to me was, "If you can get that, do it", but, you know, you have got to understand from the American perspective, they had gone down the 1441 route, he obviously wasn't cooperating. We had been through the 8 December declaration. We then went through the January report, the February report, and they had their forces down there ready to take action. It was difficult situation, but actually he did, to be fair, say, "If you can put it together, put
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But he wanted to get on with it?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think there was a judgment being made -- and I honestly, in retrospect, can't disagree with this judgment, that, you know, more time was not going to solve this.

THE CHAIRMAN: It is clearly time to break for lunch. Can I just say I would like to thank everyone in the room who has sat through this morning, and, as you won't be able to be in this room this afternoon, thank you for your very attentive and, if I may say so, well-mannered response to this session. I thank our witness and we will resume again at 2 o'clock.

(12.40 pm)

(The short adjournment)

(2.00 pm)

THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. This afternoon, the Iraq Inquiry will be hearing again from the Rt Hon Tony Blair, Prime Minister until June 2007. We still have much to cover today.

The Committee hopes we can go about our business in an orderly way and, in fairness to all, not be distracted by any disruptions. As in all our hearings, the right for our witness to respond must be respected, and those here today, this morning and now yourselves
this afternoon, were selected through a free public
ballot overseen by an independent arbiter, and I remind
everyone of the behaviour expected to be observed.

Welcome back, Mr Blair. For the benefit of those
who were not able to be in the room this morning, can
I just repeat two things that were said this morning at
the start of the proceedings.

We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence
based in part on their recollection of events, and we,
of course, cross-check what we hear against the papers
to which we have access.

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

I would now like to continue the proceedings and
turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman -- I beg your pardon, to
Sir Roderic Lyne.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would just like to pick up a couple of
points from where you and Sir Lawrence left it before
lunchtime, just to finish off the diplomatic and
political decisions that you faced in the days before
you had to take the decision that we should start
military action. There are only two on this I think
I want to ask about now.

The first one concerns the position of the
French Government, which you did refer to before lunch.
In your final speech before the conflict to the House of Commons on 18 March, you told the Commons that -- and I will quote here:

"France said it would veto a second resolution, whatever the circumstances...Those on the Security Council opposed to us...will not countenance any new resolution that authorises force in the event of non-compliance."

Had the French been on to us after President Chirac's interview of 10 March in the days after that, before you made that statement? Had they, indeed, told Number 10 through diplomatic channels that we were misinterpreting President Chirac's words by misinterpreting the context of his statement, "Whatever the circumstances". Had they told us that, in the view of the French Government, Chirac had not been saying that France would vote no against any resolution, he was referring to this resolution at this time?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I believe I spoke to President Chirac myself. I think it was on 14 March. So this is actually, you know, after that time. The French position was very, very clear. It wasn't that they would veto any resolution, it is that they would veto a resolution that authorised force in the event of
breach.

The point was this: that, if we were going to come back to the United Nations and get another resolution, it had to be a resolution that said something stronger and tougher than 1441, and, therefore, the idea was to say, because we had been through 1441, Saddam was not in compliance, "Okay, if we come back for another resolution, then this has got to authorise action".

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you didn't feel that there was any possibility that if we pursued inspections for a longer period to the point where the French and perhaps Hans Blix was reporting that the process was exhausted, that, at that stage, the French would have been prepared to vote for a resolution authorising military action?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: My judgment, having spoken to Jacques Chirac -- and we kept perfectly good lines open, actually, through this, and I was very anxious to make sure for the aftermath situation that we came back together again in the UN Security Council. So I wasn't, you know, trying to be in a position where France and Britain, as it were, fell out, but it was very, very clear to me the French, the Germans and the Russians had decided they weren't going to be in favour of this and there was a straightforward division, frankly, and I don't think it would have mattered how much time we
had taken, they weren't going to agree that force should be used.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In any circumstances, at any time, on this track?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Unless there had been something absolutely dramatic that the inspectors had uncovered. That might have made a difference to them, but the mere fact that he was in breach of 1441, despite this being his final opportunity, my judgment, I have to say -- and I think this is pretty clear -- is that there was by then a political divide on this, of a pretty fundamental nature.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: As we hadn't got nine positive votes in the bag, a French vote against wouldn't actually have been a veto. Is there any substance in the charge that, by making so much of the French veto, we were actually using it as an excuse to withdraw the resolution, which wasn't going to succeed anyway, so that we could meet the American timetable and go into action?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the actual situation -- because I had many conversations with other leaders at the time, and most of those were with President Lagos of Chile, whom I knew well and had a very good personal relationship with. He was in a tough situation, as we were all at that time, and what President Lagos was
effectively saying to me was, "Look, if you can get to
a stage where you can loosen the French opposition, then
it is a lot easier for us to come along with you".

So it was very bound up with, as it were, what was
then becoming in the Permanent 5 a disagreement; UK and
America on one side, France and Russia on the other.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you hadn't really reached a point in
the week or so or the resolution was withdrawn where you
had effectively had to give up your hopes of getting
President Lagos and maybe your hopes that President Bush
could persuade the Mexicans to come on side and decide
that you would have to plan an end-game in which our
position was presented in the best way it could be?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think it was more that -- I thought
there was -- it was worth having one last-ditch chance
to see if you could bring people back together on the
same page. So in a sense, what President Bush had to do
was agree to table a fresh resolution. What the French
had to agree was you couldn't have another resolution
and another breach and no action. So my idea was define
the circumstances of breach -- that was the tests that
we applied with Hans Blix -- get the Americans to agree
to the resolution, get the French to agree that you
couldn't just go back to the same words of 1441 again,
you had to take it a stage further.
Now, that was the idea I had. I thought it might be possible to bring everyone back together again. It wasn't possible to do that, and I was also very conscious by that time as well of the need to bring the UN back into the situation after a conflict, and so that was a factor in my mind as well.

As I say, I wanted to try, as far possible, to make sure that you didn't end up with, as it were, really a political disagreement becoming a really ugly political situation between the major countries in the Security Council.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just move on to my other point, which is a slightly wider point?

At this really critical moment, and obviously a very difficult moment in your life, you had reached the stage where you weren't going to get a second resolution, military action was imminent. Now, you had been working intensively for months, indeed for a year, to try to create a supportive environment, and we have discussed elements of that already, but you hadn't actually got a clear and strong international consensus for this action. Public opinion here in the UK was divided. No really major progress had been made on the Middle East peace plan, which you and I discussed earlier. We hadn't got the second resolution, and you were also,
I think by this stage, starting to hear warnings from people like Brigadier, as he was, I think, Tim Cross, who came to see you in Downing Street and saw Alastair Campbell, I think, that the post-conflict preparations being made by the Americans didn't look at all good.

At this point, you must, I suppose, have had some pause for thought. Did President Bush at this point, when you hadn't really satisfied the pre-conditions you wanted to achieve, offer to go it alone and offer you a way out?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the Americans would have done that. I think President Bush actually at one point shortly before the debate said, "Look, if it is too difficult for Britain, we understand". But I took the view very strongly then, and do, that it was right for us to be with America, since we believed in this too, and it is true that it was very divisive, but it was divisive in the sense that there were two groups. There was also a very strong group in the international community, in Parliament, I would say even in the Cabinet, who also thought it was the right thing to do.

So, for example, in the European Union at the time I think 13 out of the 25 members were with America. Japan and South Korea were with America, major allies
lining up with America.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly, there was support, but I suppose this was a long way short of what you would have hoped to have had.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would have hoped to have had a United Nations situation at which everywhere was on the same page and agreed. Sometimes that doesn't happen.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In Kosovo, one didn't have unanimity, because the Russians threatened to veto, but you had much stronger support. The first Gulf War, there was pretty much universal support, Afghanistan and so on. So this was a much more difficult situation for you.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was a really tough situation, yes, and in the end, as I say, what influenced me was that my judgment ultimately was that Saddam was going to remain a threat and that in this change in the perception of risk after September 11 it was important that we were prepared to act, our alliance with America was important, and, to put this very clearly, we had been down a UN path that I genuinely hoped would work. I hoped that 1441 would avoid conflict happening.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although, I think you said this morning you weren't terribly confident it was going to work. You hoped it would work.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I did hope it would work. I wasn't confident about Saddam, I think for perfectly good reasons. He was someone who had been defying the UN for ten years, and, as we know now, he hadn't really changed his intent. So I could see a situation in which you might be faced with this tough choice, but I was doing absolutely everything I could to try and avoid having to do it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Jack Straw the other day referred to a plan B that he had floated with you. I think -- I don't remember his exact words, but implying that he saw a case for it, which would have involved only partial involvement by us in the military action, but not sending the ground troops in, as I understand it. What was your view of his advice?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, that was a possibility. As I think we discussed this morning -- in fact, our own military, in a sense, to their great credit, were in favour, if we were going to be part of this, to be wholehearted.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: They are bound to, they are out there ready to go, and troops in that situation don't want to have to come back again, do they?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: This was even back in October. I think, if you look at the record back in October 2002, the
military were saying what their preferences were for the
three options.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm now thinking of the last week before
the action.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I'm sorry, I thought you were meaning to
suggest it was just because the troops were down there.
I think, to be fair -- and I think Mike Boyce would say
this to you -- that they wanted to be a wholehearted
part of this, and I thought that was right as well, as
I discussed.

It would have been a very big thing for us to have
kept out of the aftermath as well, and, of course, it
was in the aftermath that some of the most difficult
things happened, and the British forces performed
absolutely magnificently, both during the invasion and
afterwards.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Some have argued the opposite. Some of
our earlier witnesses have said that, by going in with
a large force, we actually hoped we could then take the
fighting -- the combat troops out at a fairly early
stage in the hope that other people would come in and
take up some of the load in the aftermath.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Which they did, of course.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, reversing that, if we had not sent
the force in at this stage, for this variety of reasons,
we could then still have said, in a very respectable way, that we are ready to come in and do the sort of peace building, nation building stuff that we have got a lot of experience in, in the aftermath.

So it wasn't keeping us out of the aftermath by not going in at this stage, was it?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, I meant precisely the opposite, exactly what you are saying, Sir Roderic. In other words, we would have been as part of the aftermath and, actually, as it turned out -- for reasons that we didn't foresee, as it turned out, it was the aftermath that was the most difficult and toughest part of this.

What I'm saying is: to have kept out of the aftermath as well as the initial action, I think would have been very hard for Britain, but having said all of that, look, again, this is a judgment. You could have decided to do option 1 or 2. In the end, we decided to do option 3, and I think that was, I would say, the consensus view between political and military at the time.

Just to say this to you, one of the things that I have done in every single piece of military action I advocated as Prime Minister is the first thing, in a sense, I do is get a sense from our armed forces as to whether they are committed and keen to do it, and, of
course, they are, because that's the type of people they are and they are fantastic. But it was very much a conversation we had back in -- I think beginning actually in July time, and then building up through October, and then, by the time we came to March, yes, it is true, we could have pulled back at that stage, but I believe that that would have been wrong and I think it would have not indicated the strength of support that I felt was right for us to exhibit.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to change the subject now, if I may, if my colleagues have got nothing further that they want to raise on this point.

This morning, I registered that we would want to deal with all the legal issues, as it were, in one chapter. I think that's easier. I hope it is easier for you, I think it is easier for us.

Of course, in the course of this week alone, we have had some ten hours of evidence on this from the Attorney General and from three senior Civil Service legal advisers who were involved in the question.

For that reason, we don't propose to try to go through the issues point by point again, which would take probably another ten hours. We really would now like to focus on the questions that most directly concerned you, as Prime Minister, and the Committee have
suggested that the easiest way of tackling this extremely complex subject with all of this ten hours of background behind us would be if I tried to summarise first what we, as a Committee, have heard and read on this subject, and if you will forgive me, it will allow you to rest your voice for a minute or two.

This will take me a few minutes, but I think ultimately it will also save us some time. So if you are content, I will try to wrap up what we have absorbed on this subject in a number of points.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before -- just to interject -- then coming to specific questions based on that. Is that satisfactory to you?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I will go through the summary. If you are not content with any points in it, please tell me, and then I have got one or two questions I would like to ask arising from that.

   Firstly, there wasn't a legal basis, as Lord Goldsmith repeated to us the day before yesterday, for regime change as an objective in itself.

   Secondly, lawyers in the US administration favoured what was called the revival argument and that meant that the authorisation for the use of force during the first Gulf War, embodied in Resolution 687, was capable of
being revived as it had been revived in 1993 and 1998.

However, the UK's lawyers did not consider that this argument was applicable without a fresh determination by the Security Council, and they felt that, not only because of the passage of time since resolutions 678 and 687, but also because, in 1993 and 1998, the Security Council had formed the view that there had been a sufficiently serious violation of the ceasefire conditions and also because the force that had been used then had been limited to ensuring Iraqi compliance with the ceasefire conditions. Even in 1998, the revival argument had been controversial and not very widely supported. So the British argument was that you needed a fresh determination of the Security Council.

If we turn then to the precedent of Kosovo. Over Kosovo, Russia had threatened to veto a proposed Security Council Resolution and our lawyers believed that this precedent did not apply to these circumstances in Iraq, because, in Kosovo, we had had an alternative legal base to rely on, which was intervention to avert an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe.

So what that led to was consistent and, I think, united advice, by the FCO's legal advisers and, also, insofar as it was at this stage sought or proffered by the Attorney General up to November 2002, that a fresh
UN authorisation under chapter 7 would be required for the military action contemplated against Iraq, contemplated at that stage as a contingency, to be lawful.

Such an authorisation, in their view, would provide the only grounds on which, in these circumstances, force could be used.

So the UK and the USA went to the United Nations and obtained Security Council Resolution 1441, passed unanimously. However, in the words of Lord Goldsmith, that resolution wasn't crystal clear, and I think you, yourself, this morning referred to the fact that there were arguments. It didn't resolve the argument, I think was the way you put it.

The ambiguous wording of that resolution immediately gave rise to different positions by different Security Council members on whether or not it of itself had provided authorisation without a further determination by the Security Council for the use of force.

So up until early February of 2003, the Attorney General, again, as Lord Goldsmith told us in his evidence, was telling you that he remained of the view that Resolution 1441 did not authorise the use of force without a further determination by the Security
Council that it was his position that a Council discussion -- the word "discussion" was used in the resolution -- would not be sufficient and that a further decision by the Council was required.

I think perhaps, as I'm about halfway through the summary and I have just reached the point before Lord Goldsmith gives you his formal advice, it might be sensible if I pause at half time just to ask if, up to now, you think I have got it right in your own understanding?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think that's a fair summary.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If you are content, then I will continue and I hope to do as well with the second half but I'm not the lawyer and you are.

On 7 March, Lord Goldsmith submitted his formal advice to you, a document which is now in the public domain. In that he continued to argue that:

"The safest legal course", would be a further resolution. But in contrast to his previous position, and for reasons which he explained to us in his evidence, he now argued that, "a reasonable case" could be made, "that Resolution 1441 is capable in principle of reviving the authorisation in 678 without a further resolution."

But at the same time he coupled this with a warning
that, "a reasonable case does not mean that if the
matter ever came before a court, I would be confident
that the court would agree with this view."

So at that point, Lord Goldsmith had, to a degree,
parted company with the legal advisers in the Foreign
and Commonwealth Office, who have also given evidence to
us through Sir Michael Wood and Ms Elizabeth Wilmshurst.
They were continuing to argue that the invasion could
only be lawful if the Security Council determined that
a further material breach had been committed by Iraq.
I emphasise the word "further", of course, because 1441
established that Iraq was already in breach, but then
the argument was about the so-called firebreak and
whether you had to have a determination of a further
material breach.

Lord Goldsmith told us that, when it became clear
that we were not likely to get a second resolution,
a further resolution, he was asked to give what he
described as a "yes or no decision", especially because
clarity was required by the armed forces, CDS had put
this to him, and by other public servants. He had
received also an intervention from a senior Treasury
lawyer.

So having given you that advice on 7 March, by
13 March, he had crucially decided -- and this is from
a minute recording a discussion between himself and his
senior adviser, David Brummell, who has also given
evidence to us and which is also on the public record --
he had decided that:

"On balance, the better view was that the conditions
for the operation of the revival argument were met in
this case; ie, that there was a lawful basis for the use
of force without a further resolution going beyond
Resolution 1441."

Now, there is one further stage in the process and
then I will get to the end.

This view now taken by the Attorney General still
required a determination that Iraq was "in further
material breach of its obligations."

The legal advisers in the FCO considered that only
the UN Security Council could make that determination,
but the Attorney took the view that individual member
states could make this determination and he asked you to
provide your assurance that you had so concluded; ie,
you had concluded that Iraq was in further material
breach, and on 15 March, which is, what, five days
before the action began, you officially gave the
unequivocal view that Iraq is in further material breach
of its obligations.

So it was on that basis that the Attorney was able
to give the green light for military action to you, to
the armed forces, to the Civil Service, to the Cabinet
and to Parliament.

But it remained the case, as Sir Michael Wood made
clear in his evidence, that while the Attorney General's
constitutional authority was, of course, accepted by the
government's Civil Service advisers on international
law, headed by Sir Michael Wood -- although
Ms Wilmshurst herself decided to resign at this point
from government service -- they accepted his authority
but they did not endorse the position in law which he
had taken, and it remains to this day Sir Michael's
position -- he said this in his witness statement --
that:

"The use of force against Iraq in March 2003 was
contrary to international law."

Now, my first question is: have I given a fair
summary of the legal background?

RT HON TONY Blair: Yes, I think that is a fair summary of
the legal background. I would say, however, just one
point, Sir Roderic, which is that what was so important
to me about Resolution 1441 was not simply that it
declared Saddam in breach, gave him a final opportunity,
but it said also, in op 4, that a failure to comply
unconditionally and immediately and fully with the
inspectors was itself a further material breach.

This was extremely important for us to secure in that resolution, and we did secure it, and what we kept out of 1441 was an attempt to ensure that we had to go back for another decision.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I went through that in considerable detail, as you probably saw, with the Attorney General just to make sure that we clearly understood the different positions and the weight that was being given to evidence received from private conversations and what was said on the public record.

So if you will allow me, I will not go over all of that ground again, if you are content with the way that we discussed it with the Attorney General, and I would really move on to my next question, which is that: going back to the first half of 2002, which we discussed right at the beginning of today, the period when your strategy was evolving away from containment for the reasons you explained, and towards the American position, and, therefore, you were beginning to discuss the possibility or the contingency of having to use force, in that period of the first half of 2002, when you were having these discussions, did you seek legal advice from the Attorney, or, indeed, from anyone else?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We got a paper, I think it was
an 8 March paper, which set out the legal position, and
that set it out in the terms that you have just
summarised. I was obviously not just very interested in
it for obvious reasons, but interested in it for this
reason as well: that we had taken action in 1998 and we
had taken action on the basis of the revival of
Resolution 678.

So it was very important to me because we had
already taken military action, and, indeed, as you
rightly point out, military action had been taken in
1993 as well, but we had that before us and one of the
things that was most important in us going down the UN
route was precisely the legal advice that we got.

SIR RODERIC LYNÉ: So you wanted, at that early stage, to
know the legal parameters. Do you remember where that
advice came from? Was it from the Foreign Office's
legal advisers or ...?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't, but I may be able to to --

SIR RODERIC LYNÉ: If I put it another way, I think from our
discussion with the Attorney General, it didn't come
from him, because, if I'm not misremembering his
evidence, I don't think at that stage he had been
consulted.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, it came from the Foreign Office,
actually.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: It came from the Foreign Office.

Could you say why, given that this was pretty serious territory you were beginning to get on to, you didn't at that stage think it necessary to consult the Attorney General?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I mean, we were, in my view, a long way at that point from taking a decision. Had we come closer to the point of taking a decision, of course we would have needed to have taken the formal advice of the Attorney General, as indeed we did.

At that stage, we had the advice of the Foreign Office, and, actually, the Foreign Office advice was pretty much in line with what Peter Goldsmith then later advised me.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was 100 per cent in line, as we understand from both of them. So at that point, building the Attorney General into the process of forming policy, having him at meetings, like, say, the meeting at Chequers that you discussed, wasn't something you felt a need to do?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Not at that stage, because we were, as I say, at a very preliminary point. But what I took from the advice that we were given was that we needed a fresh resolution.

I do point out that -- because this was why, at
a later stage, I became concerned as to what the legal
problem was, because, of course, we got a further
resolution.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just stick a little bit for
a couple of minutes with the Attorney General's role in
this because his evidence is very fresh in our minds?
In previous governments it was quite frequently the
practice for Attorneys General to attend Cabinet, and,
indeed, in some War Cabinets. You didn't have
a War Cabinet before the conflict began here, but you
had groups of advisers who met --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, and ministers.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Ministers and advisers. Attorneys
General, sometimes in the past, quite frequently in the
past, would have been there.

Now, Lord Goldsmith told us that he had only
attended Cabinet twice, up to the time the conflict
began, to discuss Iraq, although, as you said this
morning, the Cabinet discussed Iraq over 20 times.

It was clear from his evidence, I think, that he was
rarely included in the other discussions you were having
around this subject and that he had relatively few
face-to-face meetings you in 2002 and the early part of
2003, particularly in 2002, to discuss this subject,
which, I think, raised the question in our minds as to
why you hadn't thought it right to include him more closely.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: He was very closely involved in this, in the sense that he, himself, and on his own initiative, actually -- and after that time, we obviously had a pretty close interaction on it -- at the end of July 2002, wrote to me about his legal advice.

It is correct -- and I think this is in accordance with tradition -- he didn't attend Cabinet until we got to the point when we were actually going to take the decision, but back then we were a year off military action in March 2002.

Now, had we got close the point of military action, of course Peter would have been very closely involved and actually began to be involved some -- I think it is right to say eight months before the military action began.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you actually got to the point, quite close to the point, with him only having been to the Cabinet twice, the second time being on the eve of conflict.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The issue is not how many times he comes to the Cabinet, the issue is whether he is giving his advice to the Prime Minister and the ministers, and Peter was.
Just to say this about Peter Goldsmith. As you will have seen from his evidence, Peter is absolutely a lawyer's lawyer. He is somebody of extraordinary integrity. He is somebody who actually, as a lawyer, is in the very top rank of the legal profession, and Peter made it quite clear from a very early stage of this that if he felt he had advice to give, he would give it, and in a sense he would give it whether people wanted it or they didn't want it, but he was going to give it and he did give it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. Indeed, he told us that he volunteered it after your meeting of 23 July when you were about to go off and see President Bush and he had volunteered written advice to in a minute of 30 July, the text of which is not in the public domain, but he commented to us that this advice, he felt had not been particularly welcome. We wondered why it wasn't particularly welcome to get advice then.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that it was not particularly welcome, it was -- obviously, I was dealing with what was already a difficult situation, and now I became aware we had to take a whole new dimension into account. Of course, we had at an earlier stage of this, but once we got into discussions with the Americans, I was well aware of the fact from -- really from March
onwards, that if we wanted to be legally secure on this,
we had to go down the UN route, and that was one major
part of why we decided to do this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So basically, you had got the point, you
didn't need to be constantly reminded of it?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, but having said that, it actually
was then very helpful for him to do this, because he
focused our minds, quite rightly, on the need to get the
right resolution in 1441.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So he just got the wrong vibes from the
reaction at Number 10?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't know, but I know Peter very well
and he's someone I have a great respect for, and I'm
sure --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, it's just he made this remark, so it
is natural, indeed, for me to ask you about it and --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, to be frank, and to be fair to
him, he was deciding, before I go to President Bush --
and I think he worried about statements that had been
made by various ministers.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Later on, he was, yes.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: He wanted to make it absolutely clear
that it wasn't merely -- I think his point was: it is
not merely going down the UN route, it is getting the
right resolution that will be important.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's turn to that resolution. Just after it was adopted -- it was adopted on 8 November, Resolution 1441 and on 11 November Lord Goldsmith talked to your Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell. He was a bit concerned that he was hearing second-hand views of his own opinions and he wanted, I think, to get that straight, and he made clear to Jonathan Powell that he was not optimistic that Resolution 1441 would provide a sound legal basis for the use of force if Iraq were found in breach at a future stage but without a second resolution.

He suggested that it was desirable for him to provide advice at that point, but he wasn't encouraged to do so. The response instead was that he should -- he could have a meeting some time before Christmas at Downing Street, and that meeting duly took place on 19 December with some of your officials.

At that meeting, he was again told that he wasn't being called on to give advice at this stage, "this stage" being a stage at which he felt that 1441 had created an unclear situation. But what he was invited to do was to put a paper to you in draft of his advice, and he handed that, I think, personally, to you on 14 January.

Now, by then we are into a period in which the armed
forces had actually been instructed to prepare for
military action and in which you were moving along the
track towards an intended second Security Council
Resolution, though that wasn't tabled until
late February, I think about the 24th, from memory.

Don't you think that it would have been useful, as
he obviously felt, if you had had the formal advice of
the Attorney General ahead of these now increasingly
important developments?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. I think what was important for him
to do was to explain to us what his concerns were and,
look, all the way through this there was a -- you know,
as I know myself, lawyers take different views of issues
and an issue such as this they were bound to take very
different views. Peter was quite rightly saying to us,
"These are my concerns. This is why I don't think 1441
in itself is enough".

Now, we had begun military preparations even before
we got the first resolution, the 1441 resolution. We
had to do that, otherwise we would never have been in
a position to take military action. But let me make it
absolutely clear, if Peter in the end had said, "This
cannot be justified lawfully", we would have been unable
to take action.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But if you had known that he was going to
say that, it would have been helpful to have known that
as soon as possible, because it could have prevented you
from deploying a large force into the region and having
to bring it back. That's why I ask: wouldn't it have
been helpful to have known our options at this --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did know our options. We didn't get
formal, in a sense, legal advice at that point, but
Peter had made it clear what his view was, and then
there was a whole iteration because the whole of the
legal interpretation really revolved around a bit like
a statutory construction point for lawyers: what was in
the minds of the people who passed the resolution?

As you rightly said earlier, the resolution in one
sense was unclear as to what people intended. On the
other hand, I certainly felt where it was absolutely
clear was that there had to be immediate, full and
unconditional compliance, and any lack of that
compliance was a further material breach.

So in my view, there had to be at least a strong
prima facie case if you could show material breach, that
this justified the revival argument, since, otherwise,
you know, you couldn't have justified it in respect of
1998 --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: At this stage, before the middle
of February, he is not offering you options, nor are the
Foreign Office legal advisers. They are saying, "We have to have a further determination by the Security Council". Later on, it turned out that he was able to find an alternative option.

In planning the policy, my point is: wouldn't it have been much easier for you to have known at this early stage that there was an alternative option that didn't involve a second Security Council Resolution?

You might then have decided not to make the huge effort that you then did make to get a second Security Council Resolution, because by making this effort and then not getting it, it could be argued that you had then actually weakened the argument that you subsequently -- or the position that you subsequently took on the revival argument.

Wouldn't it have been helpful to have known that earlier?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, we did know, because Peter made it clear, the best thing to do is to get another resolution. So we were well aware that this was his advice. The issue was really this --

SIR RODERIC LYNÉ: But he was saying it is the only thing to do at this stage. He didn't offer you the alternative until after he had been to Washington on 11 February.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Actually, it was two things, I think, to
be fair to him. I think it is very important that this
is seen in its proper context. It all revolved around
the interpretation of 1441 and the question was: what
did the Security Council mean?

We were obviously arguing very strongly that the
Security Council had agreed that he was in breach, given
him a final opportunity, and any further breach was
a material breach and he had to comply fully, and what
is more --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But that had to be determined by the
Security Council.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The issue as to whether -- because some
people wanted, actually, that the Security Council had
to take a decision, that was excluded. We refused to
allow that precisely because we did not want to be in
a situation where we were forced as a matter of law to
come back for another decision, and people had
nonetheless agreed 1441. So that was why there was at
least as powerful an argument on the side of one
resolution only as there was against it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's where you ended up in March, but
until 12 February you were not being told by the
Attorney or the Foreign Office legal advisers that you
had the option of not getting a further decision out of
the Security Council. They were telling you, both of
them, that their reading of that resolution, which, as
you rightly say, was unclear, but the British reading of
that resolution, unlike the American resolution, was
that the determination had to to be made by the Security
Council.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, so there was a disagreement between
where our legal position was at this stage and the
American position. I think it was at our suggestion,
actually, that Peter then went to talk to
Jeremy Greenstock.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, it was then that his position
changed.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but it is not just because of the
Americans. What happened was he had a discussion with
Jeremy Greenstock --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: After which he wrote to you saying his
position hadn't changed.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But he said it had been a very useful
discussion and that had obviously moved him somewhat.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He told us that there were three things
that moved him: Sir Jeremy Greenstock got him part of
the way there; the negotiating history provided by the
Foreign Secretary got him a further part of the way
there; and going to Washington and talking to the
Americans got him yet another part of the way there.
That was his evolution.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is fair to say, because I think it is important to say this --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It's very important.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- it was always a very, very difficult balance to judgment, but the important thing was, in the end, that Peter came to the view -- and I think anybody who knows him knows that he would not express this view unless he thought it and believed it -- he came to the view that, on balance, the breach by Saddam Hussein of Resolution 1441 was sufficient, provided it was a breach of the obligations set out in op 4.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He asked you to say that it was sufficient, but that's at the end of the game.

Can I just go to the point where he has given you his formal advice of 7 March, but that didn't give the yes or no clear answer that the Chief of the Defence Staff and others wanted. That didn't come until 13 March, when he had had a period of further reflection.

What discussions did you, or others under your instruction, if any, have with Lord Goldsmith between 7 March, when you received his formal advice, and 13 March, when he decided that his position had evolved further?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I can't recall any specific discussions that I had. I don't know whether others would have had with him before 13 March, but essentially what happened was this: he gave legal advice, he gave an opinion saying, "Look, there is this argument against it, there is this argument for it. I think a reasonable case can be made", and obviously we then had to have a definitive decision, and that decision is: yes, it is lawful to do this or not. So --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: A huge amount hung on that decision.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Of course. A lot hung on that decision, and it was therefore extremely important that it was done by the Attorney General and done in a way which we were satisfied was correct and right, and that's what he did.

If I can just point this out, too: if you go back and read Resolution 1441, I think it is quite hard to argue, as a matter of common sense -- leave aside there are issues to do with the precise interpretation of some of the provisions. 1441, the whole spirit of it was: we have been through ten years of Saddam Hussein breaching UN Resolutions. We finally decide that he is going to be given one last chance. This is the moment when, if he takes that chance, there is no conflict, we resolve the matter, but if he doesn't take that chance and
starts messing around again, as he started to do, then
that's it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So it is quite hard to argue what? Quite
hard to argue that a further resolution is necessary?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The further resolution was clearly
politically preferable. For us, if you can get
everybody back on the same page again, it is clearly
preferable, but if you actually examine the
circumstances of 1441, the whole point about it and --
and this is the argument I used with the Americans
successfully to get them to go down this route -- and by
the way, I should just point out, at the end
of October 2002, I remember specifically a conversation
with President Bush in which I said, "If he complies,
that's it". There is no --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, I think you mentioned this
earlier --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But this is important, because people
sometimes say it was all kind of cast in stone from --
SIR RODERIC LYNE: But wasn't Number 10 saying to the
White House in January and February, even into March,
that it was essential, from the British perspective,
because of our reading of the law, to have a second
resolution?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was politically, we were saying --
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not merely preferable, but essential.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No. Politically, we were saying it was
going to be very hard for us. Indeed, it was going to
be very hard for us.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Weren't we saying it was legally
necessary for us, because that was his advice?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we said was, legally, it resolves
that question obviously beyond any dispute.

On the other hand, for the reasons that I have
given, Peter, in the end, decided that actually a case
could be made out for doing this without another
resolution, and, as I say, did so, I think, for
perfectly good reasons.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, it must have been of considerable
relief to you, on 13 March, when he told you that he had
come to the better view that the revival argument
worked, because, at that point, he had given you,
subject to you making the determination, the clear legal
grounds that you needed.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, and the reason why he had done that
was really very obvious, which was that the Blix reports
indicated quite clearly that Saddam had not taken that
final opportunity.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But he had done it in disagreement with
the international lawyers, all of them, as we understand
from Sir Michael Wood, then in the government's employ.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I seem to remember -- but I may be wrong on this; if I am, forgive me -- but I think that he had also sought the advice of Christopher Greenwood QC.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He had, and we discussed that, and it didn't appear from our discussion that there were many other people outside government arguing in the same direction that Lord Goldsmith eventually argued.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously, other countries, of course, were having the same issues as well and having to decide this and it wasn't -- I don't think it is right to say it was irrelevant that the American lawyers had come to a different view.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly not irrelevant, because it had a big impact on him, but, apart from America, were there other countries in which -- we have heard recently what a Dutch review has found on this, but were there other countries in which people were arguing in favour of the revival argument?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think all countries who took the military action believed they had a sound legal basis for doing so.

    All I am pointing out is, actually, when you analyse 1441, it is less surprising as a conclusion to come to than as sometimes is made out today, because the fact is
1441 was very deliberately constructed. It had, if you like, a certain sort of integrity as a resolution to it. It basically said, "Okay, one last chance. One last chance, Saddam, to prove that you have had a change of heart, that you are going to cooperate", and he didn't.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We are not lawyers, we have simply listened to the views of lawyers, Lord Goldsmith, Sir Michael Wood, Ms Wilmshurst, Mr Brummell, and looked at what they told us about the balance of legal opinion on this subject.

Lord Goldsmith obviously was not in a position in which he had wide support within the international legal fraternity within the government, indeed any, I think, in the UK, when he made his judgment. But he is a lawyer of the highest eminence and they accepted his authority, even if they didn't agree with it. So that was the final position.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, forgive me, Sir Roderic. All I'm trying to say is, when you actually go back and read 1441, it is pretty obvious that you can make a decent case for this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, let me not pass judgment on that. I'm asking questions and I do not have an opinion to state on it. I would just like to ask one final question to wrap up this legal chapter, and this is
really -- you were in the position, ultimately, where
you had to give this determination. You had to go
through with the action, Lord Goldsmith was preparing
with the assistance of Christopher Greenwood for the
possibility of legal challenge. He knew that he had
taken a decision that some others, many others, perhaps,
were arguing with and were going to argue with, and he
had put something to you that was described as
a reasonable case, but, nevertheless, not one that he
would have confidently put before a court.

You then had to decide whether you were convinced
that this was a strong enough legal basis to take a very
serious action of participating in a full-scale invasion
of another country.

How convinced were you, at this point, that you had
a strong legal case for doing what you did?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would put it in this way. What
I needed to know from him was, in the end, was he going
to say this was lawful? He had to come to conclusion in
the end, and I was a lawyer myself, I wrote many, many
opinions for clients, and they tend to be, "On the one
hand ... on the other hand", but you come to
a conclusion in the end and he had to come to that
conclusion.

Incidentally, I think he wasn't alone in
international law in coming to that conclusion, for very obvious reasons, because, as I say, if you read the words in 1441 it is pretty clear this was Saddam's last chance.

So that was what he had to do. He did it. As I say, anybody who knows Peter knows he would not have done it unless he believed in it and thought it was the correct thing to do, and that was -- for us and for our armed forces, that was sufficient.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You weren't worried by him saying that he wouldn't expect to win in a court with this one.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I do not know that he said "not to win", he simply said, you know, there is a case either way, and there always was a case either way. That's why it would have been preferable, politically, and -- and to have removed any doubt, to have had the second resolution, but in the end, we got to the point in the middle of March when, frankly, we had to decide. We were going either to back away or we were going to go forward, and I decided, for the reasons that I have given, that we should go forward.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: There was a case either way: one he described as the safest legal course, but that was no longer available, and the other he said was:

"If the matter ever came before a court ..."
Well:

"A reasonable case does not mean that, if the matter ever came before a court, I would be confident that the court would agree with this view."

But I think, unless you have a further comment to make, I have finished, I think, with all the questions that I had on the legal case. I do not know if any of my colleagues have. Otherwise, we will move on to the next subject.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that bring us to the question of preparations and planning, the decision having been taken. So can I turn to Baroness Prashar to start us off?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

This morning you said that your decision to contribute to a full division was driven by your sense of what the proper UK contribution should be to policy.

At that stage, did you weigh up the implications of that decision; for example, the time that would be required to acquire equipment and such like?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, of course. Part of the purpose of asking for papers that describe the different levels of military commitment that you might give is precisely in order to be able to learn what it is that you will be required to do. But in these situations, you know, you
are very, very dependent, rightly, on the advice that
you are given from the Ministry of Defence and from the
military.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But a fundamental underlying
assumption of the strategic defence review, which your
government initiated in 1997, was that there would
always be sufficient warning time for any operation at
medium or large scale to build up equipment, stores and
ammunition, and in the case of a large-scale operation,
it said:

"... such a substantial contribution to invading
Iraq, the necessary lead time would be six months."

This was necessary to allow for call-up and
preparation of reserves, including medics, and to take
account of the industry's capacity to build up stocks.

Now, on the basis of your government's planning
assumptions, therefore, in order to prepare for the
possibility, however slim, a large-scale military action
in the spring of 2003, that six-month clock would have
started ticking in autumn 2002.

But David Manning had told us that you sought to
delay the decision as long as possible, and we have also
heard from Lord Boyce and, of course, from Mr Hoon about
the restrictions placed on the visible military
preparations in December 2002.
I mean, were you aware what the implications of that would be, or had anybody made you aware of the implications of the delay?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. What was important was to be very clear that you could not do this unless the military were ready to do it, and, yes, it is true, as I think I have explained this morning, for a time we were worried about the visibility of all the planning.

We were doing a certain amount of planning, but you then reach another level when you have to make it very visible and very clear. We didn't want to do that for fear of triggering an assumption that we were actually going to do military action irrespective of what was going to be happening at the United Nations.

However, I think it was at the end of October 2002, Geoff Hoon said to me, "We have really got to get on with this now", and we did, and I know Mike Boyce said to you in his evidence that he was confident that the UK military was fully ready by the time we took the military action.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But was that assurance given to you because they wanted to give you a view that they had a "can do" approach?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the one thing about the military, in my experience, is they tell you very bluntly, quite
rightly, what their situation is, what they want, what
they don't want, and what they think about things, and
Mike was very, very clear that they had the readiness.

I think there were something like 250 different
urgent operational requirements that went into this.
All of them -- I think Kevin Tebbit told you this --
were properly met, and, incidentally, had anyone at any
stage come to me and said, "It is not safe to do this
because of the lack of proper military preparation",
I would have taken that very, very seriously indeed, but
they didn't, and they got on with it, and they did it
magnificently, as they always do.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: They did, but I think you will
appreciate that they only actually had -- it was
in January, I think, that there was a formal approval
given. So that was only about, I think, a couple of
months.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I thought that -- sorry, Baroness.
I thought that Geoff Hoon had come to me at the end
of October -- there had been a lot of work going on.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but there was no
visible preparedness, and things like the provision of
essential kit, medical supplies, combat boots, body
armour -- very important in a situation where there
could be a threat of nuclear, biological and chemical --
protection clothing, ammunition.

As it happened, the kit did not arrive until late
and that was the case.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But it was very important -- just let me
emphasise to you, on these issues to do with logistics,
and there is an expertise that the army has on this,
I needed to know from them that they could do it and
they would be ready, and that's what they assured me,
and they were.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What you are saying to me is that
nobody spelt out to you the implications of not being
prepared in time, given the fact the lead time needed
for this kind of large-scale operation was six months?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they were absolutely spelling out
the implications, which is why Geoff Hoon came to me and
said, "We have now got to get this visible and get
a move on with it". We had a meeting with the Chief of
Defence Staff and others, and -- I just want to
emphasise one thing: my attitude has always been --
I don't think I refused a request for money or equipment
at any point in time that I was Prime Minister.

My view, very, very strongly, is, when you are
asking your armed forces to go into these situations,
you put everything to one side other than making sure
that they have the equipment they need and they have the
finance there to back it up. As far as I am aware, and, as I say, I think this was their evidence to you, they got it ready and they got it ready in time.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the point is the formal approval did not come until January anyway, and, in fact, we do know that that was the case, the equipment was late.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I didn't know -- I mean, as I say, there are, as it were, issues to do with logistics that they are far better able to tell you about. All I know is that they regard themselves as ready, and what is more, they performed as ready. They did an extraordinary job.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But can I ask another question? Because, if the view was that you are going through the United Nations route and there was a military threat, why were you reluctant to have any visible preparation?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, we changed and we did have the visible preparation.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that came late, that's my point.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly, but there was always a concern, if you like, in the middle part of 2002, because people were constantly saying, "They have made up their minds, nothing is going to alter it. We are now set on a military course". So we were anxious to make sure people did not think there was an inevitability about this, because one of the things I would emphasise to you
is there really wasn't.

If the UN route had worked successfully, however
many doubts you could have on the past behaviour of
Saddam, if it had worked successfully, the whole thing
would have been -- would not have happened. We would
have taken the UN path and made it work.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I now want to turn to the sort of
general aftermath planning, because, on 21 January 2003,
you were giving evidence to the Liaison Committee. You said:

"We cannot engage in military conflict and ignore
the aftermath. In other words, if we -- at this stage
of military conflict, we also have to get a very proper
worked out plan as to what happens afterwards and how
the international community supports that ..."

Several witnesses have told us that the planning and
the resources for the aftermath of war was important, if
not more important than the planning for resourcing the
war itself. Now, what happened? Because you know, this
was inadequate and a lot of people have said it didn't
quite work.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: First of all, I think we have got to
divide it into two sections here. Actually, we did an
immense amount of pre-war planning. I think Mike Boyce
said to you in his evidence that they spent as much time
on Phase 4 as the other phases of the operation. We had
the officials meeting obviously. We had the ad hoc
meetings, we had Cabinet meetings, actually, that were
discussing these issues.

The real problem was that our focus was on the
issues that, in the end, were not the issues that caused
us the difficulty. It wasn't an absence of planning, it
was that we planned for certain eventualities and, when
we got in there, we managed to deal with those
eventualities, but we discovered a different set of
realities and then we had to deal with those.

So the vast bulk of the pre-war planning was focused
on the humanitarian, number one, I think probably more
than anything else. Indeed, I think there was a House
of Commons Select Committee report on 6 March 2003
saying you have got to do even more on the humanitarian
side. All the focus was on that. Then there was --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But we also have evidence, and
I think these letters have been declassified, that
Clare Short was writing to you for a pretty long time on
the level of involvement that DFID and she had, and she
was drawing this to your attention from a pretty early
time.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I think, if you analysed those
letters, they focused especially on the humanitarian
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: They focused on --

They do, but what she was complaining about was the preparedness and the timing when it was done, attention wasn't being paid to that.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly so, and that's why we were trying to make sure that we doubled our focus, and, when we went in there, I would simply say that on the humanitarian side -- and that was the main thing people were warning about, we didn't end up with a humanitarian disaster. In fact, we avoided, and we avoided in many ways because of the work that DFID and the other agencies did.

The other things she was warning about were the oil fields being set on fire and the use of chemical and biological weapons. So there was an immense amount of planning going on, but we planned with one assumption that turned out to be wrong, and then we also ended up with a fresh problem that I don't think people foresaw.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that raises another issue: how adequate was the planning, and had you ensured that planning covered all the full range of situations you may have faced post-conflict Iraq?

This is not only the issues that you might face directly linked to military action, but it is about security, political and economic challenges that you
might face, because, in a way, the whole idea was to
kind of reconstruct Iraq. So had you planned adequately
for these eventualities?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, for what we thought we were going
to encounter in Iraq, I think we did plan adequately.
We had a perfectly sensible plan, which was to make sure
that -- because from January onwards it was clear that
we were going to have responsibility in the south, that
we would be able, for example, to put together very
quickly a group of Iraqis in Basra that would be able to
take over greater responsibility, but one of the
planning assumptions -- and I was just looking this up
now, and I think Andrew Turnbull gave you evidence to
this effect. The planning assumption that the MoD, the
Foreign Office, I think DFID, everybody, made, was that
there would be a functioning Iraqi Civil Service.

In other words, that you would remove the top level
but you would have a functioning system underneath it,
and I think one of the major lessons of this is to
understand that, where you have these types of states
that are, in the case of Iraq, a sort of semi-fascist
state, if you like, which really operated by fear
amongst -- on the population from a small number of
people, that assumption is going to be wrong. You are
going to be dealing with the situation where you
probably have to rebuild the civil infrastructure of the
country from nothing, and that's what we found.

You will have heard from the evidence of the
generals and others, when they went into Basra, contrary
to what we thought, and the MoD planning assumptions, we
found a completely broken system.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We will come to that, but I think
you quoted Lord Turnbull. I mean, the decision, as
I said, to contribute a substantial land force to the
coalition, I mean, were you aware that we would occupy
the south and east of Iraq and that we would assume
responsibilities as an occupying power under the Geneva
and Hague Conventions -- let me finish -- because what
Lord Turnbull said -- I think it is very important -- he
said:

"Had we stuck with option 2, we would have had
warships and aircraft but we wouldn't have had the large
numbers of people and special forces on the ground and
we would not have been an occupying power with
everything that flowed from it."

That's what I meant about the implications.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is correct that I think from about
early January onwards, we knew that we would be in
a position where we were going to have to handle the
situation in the south. That was actually, I think,
preferable to us, frankly, from the situation originally
contemplated, which is that you came in from the north.
That was part of the commitment that we were able to
make. We then knew they would be joined by the forces
of other nations.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you aware of that when you took
the decision to go --
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think from January onwards it was
clear that we were going to be in a position, where we
were going to be in charge of Basra, but the whole
assumption -- and you see this very clearly from the
documents -- is that you would come in, and for the
first stage obviously the army would be the main people
in charge. You would then bring your civilian people in
behind that. You would then, as swiftly as possible,
turn it over to the Iraqis themselves, and the idea was
to get an Iraqi interim administration up and running
very quickly.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that -- I mean that happened,
I think, after we got the Security Council Resolution
1483 and --
RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that was also a very important part
of what we wanted to do. We wanted to bring the
United Nations back in.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why did we, unlike other coalition
members, accept the status of a joint occupying power?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because we were the key partner of the US in this. We believed in it. We believed it was right to be there, for the reasons that I have given, and we were prepared to accept the responsibility of then putting the country right.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did we actually weigh up all the liability, the risks and the implications, the resources required?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and one of the things that we made very clear -- I think I made this clear on a number of occasions, was that we could not walk away from our commitment to people in Iraq afterwards, but I believe, for all the reasons I have given, that this was an important commitment for us to make. The whole reason why we then had quite a detailed and difficult discussion actually with the Americans about the United Nations then coming back in for the aftermath was precisely because we knew for ourselves -- and again I think Peter Goldsmith was advising this -- that we needed that cover, that military cover, and 1483 effectively endorsed the coalition presence.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But why is it that so many witnesses have said to us that the aftermath planning was deficient?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, first of all, a lot of the criticisms have been directed at the American system. Now, all I would say about that is I think, like you, if you look at the Rand Report or the Inspector General's report, I think done in 2009, in America, I think it lays out very clearly the problems in pre-war planning and the problems in post-war execution.

I think for ourselves, if we knew then what we know now, we would, of course, do things very differently. On the other hand, for what we thought we were going to have, we had planned for it and we actually met those eventualities.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You say that criticisms were directed at the Americans, but what had you agreed with President Bush about the aftermath?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we had agreed was that -- this was the whole dispute, really, about the United Nations. We were saying the United Nations had to come back into the situation.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But they were very reluctant to give the United Nations a role and that is something, I think, which we wanted and there was a resistance from the Americans?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that's absolutely right, Baroness, but in the end the Americans agreed that they should
have what we called a vital or central role.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Andrew Turnbull said we were being fobbed off by President Bush when he said that.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think if you actually look at what then happened with the United Nations in Iraq, I think Resolution 1483 is really a very important resolution.

I don't know whether you want to look at it now, I'm perfectly content to do it, but --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I have got it, but --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Rather than refer to it, let me just make this very simple point: I saw Kofi Annan, I think on -- I think it was around 16 April. In other words, shortly after the military action had begun. I had a good and close relationship with Kofi Annan, someone I respect very much. He had been in a very difficult position throughout the last few months. He made it clear that the UN had to be independent of the coalition, but he also made it clear he wasn't arguing for the lead role. What he was arguing for --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In the circumstances, not surprising.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The fact that it had been a coalition-led invasion and he did not want the responsibility of reconstruction, that's not surprising.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct, but that is why -- when people say that, as it were, the UN should have been given the lead role, I'm simply pointing out the fact that he didn't want that. What he did want was a vital role, which is what we got the Americans to agree to, and if you look at Resolution 1483, it sets out the areas in which his special representative, which he agreed to appoint, was going to have influence and say, and actually, that special representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello, was absolutely excellent, would have made an enormous difference to Iraq and its future, but the terrorists killed him, assassinated him in August 2003.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I understand, but I want to go back to the points, because my recollection is that, as early as September 2002, a number of very sensible questions were being asked in Parliament about the aftermath planning. We have also been told that you were given rather an optimistic view by the Americans who thought it would be all right on the day.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, the Americans were making efforts, actually, but I think, as I say, if you read the Inspector General's report, if you read the Rand Report, it is very clear things could have been done differently. I think the American administration, or
the American system, as it were, has accepted that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But I understand you personally
became involved in the aftermath arrangement
about February 2003. Was that not too late?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I was personally involved in what
was going to happen before then. As we came to the
point of actually going in, it is true we had a meeting,
I think in February 2003 and then subsequent meetings
but the absolutely central point, since we are trying to
see what are the lessons that we can learn, is that,
unfortunately, what we thought was going to be the
problem didn't turn out to be the problem.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but I think I go back
to my earlier point. It is the adequacy of the planning
on a whole range of things, economic, political, because
in a way there was a danger, there was information that
Iraq could have fractured, given the insecurity of the
Kurds, what could have happened with the Shias and
Sunnis. I mean, there is a whole range of eventualities
which you planned for that wasn't done.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would say we most certainly did plan
for the problems in relation to the potential for
a Sunni/Shia/Kurd split, and what we tried to do was to
make sure that, as soon as possible, we brought the
Sunnis and the Kurds and the Shia together.
So what actually happened -- and this happened in May, only just a few weeks after the invasion -- they brought together -- I think it was called the Iraq Governing Council or the Interim Governing Council. That had a membership of 25. I think there were 13 or -- I think it was 13 Shia and 11 Sunni, and one --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But before that, I mean, the decision was taken, for example, the ORHA was actually replaced by CPA and, you know, changes were made without any consultation with us.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think -- look, what actually happened was it became very clear that ORHA was not capable of doing that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I know that, but my point is, in terms of working together, if we were a joint occupying power, were we being consulted, were we exerting the kind of influence we needed to?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think we were being consulted on the questions everyone thought would arise, but it is true -- I mean, Tim Cross and others were coming back and saying, "This system is not working in the way it should", and we were then interacting very strongly with the Americans.

The only thing I say is: had we had even more focus on it, we would have still been focusing essentially on
the humanitarian side with an assumption that we would
inherit a functioning Civil Service infrastructure, and
it was that assumption that proved to be wrong.

I think that one the reasons why we set up -- and
I know you have had evidence about this -- what is
called the Stabilisation Unit, in 2004, was precisely
because we recognised in the future -- and I think this
is what the American system now knows, for sure, if you
are going to go into a situation like this, you have to
go in as nation builders and you have got to go in with
a configuration of the political and the civilian and
the military that is right for a failed state situation.
That doesn't mean to say that you don't do it, but you
need to be prepared for it.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the point really is our
assumption was that we would get the United Nations to
take the lead role. Eventually, that didn't happen, but
did we have a plan B then? Because, in a sense, all I'm
really wanting to get at is the ability to plan for
eventualities.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did plan for those eventualities. We
did an analysis of what they might be, and we worked
them out. The trouble was we didn't plan for two
things: one was, as I say, the absence of this properly
functioning Civil Service infrastructure; and, of
course, the second thing, which is the single most
important element of this whole business of what
happened afterwards, people did not think that Al-Qaeda
and Iran would play the role that they did, and we could
have -- if what you had ended up having was essentially
an indigenous violence or insurgency, or the criminality
and the looting and so on, again there are issues to do
with the numbers of troops, the types of troops and --
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We will actually come to that later.
I will pass on to Sir Martin Gilbert.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I just want to --
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, do finish.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I just wanted to finish by saying all of
those are very important questions. We could have
handled the situation if that had been the problem. It
was the introduction of the external elements of AQ and
Iran that really caused this mission very nearly to
fail. Fortunately, in the end, it didn’t, and the
reason why that is important is that that itself, in my
view, is a huge lesson, because those are the same
forces that we are now facing, Afghanistan right round
the region.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As I have said, that is an area we
are going to cover later.
THE CHAIRMAN: I think we will take a break in a moment.
I just wanted, in hearing this set of exchanges, and reading a great deal and hearing a good deal of evidence, that there was, in terms of the planning for the aftermath on the British side, leave aside the Americans -- and we have seen the Rand Report and the Hard Lessons report -- there was a single set of assumptions which regrettably turned out to be very over-optimistic about what we would find, but there appears to have been no real risk analysis looking at best case, middle case, worst case, and at the resource and planning horizon implications of that.

What we did know -- and I would not like to sound like Donald Rumsfeld -- we knew we knew very little about the condition of things inside Saddam's Iraq. We had no embassy, we had no direct means. John Scarlett told us it was not a natural intelligence target. In principle, we could have amassed a good deal of knowledge, but none of it sufficient.

The question, looking to the future, the lesson to be drawn, is it ever safe to look at a single set of assumptions unless they can be tested quite rigorously against a worst case background?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that's a very good question. I think that actually we did, because the MoD did a massive amount of work -- there is a whole planning
assumptions paper, as you know, and we did focus on
this, we really tried to drill down on it, and one of
the reasons why, in early 2003, I was having quite
difficult exchanges of correspondence with Clare Short
particularly was because, rightly, she was getting
worried that the humanitarian side was not going to be
adequately advanced.

I think in the future you are best to make this
assumption, actually, that these types of failed
states -- I don't know whether you would describe Iraq
as a failed state or a semi-fascist state, but whatever
it was, it was a wholly dysfunctional system. If we are
required to go into this type of situation again, you
might as well assume the worst, actually, because it is
going to be -- you are dealing with states that are
depressedly repressive, very secretive, power is controlled
by a very small number of people, and it is always going
to be tough.

Now, I think the real question in a way for us, as
a country -- because I think whatever preparations you
make this was always going to be tough, always going to
be tough -- is: are we prepared to engage in this? Are
we actually prepared to be in there for the long-term on
nation building, in these difficult situations, fighting
a completely different type of terrorist and insurgency
threat?

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. It may have turned out to be an expensive lesson, but one very necessary to learn.

Let's have a break for about a quarter of an hour. Can I just remind the audience that people will need to be back here -- I suggest within ten minutes to be certain of getting in and back through the security, if you go out, because we shall need to start dead on time and if you are not here, I am afraid that's it.

Thank you.

(3.22 pm)

(Short break)

(3.40 pm)

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's resume this final part of the afternoon and Sir Martin Gilbert is going to ask some questions.

Sir Martin?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have heard from a number of our military witnesses that the requirements for troops to be deployed for such a sustained period in Iraq beyond the initial invasion stretched the military machine significantly beyond the limits of what the military regarded as its sustainability.

Were you advised about the British military's ability to sustain a significant force in Iraq?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was advised that we could sustain it,
but it was going to be difficult, for sure. We obviously had the ongoing campaign in Afghanistan. We were bringing troops from other countries. I think we had about 30 countries in the coalition. They brought in roughly, I don't know, 15,000 to 20,000 additional troops as well. I think we had the troops we needed in the south, but, yes, it was -- all the way through, it was going to be difficult.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you concerned at any point that we had actually overcommitted ourselves?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was very concerned to make sure we didn't, and obviously a constant interaction between myself and the military was to make sure that we didn't.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In his evidence to us, General Wall described the impact of the reduction of British forces in Iraq in the summer of 2003, and while he clearly accepted that this was necessary in order to provide for the long-term roulement of troops to sustain our troops in MND (South East), he did make clear that this constrains the ability to contain the emerging violence in Iraq.

What assumptions were made about the role of British troops with regard to Iraq, once Saddam had been removed? What did you see and plan for their tasks to be?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the idea obviously was that we would not require the same number of troops for the conflict as we would in the aftermath. There was, I think, a time in the middle of 2003, when we were asked for more troops and gave more troops.

Our issue really in the south was less to do with the number of troops, because, in fact, there was relatively low level violence in the south compared with the rest of the country. Our concern was how we managed to get the reconstruction going in the south in circumstances where, fairly early on, there were groups whose purpose was deliberately to stop that reconstruction.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Given the constraints, what did you see as the balance of the task for our troops, on the one hand, seeking out MND, which clearly, at one point, had to be a priority, and at the same time delivering a secure environment in which not only the Iraqis could sustain a normal life but also our British civilians who were there in reconstruction?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: These were very much decisions for the commanders on the ground, but I think they were conscious at a very early stage of this that they were trying both to make sure that they dealt with any lingering resistance, but, also, that they provided
security for the local people.

I have gone back over this many times, because I think it is very important actually, this period straight after the invasion, because, in a sense, what happened was that we very quickly toppled the Saddam regime, but then what we found, as I say, was that the situation was different from the one we expected.

Between, I would say, March 2003 and early 2004, during the period of time that Sir Hilary Synnott was there, you know, we had the situation more or less under control. There was some reconstruction going. We had agreed, I think, a special claim on the reserve at the end of March 2003.

What really happened was that another assumption that had been made, which was that Iran would basically not be provocative, it might have its interests, but it wasn't going to be provocative, that assumption also started to change, and what happened was that, as Moqtadr Sadr became more powerful, and obviously to an extent backed by Iran, that entered a new dimension into that, and then, as 2004 went on and came into 2005, this Iranian issue became much larger.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned that it was the military who were, of course, advising in terms of the priorities, but what was your input at this time? What
were you, as it were, suggesting and proposing to them?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think we were getting feedback as quickly as we could on how we could change the situation round. We were trying to get the United Nations obviously back in with a vital or central role. I went out then to Iraq at the end of May 2003. I met Jerry Bremer there, and, after that, I had meetings both internally, commissioning work, and then had a very frank discussion with America as to what was happening up in Baghdad.

At that point, I think it is fair to say the issue really was -- I think John Sawers described this to you as the "Baghdad first" policy that, in the end, unless you could secure Baghdad, you were going -- you were always going to have difficulties.

But I would say -- it is interesting, this, when I was getting frequent reports back, and then, I think, as Sir Hilary Synnott told you, actually, I was always very clear with our people out there, "If you have got a real problem, pick up the phone, if necessary, and if you start to get messed around with bureaucracy, come to me directly".

I think, when I saw him at the end of February 2004, when he left, he thought it was challenging, but, you know, there was some progress being made and we had to
If I could go back to the military funding issue and perhaps look at its wider aspect, we have heard from several military witnesses how effectively the urgent operational requirements for the military were addressed, but we have also heard -- and Geoff Hoon touched on this last week -- how, because of the way the UOR procedure works, in years 2 and 3 of the funding cycle, the continued use of UORs over the sustained period led, in effect, to core MoD requirements being diverted to the UORs. Was that something that you were aware of, something that you became involved in?

I don't think this was something I was personally involved in, no. I was more involved at the level, if you like, of say, for example, in September 2003, they asked for additional forces and I was keen to get them going. I don't think I really -- I don't think the issues to do with urgent operational requirements really came to me.

Or the fact that the urgent operational requirements were diverting funds away under the strategic defence review system.

I think if anybody had come to me and said, "Look, there is an issue and a problem here", and
we were having ongoing discussions about the defence budget and so on and so forth within government. If somebody had come to me and said, "I think there is a real problem. We have to deal with it", I would have been straight in there trying to sort it out, but I wasn't aware of that particular issue coming across my desk.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of other departments, we have also heard from Sir Suma Chakrabarti, among others, of problems that, essentially, they felt that funding was not being divided adequately, for example, that the rehabilitation in Iraq, the DFID requirements really required more significant resources. Is this something that came to you?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it did, and one of the reasons why we agreed a supplementary provision by the Treasury, I think of £127 million, if I remember rightly, or round about that, at the end of March, was precisely because we were aware we had to ramp up pretty quickly.

Now, there was there was an additional problem, which was getting the allocation -- the Americans had made a huge allocation for the CPA, the provisional authority up in Baghdad, and we were trying to get that money transferred back down, and I even got involved at one point -- I seem to remember that was a Siemens power
plant and I got involved in trying to sort out the money
being delivered for, but my basic view -- I think we
spent for DFID -- I think, 2003/2004, Iraq was the key
country. We spent over £260 million. It was a big
commitment that we were giving. Much of that was
humanitarian, but there was also money there for
reconstruction.

Had people come to me again and said, "Look, we need
to make an even greater commitment", I would have done
so, but I think, to be fair, during that period of time,
as people were then assessing a quite different
situation, what became clear in time was not a lack of
resource, but a lack of security.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That brings me to my final question
really, and you touched, I think, just before the break,
in part on your answer, and that is the question of
anticipating some of these problems in advance.

From what we have heard from the people on the
ground, the military, and also, of course, the DFID and
the whole question of the deteriorating security
situation, are these not things which, August,
September, October, 2002, should have been addressed?
After all, Iraq was not an unknown quantity.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely correct, and we focused very
much on what we would find and how we would deal with
it. Also, there was, of course -- I mean, I raised this issue myself several times, you know, how would the Sunni/Shia relationship work out? That was going to be a major part of the problem. You had basically three groups. You had the Kurds up in the north, you had the Sunni, and then down in the south there was predominantly Shia.

For that very reason -- that was another reason why I wanted the UN closely involved, because I thought they had a better chance of bringing those groups together. It was also a reason why, very early on, we put a lot of effort into getting a sense amongst the different Iraqi groups that they could come together, because one of the things that had happened in Iraq, obviously, was that the Sunni, who were, what, 20 per cent of the population had effectively ruled the country, and so the majority Shia population had been excluded. So this was going to be a huge thing now. They were for the first time going to come positions of power.

But we put a lot of focus and work in that, and by and large -- you know, one of the extraordinary things about this, from 2003 onwards, is this political process, despite everything continued, and, actually, it was in 2006, as the result of what was an absolutely wicked and deliberate act of bombing the Samarra mosque,
that was what started to tip this into a Shia/Sunni
issue.

Fortunately, in the end, we got back out of it
again, but in 2004, down in the south, there were all
sorts of issues but we were managing them.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was it then a weakness in the
pre-March 2003 discussions that somehow voices weren't
raised, and experts and knowledge weren't put on the
table that there could be this massive deterioration?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was very much discussion of the
Shia/Sunni issue, and we were very well aware of that.

What there wasn't -- and this, again, is of vital
importance and this certainly is a lesson in any situation
similar to this -- people did not believe that you would
have Al-Qaeda coming in from outside and people did not
believe that you would end up in a situation where Iran,
once, as it were, the threat of Saddam was removed from
them, would then try to deliberately destabilise the
country, but that's what they did, and there are some
very important lessons in that, because what is
important also to understand throughout this process,
the Iraqi people, as a people, were not in favour of the
violence, they were not in favour of sectarianism. As
a people, they supported and have supported throughout
the political process. Indeed today in Iraq you have
now got, for the elections that are coming up, groups who are overtly non-sectarian standing for election, which is a huge thing for the whole of the Middle East and a great thing incidentally.

So I think what I think in future you have to be aware of is that if you are dealing with a country where you are likely to get this -- as I say, this perversion of the proper faith of Islam as a major element in the equation, you are going to have to prepare for that very carefully. Your troop configuration has got to be prepared for it and you are going to have to be prepared for quite a fight over it.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned I think twice in your speeches before the war, your meeting with Iraqis and how affected you were by that, but they weren't giving this sort of warning sign?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they weren't. Look, it was a statement of the obvious. I mean, Britain in a sense, as Iraqis remember, back in the 1920s, were intimately involved with all this. So everybody understood the history of how Iraq had come about, and obviously you had the Kurds, you had the Sunni, and you had the Shia. But the consensus view was you had to watch for the Sunni/Shia violence. That was precisely why you had to construct an inclusive political process.
Right from the outset, we tried to deal with that, and I did something else, and I think Jack Straw mentioned this to you in his evidence. I also sent Jack to talk to the Iranians. A very big lesson from this for me was that we tried with the Iranians, tried very hard to reach out, to in a sense make an agreement with them, to give them a strong indication that it wasn't -- the American forces were not there, having done Iraq, to move through to Iran or any of the rest of it and one of the most disappointing, but also, I think, most telling aspects of this is that the Iranians, whatever they said, from the beginning, were a major destabilising factor in this situation and quite deliberately.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think, Roderic, you have got a question.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just briefly follow through on that point and then raise one other?

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and with all the wisdom of hindsight, I suppose it seems pretty obvious now that Al-Qaeda would seek to exploit conflict in Iraq and, indeed, that the Iranians would as well. As you have just said, they had a destabilising effect and they must have enjoyed putting pressure on us and the Americans at a time when we were trying to put them under pressure to deal with their nuclear programme.
Now, that's all hindsight. But if there had been a really rigorous risk assessment made before we went in, would it really not have shown that these risks existed? You have repeatedly referred to how these external factors destabilised and how this wasn't something that would be predicted. Could it and should it have been predicted?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That is a very, very good question. Let me try and answer it. We did ask for an assessment on Iran particularly. Indeed, you will see through the intelligence assessments in 2002, I'm constantly going back and forward -- you know, is Iran -- I think I asked this again in February 2003: what's the attitude of Iran going to be?

The conventional wisdom, if you like, at the time, was that you might get elements of the revolutionary guard playing about, but basically the evidence was that Iran would more or less have a watching brief to see how it would play out but it had no interest in destabilising.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Despite the fact that Iraq had fought a long war with it, they weren't exactly best pals.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, exactly. That was the point. Because Saddam had been their enemy in the Iran/Iraq war, and, as I say, there were a million casualties in
that war, it was the most terrible situation. Precisely because they would be pleased to get rid of Saddam, we thought they would be more amenable.

I had actually spoken myself to the President of Iran prior to September 11 when we were trying to get the new resolution on sanctions. I had actually had a telephone conversation with President Khatami at the time. I had gone out of my way to say, "Let's have a new relationship", and so on. So in respect of Iran that was the advice, but we did go into this in some detail.

In respect of Al-Qaeda, I think, in retrospect, this was difficult. At the time -- and you know, we know so much more about these groups and how they operate now, but, at the time, the single thing people were most determined to prove was, in a sense, they were two separate problems, because the Americans had raised this question of a link between Saddam and Al-Qaeda, and, really, our system in Britain was determined to say, "No, come on, keep the two things separate. We are not saying Saddam had anything to do with September 11", and that was very much how Al-Qaeda were seen.

Now, I think -- and this is a very interesting point because it is absolutely goes to the 2010 point that I raised earlier. My view is, if we had left Saddam
there, and he had carried on, as we said, with the
intent to develop these weapons and the know-how and the
concealment programme, and the sanctions had gone,
I have little doubt myself -- but it is a judgment and
other people may take a different judgment -- that today
we would be facing a situation where Iraq was competing
with Iran, competing both on nuclear weapons capability
and competing more importantly, perhaps, than anything
else -- competing, as well as the nuclear issue, in
respect of support of terrorist groups.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think it would be very useful, if we
have time at the end, to come back to this 2010 point,
because you have raised something that other witnesses
have not so far raised with us, at least not in that
way. But you have raised it as a sort of binary
question, whereas there are alternative scenarios under
which Saddam might very well still be in a box.

It wasn't a question of whether he got right out of
it or not, but I think it is best if we don't go down
that track at this moment.

I just wanted to put one other question about the
post-conflict period to you, which is simply this: you
said you went to Baghdad in May and you met Bremer. Of
course, when Bremer arrived, he arrived setting up the
CPA in place of ORHA which everybody had described as
a shambles, with two extremely important edicts which he
promulgated in his first week, which had been
pre-packaged in Washington, on de-Ba'athification and on
the disbandment of the Iraqi armed forces.

It wasn't, as other witnesses have told us, that we
disagreed with the principle of these edicts. It was
really the extent. They were far too sweeping, and that
damage had to be undone. So a lot of damage, it turned
out, was done by these edicts, again based on what we
have heard in evidence.

My question is this, simply: had we been consulted
before this happened by Washington on these very
important decisions? We were their co-occupying power,
and if they hadn't consulted us, should they have done?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Certainly the moment -- I mean, I don't
know whether there had been any official contact on this
at all. I know I hadn't had the discussion with the
White House on it. I would, however, say, the moment we
were aware of this -- John Sawers was, of course, in
Baghdad then, and he was on to the case.

I think one of the things, you know, that obviously
you will do is to look at this de-Ba'athification and
disbandment of the army and assess how big a factor it
was.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have done to an extent already.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would say it is quite interesting, this. I'm not sure in my own mind about this even now. I think in respect of de-Ba'athification -- and I think John Sawers said this to you -- it was going to be really difficult to prevent a certain level of de-Ba'athification. The question is: should it have gone down to the level it did?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, that's exactly the point.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: All I would say about that is the pressure -- because it is almost impossible for us, I think, to understand how oppressed and repressed the population of Iraq felt. Suddenly they had this freedom. They detested these Ba'athist people. I remember meeting groups of Iraqis before the invasion and they would tell you of the torture chambers and all the rest of it. I know we had the same problem with the Nazi party in Germany after the war. It is a very, very difficult situation, this, and even now -- because I got on to President Bush pretty much straight away on this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was kind of too late by then. So effectively, we hadn't been consulted in advance. As soon as we heard about it, you and John Sawers got on to it.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think John was actually there at the time of the decision.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: My other question was: do you feel we should have been consulted about it before --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I feel it is a decision of such moment that it would have been sensible if there had been a major discussion about it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the answer is "yes"?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: But I would say, to be fair to the Americans, the moment that it happened we raised these issues with them and actually they reacted to it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But they didn't withdraw the decisions.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: They amended the decisions very substantially, and this is where I think again I would consult quite carefully with the people who took these decisions on the American side, because I have spoken to people subsequent to this. I think probably it is true it would have been better not to have done the de-Ba'athification and disbanding of the army in that way, but all I say to you is that's a very live debate amongst the people that were there at the time, and --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- just to say this: as a result of the conversation I had with George Bush, literally days after this, they were then scaling back. They scaled back further, and in respect of the army, they were always intending to re-recruit and then they corrected
this pension problem that they had with the army pretty quickly. So all I would say is I think it is something that you need to take a range of views on.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. We are now firmly into the post-war period. We discussed before lunch some hours ago, the ISG report and I really don't want to go back over that. I think we can agree it indicated that Saddam had never lost his interest in WMD programmes.

But the headline for most people was that the actual stocks of WMD, the reconstituted facilities, as discussed in the dossier, for example, had not been found. What was your -- when did you realise that that was likely to be the case?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, obviously, as time went on through the course of 2003, you know, at the very beginning -- you know, others have taken some evidence of our genuine belief about this. At the very beginning, we were constantly, almost daily, getting reports that there was this site or that site and we were trying to direct the armed forces there, but it was a major part of our operation, actually, after 19 March. But obviously, during the course of 2004, it became very difficult to sustain this.
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, General Fry has told us that, even as those troops were on that mission, as you describe, they became somewhat disillusioned, because the basis they were supposed to be there, it wasn't there. So even during the course of 2003.

Now, that's the fact that you now found, we have gone into this campaign on one assumption. Maybe, as things developed in the future, it still could have turned out as badly as you thought it already was, but it meant that, in effect, the quality of post-Saddam, Iraq was now going to be the major test of what we were doing.

I just want to briefly go back before the war. Were you aware of the pre-war assessment that the American army -- the chief of the American army, General Shinseki, made that 500,000 troops were going to be needed to secure Iraq. It wasn't just him that was saying this. He was slapped down by Paul Wolfowitz for the comment. Were you aware of that?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was aware there was a debate within the American system. Did you use the -- I think it was the doctrine of overwhelming force or did you have a smaller group of people a smaller force? I think the issue is really for the post-war period. I think you can argue for the actual conflict itself there were
sufficient troops. The question is: should you then
have changed and had more or different troops later?
I think, again, that is a difficult question to answer
and there are people who take both sides of that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, but part of the debate
within the United States was the determination of
Donald Rumsfeld to demonstrate that it was possible to
wage a campaign of this sort with comparatively few
forces meant that he underprovided for the security
situation that was going to arise after the war, which
was General Shinseki's point.

So in some senses the difficulties that were going
to be faced were pre-determined. It was always going to
be difficult after the war. There just weren't enough
troops around.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the key thing is this -- and,
again, this is a major, major part of how any such
operation would be done in the future. The force to
remove a regime and change the government, if that's
what happens, that's the only way you can secure your
objectives, and this is the decision we had come to, the
only way we could prevent Saddam being a threat was
actually to remove him from office -- the force that you
require to do that is one function and there is one set
of arguments that go along that, and you are probably
much more expert on this than me.

However, what we now know and in any of these situations should know from now on, is that you will be nation building after that and that may require a quite different type of force and it may require more, it may require simply different forces, but it is a different task.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, there are different requirements. We have had evidence about the skill of British forces in being able to move quite quickly from a war-fighting role to this nation-building role, but it is fair to say -- and I don't think Americans, certainly now, would disagree with this -- that was not the way that they looked at it. That, from Rumsfeld's point of view, it was the war-fighting role he was interested in, and they made very little provision, both in training, doctrine and numbers for the follow-on forces that would provide for the security.

So in the context also of the disbandment of the Iraqi army, the risk of a vacuum in the security situation is very high indeed.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think in respect of the disbanding of the army, I think again -- I think -- I think it was Mr Slocombe who was dealing with this on behalf of the Americans, and I think his view was that,
in a sense, the army melted away and then they tried to re-recruit.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was the pensions point you mentioned earlier, that it was true that it didn't exist as an organised force, but there was a basis to get them back together quickly again which was lost.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think a huge question here -- because security is what went wrong. Sometimes people say, "If you had done the reconstruction quicker or got more underway or something, it would have been a different situation".

My view of this is that the very purpose of the people we ended up fighting was to stop the reconstruction. So every time we would repair electricity, they would bomb it, every time we got the oil production going, they would try and sabotage it. Every time we tried to provide better facilities, they would try and wreck it. So the issue is a security issue.

Now, I think we had moved beyond what was a debate at the time, which really went something like this -- and you probably recall this from 2003 and the early part of 2004, and that was a debate which said, "Look, the Americans are good at war fighting, but they do not do peacekeeping. The British can do both". I think, if
we are looking at our own capabilities now, and what we
will do in the future, I think it is not as simple as
that, actually, and if you look at what General Petraeus
did in the end with the surge, it is correct that he had
his political dimension, reaching out to the Sunnis and
so on, but as the surge began, the American forces
suffered even heavier casualties.

I mean, they were doing fighting and one of the
things that I think -- I am afraid we have to learn from
this situation, because we face exactly the same
situation in Afghanistan -- is that, in these
circumstances, it is not going to be easy. You do not
move to peacekeeping because actually you are facing
a situation where your enemy is trying to kill you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It partly depends upon your ability
to assert order and authority early on, and I don't want
to go into all the details, but that's clearly where
things went badly wrong, and we can remember the looting
and so on and comments that were made at the time.

Let me fast forward to what seems to me
a particularly significant month, which is April 2004.

A lot of things happened in that month. I won't --
one of them was Spain left the coalition, but we will
leave that to one side. Fallujah. You have --
relations with the Sunni community had deteriorated,
they felt they were potentially being disenfranchised.

This was coming to a head in Fallujah, where US Marines were planning to enter the city with force to take out some 2000, I think, insurgents. How did you view that situation, because it was potentially extremely dangerous?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It certainly was, yes, and I was involved in discussions with the Americans, with the President and also with Allawi as well, who was taking on the interim administration in Iraq.

I mean, I think at the time I was worried the Americans were going in too hard and too heavy, and they made certain changes as a result of the conversations that we were having. If I look back on it now, I'm not sure I was right about it, though. You see, I think the truth is we were reaching out to the Sunni. Indeed, one of the reasons why I could see us having a more challenging situation in the south through into 2005, and it was something we were discussing in the government, was that it would become at some point very clear that the purpose of what we were doing was not to replace a Sunni dictatorship, a minority dictatorship with a Shia majority dictatorship. We actually wanted a genuinely inclusive government. So I have always thought at some point we must be able to persuade the
Sunni that we were actually their best chance of participating in the political process.

The reality is there were people who were quite determined not to allow that reconciliation to happen.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, this illustrates the dilemma you now faced, the coalition faced, because, on the one hand, you had people who clearly had no interest in any accommodation with the coalition, starting to cause serious casualties, developing their numbers and their skills, and not just external forces, these were indigenous. But if you came down too hard on them, the risk was of alienating further. The scenes that would be out on Al Jazeera would be horrific. You were concerned, I suspect, about the impact of what Mr Brahimi could do, who was Sergio de Mello's -- not quite in the same role -- replacement.

I'm interested in the dilemmas we found ourselves in in Iraq. Either way, it was going to be very tough.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was going to be very tough, and one of the central questions -- I mean, my view is that the way these terrorists are trying to stop us doing what is right and right by the people of Iraq shouldn't deter us. We should carry on, and, having beaten one tyranny -- as one Iraqi put it to me: having beaten the tyranny of Saddam, we should now beat the tyranny of the
terrorists.

I was certainly of the view that we had to carry on in that endeavour, but you are absolutely right, that was a huge problem, and the interesting thing to me, if you look round the world, it is a problem for all nations in this situation dealing with this new type of terrorism.

If you take -- because I spend a lot of time out there now, obviously, in the Middle East, with the Israel/Palestine question, it is a constant problem for Israel. They get attacked, they then use great force in retaliating. Before you have gone two weeks, they are the people who have started it all.

If you look at the difficulties that India has, or Russia and Chechnya, or --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is undoubtedly true that the nature of the response to this sort of insurgency makes a difference to it, and we can talk about these other cases. The problem that you were in at the time is that the forces available to the coalition were insufficient to get a grip on it, and that the methods that they therefore would have to use in order to impose themselves militarily, would be much more likely to cause civilian casualties than they would have done if you had had far more forces properly trained to start
with.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously this wasn't the issue down south, but --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's the other issue for April 2004.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but -- I think you have got to look at this question very carefully, because I think I would put it in a different way, and I think, if you look at how the surge actually worked in the end, it worked because you had a -- in fact, it really worked for four reasons, the surge.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think -- the surge worked in very different political circumstances than those obtaining in 2003/2004.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's my point, in a sense; that if you analyse why it worked then, 2007, and in 2004 it wasn't working, then that's the question: what is the --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, but it worked because you had forces that were trained for the job, you had a doctrine that was appropriate, and the political conditions, including -- you have indicated this aspiration of the Iraqis with the violence helped, but in 2003/2004, it was different.

Let me just explain April 2004. You have got the Sadrist uprising. You have got -- we had considered
the Shia areas more likely to be settled, and you have
given some indication of this as well. So now we are
starting to find, even there, violence is taking root.
This, again, must have been a really serious concern to
you, because this is where the British forces were.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and what was very clear is,
as I say, this influence of Iran on the situation was
growing. We debated a lot what to do with Moqtadr Sadr.
Did we try and reach out to him? I think we tried to
make certain approaches there. Did we try to arrest
him? There was an issue there. Would that provoke more
violence? This is why these things become really,
really difficult.

Sorry, I didn't mean to take you out of your time
zone when looking at the surge, but the reason I think
it is so important, because there is a real lesson out
of this, is that -- you see, you are bound to take
a certain amount of time to win this battle, because,
essentially, what happened in Iraq, and I have tried to
explain this to people before, is you had one conflict,
which was the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and
that was over pretty quickly. You had the aftermath,
which was very difficult. But then what started to
happen in 2004/2005, and then with full on in 2006, the
first half of 2007, is you had a metamorphosis into
a different type of conflict, where you were fighting,
yes, a certain amount of indigenous insurgency, but with
these external factors coming in.

In the end, what did we need? We needed four things
to defeat this, and two of them take time. One is we
needed the political buy-in. The second is we needed to
build up Iraqi capability. The third is we needed, as
you rightly say, Sir Lawrence, the right troop
configuration, and the fourth thing is we needed to be
prepared to stick at it and to indicate clearly that we
were going to stick at it until it was done.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have taken us again three, four
years further on and indicated what happened in those
three years.

The final aspects of this month, April 2004, which
was the revelation of what happened at Abu Ghraib. What
was your reaction when you saw the photographs of the
conditions inside the prison?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I was shocked and angry, as anyone
would be. Shocked because it was wrong, and angry
because of the damage I knew it would do.

You know, you mentioned earlier the media part of
this and Al Jazeera. The truth is we were fighting
a constant battle against people utterly misrepresenting
us, our motives, what we were trying to do, and
obviously these pictures and the abuse of prisoners was
going to be vital propaganda for our enemies.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Had you been given any advance
warning by the Americans that these revelations were
coming?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think everybody was taken by surprise,
including in the White House.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there was knowledge from January
that something awful had been going on there.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I had actually appointed Ann Clwyd as
human rights adviser, and we made a real effort, in
fact, to try and say, "Look, things are going to happen
differently". So there are no excuses for it. It is
completely wrong. The most important thing was that it
did damage to our cause.

On the other hand, and it is right to say this, and
I said this at the time, the activities of a few within
the American forces, and, indeed, the British forces,
should not take away from the fact that the majority of
American and British forces were doing a magnificent job
in incredibly difficult circumstances and were doing
that job for the Iraqi people and protecting them and
helping them.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Well, let's consider how much they
were. We have covered some of this. So let me just
summarise where we seem to be. The year after the invasion, at the moment the coalition is unable to provide security for the Iraqi people and you have indicated, without security, life can't get better. Infrastructure is blown up, the life of people deteriorates, services aren't any good. You can't develop the economy and that feeds into an awful situation.

Now, for the Iraqi people at this time things are not getting better. Is that fair to say? If you look at the promises that had been made to them, they might have some grounds for disillusionment with the coalition.

I just want to give you some figures, because I find them tragic. We are in January 2010 now. These are just January monthly figures, the documented civilian deaths from violence in Iraq. 570 in January 2004, 1,042 in January 2005, 1,433 in January 2006. 2,807 in January 2007. These are monthly figures. These are the documented deaths. They are not the -- goodness knows how many undocumented. They are not the deaths from the deterioration in services, poverty, poor health and so on.

The striking thing is they are getting worse each year. What did you feel at the time that you could do
about this? Did you -- what could you say to the Iraqi
people that could explain what they must have felt,
a sense of letdown at what the coalition had been able
to do for them?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we did with the Iraqi people was to
say, "First of all, we are going to carry on with the
political process, because for the first time you have
actually been able to elect your government and your
officials. You are drawing up a constitution in
a proper and decent way".

The second thing was to say, "We are going to be
with you and we are going to help you defeat this", and
the third thing to say -- and this is immensely
important to this whole argument -- when people say,
"There were people dying in Iraq", and, you know, the
figures, I think the most reliable figures out of the
Iraq body count or the Brookings Institute may be
100,000 over this whole period -- the coalition forces
weren't the ones doing the killing. The ones doing the
killing were the terrorists, the sectarians, and they
were doing it quite deliberately to stop us making the
progress we wanted to make.

So my attitude -- and I took this line very, very
strongly with people -- when we say, "Isn't it terrible
that the death toll went to 2007, that high?" yes, it is
terrible, but the first question to ask is, "Who was killing them?" and this turned out to be precisely the same people that we were trying to fight everywhere and our responsibility was to stick in there and see it through, which eventually happened with the surge, with the Charge of the Knights down in Basra, and today, of course, the situation in Iraq is very, very different and the people are better off and have a decent chance of a proper future.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let us hope so.
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that's the evidence that was given --
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Certainly better off than they were in 2007.
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Having just had some conversations with Iraqis, I think that's something that has to be shown. But I don't want to get into that. We can agree and hope that the position for ordinary Iraqis only improves.
Can I just go back to this question of responsibility? There is no doubt that this was not British troops killing Iraqi civilians. This was violence on a major scale, but isn't it, to some extent, to a considerable extent, our responsibility, if we have
gone into a country, initially as an occupying power, and then unable to provide the basics of security?

Let me just -- this is evidence that we got from General Shirreff describing the situation as he found it in May 2006:

"A single battalion commander responsible for a city of 1.3 million people told me that he can put no more than 13 half platoons or multiples on the ground, less than 200 soldiers on the ground. You compare that with what I recall as a young platoon commander in West Belfast in the late 1970s, when there was a brigade on the ground. The result of all of that was what I call a cycle of insecurity."

He goes on to make the points that we have made before. So that was May 2006, and the basic description was that the militias had filled the gap that we had left.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: By May 2009, that is a different situation, and why? Because we then built up the capacity of the Iraqi forces themselves. Actually, in the end, the British, I think, were particularly with the Iraqi 10 Division. In the end, we managed -- and if it hadn't been for the British forces down in Basra making sure that we were acting and helping keep this at bay the entire time, the Charge of the Knights would
never have worked, but it did in the end, and if you
talk to people about Basra today, there are real
improvements there now and it is a completely different
situation in security. Likewise, in the rest of Iraq.

In the end, we did stick with them, and I agree with
you it is our responsibility, but here is the point that
I think we have got to get ourselves into in the western
world, if I can put it like this, or when we are doing
these types of operations: yes, it is our
responsibility, but let's be quite clear why we face the
difficulty. We face the difficulty because these people
were prepared to go and kill any number of completely
innocent people in suicide bombings, because, as you
know, in the first half of 2004, I think we had 30, in
the first half of 2005 that then went up to 200. We
should be prepared to take these people on, and the fact
that they are prepared to act like this should not be
a reason for our not being there or fighting them.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to conclude because there are
other questions that need to be posed to you. I suppose
the final question is: this was a very heavy price to
pay, was it not, for the lack of preparation? Perhaps
a cavalier attitude to planning taken, perhaps more in
the United States than the United Kingdom in 2003.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We certainly didn't take a cavalier
attitude to planning in the UK. What we planned for was what we thought was going to happen. But -- and you will consider this, but I just give you my view of this, because, otherwise, I think we will make a mistake in the future in such situations.

However much you plan, and whatever forces you have, if you have these elements, AQ on the one side, Iran on the other, who are prepared to destabilise, you are going to be in a tough, long-drawnout, difficult situation, but my point is very simple: the fact that these people, in breach of not just the rules of international law, but humanity, are prepared to do these terrible things in order to frustrate the will of the Iraqi people should not mean we back away from confronting them. We should be there with the Iraqi people, alongside them, as we did and were in the end, in order to make sure that, having been released from Saddam, they were then released from the reign of terror.

I do speak to Iraqis, and I spoke to one just a few days back who said to me, "We have changed the certainty of repression for the uncertainty of democratic politics". He said, "It is difficult and challenging, but the progress is extraordinary", and nobody would want to go back to the days when they had no freedom and
no opportunity and no hope.

So I understand what you are saying, but -- and we do have to take our responsibilities seriously in these situations, but we are in exactly the same situation now in Afghanistan, and heaven knows where we will be in the same situation again in the future, and the lesson out of it, in my view, is you have got to be prepared for the long haul and you have got to be prepared to stick it through to the end.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The long haul started in 2003?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It did start in 2003, but I posed the 2010 question earlier and I will pose it again.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. At that point, I think I had better pass over to the Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we had better ask one or two questions about Afghanistan and its influence, as it were, from the side, on the Iraq situation, not to look at Afghanistan in its own right. Sir Roderic?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just one really. You have just mentioned it.

In 2004, Geoff Hoon told us that he was against the idea of deploying into -- more troops into Afghanistan until we had reduced our commitments in Iraq. In the following year, we decided to take responsibility for Helmand province in Afghanistan and to deploy a much
larger troop contingent there, and the effect of that was that, by the end of 2006, at its peak, we had over 7,000 troops still in Iraq and over 6,000 by then in Afghanistan.

Weren't you concerned that this was stretching the resources, both the human and the equipment resources, of the army absolutely to their limits?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I was certainly concerned that we were then fighting in two different theatres of operation, but, again, I think the decision actually to go down into Helmand was taken, or began to be taken in 2005. We were told that we were able to do this, and it was right that we did it, and what was actually happening in Iraq was that, unlike the rest of -- it all happening in Basra, as I would say it, in the south as opposed to the rest the country, is that the problem in a way was that people were worried that most of the attacks were actually happening on us, on the coalition forces. So our concern was that, over time, we should be building up the Iraqi capability and then that would allow us to draw down.

But we were capable of doing the Helmand mission, and, indeed, we wouldn't have done it if weren't.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was a stretch, and you were warned that it would be stretch presumably?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: Actually, the suggestion that we did it came from the MoD. Of course, they said it is going to be tough for us, but they said we can do it and we should do it. So in a sense, right at the moment it was difficult in Iraq, we were prepared to make the additional commitment to Afghanistan.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: We would like, Mr Blair, to ask a few questions about the strategic direction of government and how one does that in a Cabinet system in situations like Iraq. I think Baroness Prashar would like a start.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

Some questions, Mr Blair. Just taking your meeting on 3 July 2002, which you chaired and at which the Chief of Defence Staff put forward some military options, and according to Alastair Campbell you said that you did not want any discussions with other departments at this stage and did not want any of this swimming around the system.

Why was the participation restricted to two Cabinet ministers and not, for example, to the Secretary of State for International Development Secretary?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were discussing then what was likely to happen in relation to the politics and the diplomacy, particularly in relation to the military.
Now, at a later time, as you know, there were --

officials from DFID were involved in the planning meetings. I think --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My understanding is that came at a very late stage and after a lot of pressure from --

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the officials were together. It is true that it was at a later time that Clare Short herself joined the Committee.

However, having said that, we were in pretty regular correspondence and, as I say, in the end, DFID acquitted itself perfectly well. The problem we had was not a problem that was capable of being cured by DFID.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but, I mean, at an early stage, for effective planning to go ahead, you know, you need full departmental engagement, probably Cabinet involvement. Why wasn't the Treasury and DFID involved in the early stages?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were also discussing this at a Cabinet level too, and obviously we were in close touch with the Treasury and so on. Right at that moment, the single most important areas were diplomacy and were the issues to do with military planning.

Look, I know that much has been made of: well, these were ad hoc committee meetings with a small "a" and a small "h", rather than with a large "A" and a large
"H": The key thing was to get the key players together so you could have a proper, frank discussion and take the decisions necessary. That's really what we did, both before the invasion and afterwards.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but Lord Turnbull said:

"I think you should include people who have a locus, even if they are going to be difficult."

Because in a way, if you are going to look at the aftermath reconstruction, DFID and the Treasury had a locus.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sure, and I think I said in response to the Butler Inquiry that, you know, in future, there is a case for having a specially constituted committee.

All I would say to you is that we did have the key players and there was a constant interaction with government on the key issues. Insofar as we were predicting what we would find, we made provision for it and the relationship between myself and Jack Straw, Geoff Hoon, the politicians, but also the Chief of Defence Staff, were close. I mean, we were in close interaction the entire time, and the main bulk of this was going to be done in the first instance by the military.

Now, it is correct that, as we got into late 2002, early 2003, DFID became a bigger part of the picture.
Clare said she wanted to come to the meetings. That was fair enough. That then happened. The issue, however, that DFID was focused on was the humanitarian side, and, to be fair to them, they did a very good job of it.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As you have mentioned the Butler Report, I think the Chairman has a question on that.

THE CHAIRMAN: I sat on the Butler Committee and I don't want to go over old ground, but just to be clear, the Cabinet met frequently in the period 2002/2003, and it is not that they were not consulted, but, rather, that papers in general were not circulated.

The Butler Committee found none and we haven't found any, which has given rise to the question: was there sufficient information, analysis, both of the issues and about the background, to enable your Cabinet colleagues, who would take full collective responsibility for the big decisions, to understand, and, if necessary, challenge within Cabinet discussion?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had, I think -- I think it is 20 -- I think there was --

THE CHAIRMAN: At least 25.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- 25 pre-invasion Cabinet discussions of Iraq, and then there were ad hoc ministerial discussions, I think 28 of those meetings. There was
a constant interaction and people would describe -- it wasn't just a sort of formal Cabinet discussion, Jack Straw would take people through the information that we had. There was an immense amount going on inside the MoD, inside the Foreign Office, actually inside DFID as well, and I really don't think any of the members of the Cabinet at the time felt they weren't involved or felt they couldn't challenge.

Indeed, Robin Cook did, and Robin and I disagreed about it in the end. So obviously, there are these issues to do with the nature of the meetings that were held, but I was in an almost constant interaction for 2002 and 2003 with members of the Cabinet.

THE CHAIRMAN: You do have, both from two very different witnesses that we have taken testimony from, Alastair Campbell and Lord Turnbull, the same thought, that you need to accommodate difference of view and respond to it within a collective, within, in this case, the Cabinet or some smaller grouping, the ad hoc committee, for example.

With hindsight, do you think that there was sufficient space and opportunity for those differences to be accommodated and fed into final judgments?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I really do, actually, yes. Nobody in the Cabinet was unaware of the -- what the whole issue
was about. It was the thing running throughout the whole of the political mainstream at the time. There were members of the Cabinet who would challenge and disagree, but most of them agreed. It was the same with Parliament. I was subject to constant numbers of people telling me, "You shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that, you should do it differently", and so on, and in relation to the planning afterwards, I mean, whatever else -- whatever differences Clare Short and I may have had from time to time, the one thing I would never accuse her of being is backward in coming forward.

So there was a huge -- all the time, interaction, as I say, between people on the very issues.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we would like to explore just one other aspect of this, and that's the interaction between major strategic policy-making at Cabinet level, at Prime Ministerial level indeed, and the folding into that of key legal advice.

We are not going to go over the ground we have already covered earlier today, but there is a set of questions we would just like to pursue, starting with you, Usha.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

We discussed with Lord Goldsmith, you know, the process through which he was involved in this
decision-making process and what became very clear is
that, during the time, particularly before July 2002,
ministers were making public statements. I think he had
to write to Mr Hoon and he saw a memo of the comments
that Mr Straw had made to Colin Powell, and he was
having to constantly write and tell them, you know, they
should be seeking his legal advice.

The fact that he had to respond to people making
statements without being clear about what the legal
situation was, do you think that could have been avoided
if the Attorney had been able to discuss issues in the
Cabinet and that would have actually ensured that the
formal advice of the Attorney would have been
pre-empted?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the very first paper we got on
this back in March, or the clutch of papers we got
in March 2002, which were seen obviously by Jack --
I mean, the legal paper was provided by Jack Straw's
department and by Geoff Hoon as well, who is, I think,
fully aware of all this. I mean, people had the basic
legal framework.

Now, I think it is perfectly good for
Peter Goldsmith, as the Attorney General, on his own
volition, if he thought somebody was saying something
that couldn't be justified or was unwise in legal terms,
if he got on the phone and said, "Don't do it", or wrote
them a note saying, "Come back into line on this", which
I think they did.

I don't think it would have made a great deal of
difference to have had him there at Cabinet. What
he needed to be able to do was be in a position feeling
sufficiently confident, which he did, to be able to
intervene and say, "I don't agree".

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the expression we got was he was
constantly having to ask, and wanted to write his
opinion, and provide his opinion, and he said it wasn't
always welcome.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think he said that about the
particular opinion he gave at the end of July, and it
wasn't so much, as I said earlier, that it wasn't
welcome, it was, you know, I was dealing with an already
difficult situation. Now I had another issue to take
account of. I had to take account of it, rightly, and,
incidentally, he was completely right to do it, because
it made a big difference to the way we approached 1441
and the resolution there, but I don't think it would
have made -- look, I'm very happy to talk about how, for
example, you know, you might do some of these things
differently now, but I honestly don't think having Peter
at the Cabinet meeting would have made a difference.
What did make a difference was his having the confidence to be able to say, as he should, as an independent attorney for the government, to pick up the phone and -- even to the Prime Minister, which he did, saying, "This is what you can say and this is what you can't".

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that doesn't allow for a collective decision-making where there is a proper consideration of different options and so on.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think in respect of the legal opinion, Baroness, I think that the key thing really was this: the Cabinet weren't interested in becoming part of the legal debate, they just wanted to know, "Is the Attorney General saying it is lawful or it is not?"

I think in respect of these other issues, there were actual debates about this. There was a debate, for example, in January 2003, if I recollect it, that was not just about the diplomatic issues, but specifically on the humanitarian and aftermath questions in Cabinet.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But going back to the legal advice, I mean, when the Cabinet met on 17 March, I think Lord Goldsmith presented the draft Parliamentary question answer, but there was no discussion on this legal advice, and we have seen the report of a discussion that he had with Mr Straw on 13 March in
which he was persuaded not to present a finely balanced paper of the arguments, but actually to present this paper which was going to be his Parliamentary question, and I think Clare Short made it clear that she wanted to discuss it and know whether the Attorney General had changed his mind, but no such discussion took place.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think Andrew Turnbull explained this to you. The whole purpose of having the Attorney there at the Cabinet was so that he could answer anybody's questions about it.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the Attorney General did say that, you know, the legal basis is essential but not sufficient. So in that sense the broader implications of invasion -- I mean, should that not have been discussed?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: The broader implications in terms of whether it was right or wrong to do it?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: That was, in a sense, the purpose of the Cabinet discussion, I think, and it is perfectly -- the legal issues were one aspect of this. But I think, once the members of the Cabinet -- I mean, the members of the Cabinet were really focused on the politics, and indeed even Robin Cook, his attitude was, if you get a second resolution, then I'm with you, but if you
can't, then, politically, I think this is too difficult.
So, you know, we were very focused on those political as
well as legal questions.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But would it not have allowed them
to weigh up the risks for themselves, for the civil
servants and so on, you know?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think they were weighing the risks up
for the country, but I don't think, in respect of the
law, as it were -- I don't think members of the Cabinet
wanted to have a debate with -- I mean, Peter was there
and could have answered any questions they had, but
their basic question to him was: is there a proper legal
basis for this or not and his answer was, "Yes."

Now, we had actually said -- and this was the reason
why we had Peter there and I think in any future
situation it is sensible to have the Attorney there.

But in a sense we offered him up; he was the lawyer
there to talk about it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Blair, do you think there is a contrast of
approach between what frequently happens in government
at all levels, including to the top, that, in forming
policy, you engage with legal advice because it may need
expression in statute, or comply with existing bodies of
law, you fold in the legal advice through the
policy-making process -- that's one approach. The other
is to set very clearly what your policy objectives
are -- and they may be, as in the Iraq case, iron
strategic objectives -- and then, as it were, work
around or through and with the constraints and
opportunities that legal advice then gives? Do you see
a difference of approach there?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that there could be but I would
say in this situation, since in a way March 2002 was the
time when you set the first framework for this, the
legal advice was one of the key things we asked for, and
we got it, and that legal advice -- and it is
interesting to go back and look at it -- it was legal
advice that was saying you needed a fresh resolution,
and one of the reasons why we went down the path was to
give a fresh resolution.

One of the things -- and this was part of the debate
that happened later -- was that I felt we got the fresh
resolution, so why is there still a legal problem, but
then I was told what the problem was.

THE CHAIRMAN: It still seems, from all we have heard, both
today and on from previous witnesses, that there was
a very clear strategic policy objective set for Iraq,
which was to bring about compliance with the
United Nations Resolutions, disarmament, clearing of
WMDs, and if that meant regime change by military means,
that was the last resort but not ruled out.

But there were moments very, very late
in January, February and March 2003, when that policy
objective could have been blocked by a failure because
of a legal constraint. Is that unavoidable in
situations like this?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think it is unavoidable in
a situation where it is that controversial and divisive
and it is that -- you know, that open to challenge. You
see, there actually could have been a major debate about
Kosovo and legality; there could have been. There
wasn't because in the end most people went along with
the action; they agreed with what we were doing.

The truth is that the law and the politics follow
each other quite closely, and I think, necessarily in
this situation, where we were setting our strategic
objectives. You know, we had this strong belief and, as
I say, this is my belief now too, that this threat had
to be dealt with with a certain amount of urgency. We
had our alliance with the United States of America and
so on and all the issues to do with Saddam, and then
obviously, at the same time, as you are proceeding and
strategy is evolving, diplomacy is evolving, you are
looking at the issues to do with legality.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we would just like to ask one or two
more questions before we come to the close. So, Usha?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My final question, Mr Blair, is really about the effective government? Because there would be a long command chain. Because, if you are looking at the top decision-makers in London, working with soldiers and civilians who had to deliver locally in Iraq -- so it is quite a complex operation and many of these issues were cross-departmental, and therefore quite -- a new operation had kind of come together.

How did you hold your Secretary of State to account for delivery, because delivery was your mantra at that stage? How did you make sure that what was to be delivered was being delivered effectively on the ground?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: In the pre-war part we had the Ad Hoc Group on Iraq of officials, which met from September onwards, and that included all the relevant departments. I was chairing the ad hoc ministerial discussions, and as I say, I think we had 28 of those meetings. And then afterwards we had the War Cabinet and then the DOP meetings, and then Jack Straw became the effective Chairman of the ministers and the officials driving forward policy from that front.

There wasn’t an issue really at any stage of this with people not feeling they were part of this, apart from the one issue to do with Clare and the ad hoc
committee, which, as I say, was resolved in, I think, early 2003.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Tim Cross said to us that there was no minister Cabinet rank reporting back and driving this day-to-day, because, you know, what we were hearing from the ground. This was Tim Cross's comment to us.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think one of the questions -- and I think this has been raised in some evidence to you -- is, again, if we knew then what we know now, would you want perhaps to put a specific Cabinet minister in charge of this? All these things are worth looking at. The only thing I would say to you is that we were, partly through my own personal involvement but also because you had Mike Boyce and the Chiefs of Staff Committee, you had the officials meeting, you had David Manning very closely involved in this -- I can't really think -- and I think Andrew Turnbull said this to you in his evidence -- that there was a machinery of government problem, in the sense that if we had had a different machinery, we would have acted differently. I don't think, but that's a judgment.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: One thing I want to put to you -- because Sir David Omand, whom we saw last week, he emphasised the importance of structuring decision-making so that you are simply not swept along with the pace of
events, particularly like military preparations. Do you think we had the ability and the will to pause and look at our strategy? For example, in early 2003, UNMOVIC inspectors had returned to Iraq and were expecting either Saddam would grossly obstruct them or he would quickly find evidence of WMD. In the event this didn't happen. Did we actually think -- did we stop and re-evaluate our strategy at that stage?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: We would have entirely re-evaluated our strategy had, as I say -- and I'm just using this as a shorthand -- Saddam Hussein done a Gaddafi, had he said, "I'm finished with all this, I want to join the international community on proper terms." But he didn't, and what he did -- and this is where, as I say, the Iraq Survey Group -- unfortunately, people have only looked at one part of their findings and not the other part of their findings. He never had any intention of complying because he had the intention, once he got sanctions out of the way, of restarting it again.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Even later, it became clear that our post-war efforts were becoming a strategic failure. Did we think at that stage -- because the impression one gets is we are responding to events on the ground. Were we doing any re-thinking?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. The reason why we were in
a constant iteration very quickly after the conflict was
because of what we were finding, and then, as I say,
there was this metamorphosis of the whole struggle,
really, and battle, when the AQ and Iran elements became
uppermost, and then it really did change into
a different type of fight, and one of the interesting
things, for example -- I mean, Kimberly Kagan does this
on her book on the surge and it is important because in
the end that is what worked.

What nobody foresaw was that Iran would actually end
up supporting AQ. The conventional wisdom was these two
are completely different types of people because Iran is
Shia, the Al-Qaeda people are Sunni and therefore, you
know, the two would never mix. What happened in the end
was that they did because they both had a common
interest in destabilising the country, and for Iran
I think the reason they were interested in destabilising
Iraq was because they worried about having a functioning
majority Shia country with a democracy on their
doorstep, and for Al-Qaeda they knew perfectly well
their whole mission was to try and say the West was
oppressing Islam. It is hard to do that if you replace
tyrranical governments with functioning democracies.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So from your point of view you think
the machinery of government worked?
RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't doubt you could have had different machineries, but we did have a machinery of government that worked, and worked effectively, in order to analyse the problems we were likely to face and how we would deal with them. And as I say, I think no doubt there are other ways that it can be done but we had --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But on reflection there is nothing you would do differently?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, when you look back now -- and I have just said to you earlier. For example, if you want to look at maybe putting a specific Cabinet minister in charge of this, there are all sorts of things that, if you knew then what you know now, you would do differently: I have been through the whole reconstruction piece. But, in terms of what we knew at that time, we had a machinery of government that was perfectly adequate. There were 25 separate Cabinet meetings, 28 ad hoc committee meetings, regular weekly meetings of the officials.

Now, you could put them with a capital "A" and a capital "H", rather than a small "a" and a small "h", but I don't think it would have made a difference to the essential decision-making.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are coming to to the end and I have got a couple of questions I would like to raise. I think
the first is to look at the perspective of the whole enterprise from the standpoint of the people of Iraq. The coalition went in as liberators. Rather soon they began to be resented by parts of the population and then attacked as occupiers by some. By the time, for example, British forces withdrew from Basra City to the airport, 90 per cent of the attacks there were against them, as against -- between mix of the Shia factions.

So do you think, looking back from 2010, that the people of Iraq thought that the enterprise was worthwhile. Just as one piece, not of evidence but as a bit of anecdote: a very senior constitutional, if I can put it that way, Iraqi, said, clearly it was good that Saddam has gone but the inept nature of the some of the things that the coalition did -- the coalition, not the British specifically -- has caused great suffering, so the price was high.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is too early to say right now whether the Iraqi democracy will take root and will function effectively, although, as I think John Jenkins and Frank Baker said to you, there are really hopeful signs. And just to say some of the things that I think are taking place in Iraq today, if you look, for example, at the electricity, you look at income per head, which is several times what it was under Saddam, you look at now...
the money that is being spent on infrastructure,
I think, yes, it was a very, very difficult fight
indeed, it was always going to be difficult once these
external factors came into play of AQ and Iran, but,
sure, when you go into a nation-building situation in
the future, I think we will be far better prepared and
better educated than we were then.

I would just give one -- if we are talking about was
it worth it in terms of the Iraqis themselves, if you
look at the latest information from the Brookings
Institute and the polls that they are doing about the
right direction, wrong direction for their country, they
are actually upbeat about the future. You know, if you
look at whether they believe that security and services
are getting better, a majority of them think they are,
despite all the trouble, despite the fact these
terrorists carry on.

Let me just give you one example of where I think
you can see both the nature, since we are talking about
how is it for Iraqis -- because the Iraqis were
themselves less worried about the issues to do with
United Nations and so on; they were worried about their
country and the oppression. Just focus for a moment on
what the Saddam Hussein regime was like.

In 2000 and 2001 and 2002 they had a child mortality
rate of 130 per 1,000 children under the age of five, worse than the Congo. That was despite the fact that Saddam had as much money as he wanted for immunisation programmes and medicines for those children. That equates to roughly about 90,000 deaths under the age of five a year. The figure today is not 130, it is 40. That equates to about 50,000 young people, children, who, as a result of a different regime that cares about its people -- that's the result that getting rid of Saddam makes. And you can talk to Iraqis, of course, who will say to you, some of them, particularly those from the Sunni side still worried about whether they will be able to come into the politics -- and some of them may say, "Well, I don't believe it was worth it."

But I think if you ask the majority of Iraqis today, "Would you really prefer, with all the challenges that lie ahead, to be back under Saddam?" I think you would get a pretty overwhelming answer to that question.

THE CHAIRMAN: The other perspective clearly -- and you will appreciate this better than anyone can, probably. Our participation in the Iraq conflict has been very divisive here and abroad, has caused deep anguish to those who lost people they loved, some of whom are in this room. There is gratitude, great gratitude, to our armed forces for the sacrifices they made and the
bravery they showed and great sorrow at their losses.

But we, like you, have also experienced at first hand
the anger which is still felt by many people in this
country and we have been asking, therefore, the question
why. And so, as we conclude today, can I ask what broad
lessons you have drawn -- you have drawn some already in
the course of your testimony -- and to say whether you
have regrets about key aspects of the Iraq conflict?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I mean, I have said some of the things

that I think are lessons that can be learned about
nation-building. I think you have got to look very
carefully at what type of forces you require because
there will be a security situation that you face,
a challenging security situation. I also think you have
really got to look at the issue to do with the nature of
this threat from Al-Qaeda on the one hand, Iran on the
other, and the impact that that will have, not just on
Iraq but potentially in different arenas right round the
Middle East region and beyond.

I feel -- of course, I had to take this decision as
Prime Minister and it was a huge responsibility then,
and there is not a single day that passes by that
I don't reflect and think about that responsibility, and
so I should. But I genuinely believe that if we had
left Saddam in power, even with what we know now, we
would still have had to have dealt with him, possibly in
circumstances where the threat was worse and possibly in
circumstances where it was hard to mobilise any support
for dealing with that threat.

I think we live in a completely new security
environment today. I thought that then, I think that
now. It is why -- I have said this to you a number of
times today -- I take a very hard, tough line on Iran
today, and many of the same arguments apply.

In the end it was divisive, and I'm sorry about that
and I tried my level best to bring people back together
again, but if I'm asked whether I believe we are safer,
more secure, that Iraq is better, our own security is
better with Saddam and his two sons out of power and out
of office than in office, I indeed believe that we are,
and I think in time to come, if Iraq becomes, as I hope
and believe that it will, the country that its people
want to see, then we can look back, and particularly our
armed forces can look back, with an immense sense of
pride and achievement in what they did.

THE CHAIRMAN: And no regrets?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Responsibility but not a regret for
removing Saddam Hussein. I think that he was a monster,
I believe he threatened, not just the region but the
world, and in the circumstances that we faced then, but
I think even if you look back now, it was better to deal with this threat, to deal with it, to remove him from office, and I do genuinely believe that the world is safer as a result.

I know sometimes, because this happens out in the region, sometimes people will say to me, "Well, Saddam was a brake on Iran". Let's be clear, there is another view of foreign policy in this instance, which is the way, if we had left Saddam in place, he would have controlled Iran better. I really think it is time we learned, as a matter of sensible foreign policy, that the way to deal with one dictatorial threat is not to back another, that actually the best answer to what is happening in Iran is to allow the Iraqi people the freedom and democratic choice that we enjoy in countries like ours.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. This brings us, I think, to the end of today's hearings. Is there any final comment, beyond those you have already made, that you wish to add before we close?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: In that case can I say two things? The first is that there clearly are considerable limits to what we can cover in one day. The Inquiry still has much work to do. Among other things, our witness today, Mr Blair,
has drawn attention to a number of dimensions arising out of Iran and its behaviour which I think we shall want to pursue.

Can I, with that, thank our witness for a long day of testimony, a long, hard day, I think, and thank very much those of you who have been here as witnesses to this session, as to those who were present in the morning session. Thank you all very much indeed.

Now, with that, we will resume hearings next week on Monday at 11 o'clock in the morning, and later on, in late February or early March, we will be taking testimony from the Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Brown, and other senior ministers perhaps.

So, with that, we close this session. Thank you all again.

(5.10 pm)

(The Inquiry adjourned until 11.00 am on Monday 1 February 2010)