

1 Friday, 21st January 2011

2 (9.30 am)

3 Evidence of THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, good morning, everyone. Today the
5 Iraq Inquiry will be hearing from The Right Honourable
6 Tony Blair, Prime Minister from 1997 until June 2007 and
7 I would like to welcome those of you in the hearing room
8 and also those who are watching the hearing elsewhere in
9 the QE2 Centre. Your places were allocated through
10 a public ballot, which was independently overseen. We
11 have much to cover with Mr Blair and I hope we shall be
12 able, as we were last year, to go about our business in
13 an orderly way and in fairness to all not to be
14 distracted nor disrupted.

15 I should like to start by welcoming our witness and
16 those who have joined us at the QE2 Conference Centre
17 today as well as those who may be watching the hearing
18 either on television or through the Internet. We heard
19 some six hours of evidence from Mr Blair a year ago. We
20 have also heard from many other witnesses and have
21 amassed a very considerable body of documentary
22 evidence.

23 As I made clear in launching this round of hearings,
24 there are a number of areas where we need to clarify
25 what happened. We need to find the lessons to be

1 learned and to do that we need to construct as reliable
2 and accurate account as possible and reach our own
3 conclusions.

4 So this morning we want to concentrate on a number
5 of issues and decisions, some strategic, some more
6 detailed, where Mr Blair's own recollections are
7 important.

8 Those issues include the way in which the decision
9 to take military action was considered and debated
10 within the government, our understanding of what
11 happened in Iraq after Saddam Hussein was removed from
12 power and the UK's preparations for our role in Iraq.

13 We shall also look at what happened after 2003 and
14 in particular the increase in violence which has
15 resulted in the loss of so many lives.

16 We asked Mr Blair to provide a statement addressing
17 a number of issues in advance of the hearing. Our
18 request and Mr Blair's statement are being published
19 now.

20 We are also publishing a number of documents or
21 extracts from documents which are relevant to this
22 morning's hearing. Mr Blair's statement covers a great
23 deal of ground and refers to many documents. We shall
24 not be going through it line by line this morning, but
25 we shall, of course, be able to follow up further points

1 if we wish.

2 There are other matters which are important to the
3 Inquiry's Terms of Reference, but which we do not need
4 to address in the hearing this morning. We shall not,
5 for example, plan to go over again the intelligence
6 about Saddam Hussein's armament programmes and the
7 government's knowledge and understanding of those, nor
8 how that information was put into the public domain.

9 As Mr Blair's statement makes clear, he wishes to
10 add a short summary of the lessons he thinks it would be
11 valuable for a future Prime Minister to know, and we
12 shall ensure that there is time at the end of the
13 hearing for him to do so.

14 I have said on every single occasion when we have
15 held a hearing that we recognise witnesses give evidence
16 based on their recollection of events, and we, of
17 course, check what we hear against the papers to which
18 we have access, some of which are still coming in.

19 I remind each witness on each occasion he will later
20 be asked to sign a transcript of evidence to the effect
21 that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

22 With those preliminaries I will ask Sir Martin
23 Gilbert to ask the questions. Martin.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Mr Blair, the very powerful speech you
25 made to the House of Commons on 18th March 2003 was of

1 critical importance. Without Parliament's approval our
2 troops would not have been able to participate in the
3 invasion. In your speech you drew an analogy with the
4 1930s, the moment you said when Czechoslovakia was
5 swallowed up by the Nazis. That's when we should have
6 acted.

7 This was not the first time that analogy had been
8 made. Jack Straw, for example, recalled the descent
9 into war in the 1930s when he spoke on 11th February.

10 Comparing Iraq with Nazi Germany has enormous
11 emotive force with the British public. It also
12 heightens perceptions of the level and imminence of the
13 threat.

14 In your book "A Journey" you say that you regretted
15 and almost took out that reference and the almost
16 universal refusal, as you put it, for a long time for
17 people to believe Hitler was a threat. Can you tell us
18 why you regretted saying that?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think I actually said in the
20 speech in the House of Commons on 18th March -- I don't
21 have it in front of me -- we have to be aware of glib
22 comparisons, but there was one sense in which I think
23 there was still a valid point to be made about how we
24 perceive threat and that is in this sense, my view after
25 September 11th was that our whole analysis of the

1 terrorist threat and the extremism had to change, and at
2 that point I was most focused on this, that the single
3 most important thing to me about September 11th, as I
4 have often said; is that 3,000 people died, but if they
5 could have killed 300,000, they would have.

6 The single most difficult thing we have to face
7 today and I think we face it still -- I think this is
8 why I personally take a very hard line view on Iran --
9 is the risk of this new type of terrorism and extremism
10 based on an ideological perversion frankly, of the faith of
11 Islam, combining with technology that allows them to
12 kill people on a large scale.

13 Now where I think the analogy is valid is in saying
14 even though we may look at the world today and say does
15 it really matter? Is Iran that much of a threat?
16 Supposing we just let Saddam carry on, would it really
17 have been such a problem? My anxiety is that yes, we
18 cannot take that risk, that after September 11th, the
19 calculus of risk had to change and change fundamentally.

20 So in that sense in a way I would say there is
21 an analogy, but you have to be careful of bringing it
22 out too broadly, otherwise you make a point that
23 suggests the circumstances of Nazi Germany were the same
24 as Saddam Hussein and I didn't really mean to suggest
25 that.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So that's what you regretted?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I don't -- let me just
3 make one thing very clear, I don't regret the basic
4 point I am making, which is that this is a time in which
5 even though many people would say this extremism can be
6 managed, I personally don't think that's true. I think
7 it has to be confronted and changed. That is the
8 foreign policy difference you will see throughout this.
9 I just read last night Sir Stephen Wall's evidence to
10 you. Stephen is someone I like and admire and have very
11 great respect for. I fundamentally disagree with him
12 about this point. There are two views in this world.
13 One view over Iraq in a sense was represented by Jacques
14 Chirac. The other by me. One view is this extremism it
15 is an encrustment on an otherwise manageable situation.
16 Don't over-worry about it. Don't provoke it. Don't
17 stimulate it. Just manage the situation.

18 The other view, which is my view, is that this thing
19 is deep. Its potential to wreak enormous and
20 devastating damage is huge and we have to confront it.

21 Now if that is an echo of how people were dealing
22 with fascism in the 1930s that is the echo, but it
23 doesn't go broader than that.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You have explained for you the decision
25 to oust Saddam Hussein's regime by force was not

1 pre-determined and if Saddam had backed down, though you
2 did not expect him to do so, then invasion would not
3 have been necessary.

4 A critical decision was therefore your decision that
5 we should be prepared to join the Americans in using
6 force and that we should prepare to use force ourselves.

7 Can you tell us at what point you took that
8 decision?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think after September 11th.
10 I think I said in my statement of 14th September 2001
11 that I think this issue of WMD is going to take on
12 a different meaning now. Of course the Americans had
13 already a policy of regime change. That was a policy,
14 in fact, articulated by President Clinton, passed in
15 1998 following the military action we took against Iraq,
16 US and UK in 1998. So it was obviously going to be on
17 the agenda. I was always going to make it clear and did
18 make it clear we would be shoulder to shoulder with
19 America in dealing with these threats after
20 September 11th. So how we were to deal with it, that
21 would be an open question. That we were going to deal
22 with it I think was pretty clear from that moment on.

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The Cabinet paper for conditions on
24 military action which was issued on 19th July 2002,
25 a version of which has appeared in the press, recorded

1 that you had told the President at Crawford in
2 April 2002:

3 "United Kingdom will support military action to
4 bring about regime change provided certain conditions
5 were met."

6 Was that a turning point?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It wasn't a turning point. It was
8 really that all the way through we were saying this
9 issue now has to be dealt with. So Saddam either comes
10 back into compliance with UN resolutions or action will
11 follow.

12 If you like, it might just help, because going back
13 through the papers again for this, I think I can give
14 more of a shape as to how this then evolved.

15 So pre-September 11th we have a policy of
16 containment, but sanctions are eroding. Containment
17 they say partially successful, but it doesn't mean that
18 he's not still developing his programmes with his
19 intent.

20 Post-September 11th the calculus of risk changes.
21 America has a policy of regime change, so they could
22 have and some of the American system I think wanted to
23 say right at that moment we are going after Saddam.
24 I think there were a group of senators that wrote to
25 President Bush at the end of 2001 saying that's what

1 should happen.

2 The first thing was in April to say to the
3 Americans, "Look, we are going to be with you in
4 tackling this. However, we should do this by way of
5 an ultimatum; in other words, we should give him
6 a chance to come back into compliance."

7 Then in July we say to the Americans, "Look, he
8 should come back into compliance but we should do it
9 through the United Nations. So we should build
10 an international coalition."

11 So now we have instead of action immediately
12 ultimatum first, then ultimatum with the UN sanction.
13 That's really then when we came together for Resolution
14 1441 and then even later, by the way, we tried to get
15 another resolution with another ultimatum, but that's
16 for another time.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I'd like to turn now to the involvement
18 of your Cabinet in these decisions. You told us last
19 year that the options paper produced by the Cabinet
20 Office in March 2002, a version of which again has
21 appeared in the press, was seen by you and the Foreign
22 and Defence Secretaries and was discussed by Ministers.

23 We have been unable to identify such a meeting, such
24 a discussion, and it is not listed in the material that
25 you prepared for the Butler Inquiry in 2004.

1 Can you identify when this March 2002 option paper
2 was discussed?

3 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I know that there was a version of
4 it that certainly went to the Chancellor, for example,
5 but we actually had Cabinet discussions. I don't know
6 specifically on that paper, but on what to do about
7 Iraq, and so, for example, there's Cabinet meetings
8 I think in March before Crawford. For example, on
9 7th March we set out our position on Iraq in the
10 Cabinet minutes there. We say:

11 "It was important the United States did not appear
12 to be acting unilaterally. It was critically important
13 to re invigorate the peace process. Any military
14 action taken against Saddam Hussein's regime had to be
15 effective. On the other hand the Iraqi regime was in
16 clear breach of its obligations under several United
17 Nations Security Council Resolutions. WMD programmes
18 posed a threat to peace."

19 So that's what we said there and then we went on to
20 say how we should deal with this in a proper way.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My question is not that the Cabinet
22 discussed it --

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Right, but did they see the paper?

24 I don't know whether they saw the paper at the time.

25 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: At that particular Cabinet all we can

1 find that the Cabinet were presented with was the
2 Parliamentary Labour Party paper that had been produced
3 shortly before.

4 How did you expect your Cabinet to take an informed
5 view or have substantive discussions of the sort you
6 have told us did take place, without having papers and
7 background information of the sort that were available
8 to you?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the Cabinet, as I say, the
10 leading members of the Cabinet certainly did, but the
11 rest of the Cabinet, when we were having these
12 discussions about Iraq, and I think all in all there
13 were over 20 different Cabinet discussions about it, I
14 have heard it said occasionally these discussions were
15 undetailed. They were immensely detailed. You can see
16 all the points that were being made, including all the
17 points by the way in these papers.

18 The notion people weren't debating and discussing
19 it, I can tell you it was dominant as the issue of
20 discussion in the Cabinet, but more than that outside of
21 the formal Cabinet meetings people were talking about
22 this the whole time. So I can't say -- and I will go
23 back and have a look again at whether apart from the key
24 Cabinet Ministers others had sight of these option
25 papers -- but this was a perpetual conversation going on

1 in depth and in the Cabinet discussions in March, in
2 April, then again in May, June, July, all of this was
3 being canvassed pretty broadly and pretty deeply.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But without access to some of these
5 crucial documents -- I mean, the options paper is very
6 important. This was not something which they were able,
7 as it were, to add to their contribution to the debate.

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the options paper really
9 said two things. It said you can either go for
10 containment. We can't guarantee that that's successful.
11 He will probably continue to develop his programmes and
12 be a threat, but nonetheless that is one option. The
13 other option is regime change.

14 Now there's nothing in those papers, as it were,
15 that wasn't surfaced as part of the discussion. So the
16 discussion all the way through was: what is the
17 judgment? Because it is pretty -- look, the facts on
18 this are fairly clear in these options papers. If you
19 go back to the one in March 2002, it lays it out pretty
20 clearly. Right. That was certainly part of the
21 discussion that was going on in Cabinet.

22 Now you can say, and I would be perfectly happy if
23 you did say, look it is better to disclose all those or
24 give everybody a copy of those papers. I certainly
25 didn't say they shouldn't be, but the content of those

1 papers, that is something that was very, very adequately
2 discussed and the issue was clear in the end. There was
3 not a great dispute about what we thought about the
4 facts. The facts were he is continuing to develop WMD.
5 He has the intention of doing that. It is crucial to
6 his regime. On the other hand, so far we have contained
7 him.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

9 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will ask Sir Roderic to pick up the
10 questions now. Rod.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just following through on that last
12 point, Mr Blair. You say the content of things like the
13 options paper is what was discussed. Now the options
14 paper looked at three possible ways of effecting regime
15 change. Does this mean that the Cabinet at this stage
16 in March of 2002 was discussing regime change and ways
17 in which it might have been effected?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What we were discussing was this,
19 and you can see this set out in some of the other
20 Cabinet minutes -- I have them here -- from 11th April
21 straight after Crawford. The Cabinet was discussing
22 this. We are going to have to deal with this issue now.
23 Everybody knew that the Americans were taking
24 a different and stronger line. The issue was very
25 simple. He either had a change of heart, or regime

1 change was on the agenda. That was clear from
2 the minutes, from the discussion at Cabinet and indeed
3 from the whole of the public discourse around this.

4 Now you could have regime change happening in
5 a number of different ways. There didn't need to be
6 military action but the likelihood was that's what would
7 happen.

8 For example, in the --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think you had been advised it wasn't
10 going to happen without military action. It was
11 a question of whether the military action was in support
12 of a rebellion or was more direct?

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, yes.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But regime change without military
15 action, I mean, you are going back to what happened in
16 1991 when an internal rebellion had failed. That was
17 looked at and dismissed in the options paper, wasn't it?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. Exactly. So --

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This really brings me to my next
20 question. You referred earlier to the evidence given to
21 us earlier this week by Sir Stephen Wall, who was your
22 advisor, of course, not on Iraq but the European Union,
23 but a very, very experienced official who attended
24 Cabinet meetings, and in his evidence session he was
25 asked at what point he thought from sitting in Cabinet

1 it would have become clear to Cabinet members as a whole
2 with the possible exceptions of Robin Cook and Clare
3 Short and obviously with the exceptions of the Foreign
4 and Defence Secretaries, but to the rest of the Cabinet
5 at what point would they have appreciated that they had
6 endorsed a policy that was very likely to lead us to
7 war. His answer to that question was "Probably not
8 before January 2003". So that's about nine months later
9 than the meeting you were just talking about.

10 Do you think that a fair assessment by Sir Stephen?

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't frankly. I mean, the
12 whole debate that was going on in and around, for
13 example, the visit to Crawford was whether we would be
14 with America on military action. You can go back and
15 look in my press statements. This is not a private
16 thing. This is a public thing. You could look at the
17 press statements, the speech in Texas. I actually have
18 here, and I will just look out I think in a moment,
19 an interview I did -- not the interview you referred to
20 but an earlier interview with Jeremy Paxman in which
21 I make it absolutely clear that, you know, regime change
22 is possible. This is in April 2002. Okay. This is on
23 BBC television. So it is not exactly a secret.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, you made a similar point in
25 your speech at Crawford also in April 2002.

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Just to give you a flavour of it:

2 "Paxman: Do you agree with Bush on Iraq there has to
3 be a toppling of Saddam Hussein?

4 Blair: I certainly believe getting rid of Saddam
5 Hussein would be highly desirable. I certainly endorse
6 the policy of doing everything we can to get rid of
7 Saddam Hussein if at all possible, everything we can
8 including military means. That depends, as I have said
9 many times."

10 Then we go back into the inspectors and I say:

11 "If he lets the weapons inspectors back in
12 unconditionally, anywhere, any time, any place, of
13 course that makes a difference but there's absolutely no
14 sign that he's prepared to."

15 Then on 11th April -- this is at the Cabinet
16 meeting, straight after Crawford -- I say that
17 I consulted my hosts in advance on the speech
18 I delivered in Texas. In it I have made it clear that
19 the Iraqi regime should permit the United Nations weapon
20 inspectors to reenter Iraq unconditionally."

21 Then summing-up I say:

22 "If President Saddam Hussein were to reject a clear
23 ultimatum on the return of weapons inspectors there
24 would be widespread understanding of the need to take
25 appropriate action."

1 By the way, daily there were stories that we were
2 lining up and about to launch a military action with the
3 United States. So the one thing nobody could have been
4 in any doubt about was either where I stood on the issue
5 or what the policy of the government was. The policy
6 was to say to Saddam, "You have to let back in the
7 inspectors unconditionally, allow them to do their job
8 and the ultimatum is if you don't do that action will
9 follow."

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another senior official who attended
11 Cabinet, Mr Tom McKane, told us in evidence this week
12 that the official policy of the Government continued to
13 be containment at least until September 2003 -- 2002.
14 At the period that you are talking about the government
15 under your leadership is still leading a drive to get
16 a smart sanctions resolution of the United Nations that
17 was then passed in May.

18 So would an ordinary Cabinet member, not one
19 directly handling this issue, really have been aware in
20 March/April of 2002 that he or she was taking collective
21 responsibility for a policy that was, if Saddam didn't
22 back down, likely to lead us into joining in military
23 action against Iraq? Sir Stephen Wall thought not. You
24 say he is wrong. You were the Prime Minister. I mean,
25 he was sitting there in the meetings listening to them.

1 I suppose in a sense he was more in the position of the
2 Cabinet Minister not involved in the issue. But you
3 think it was absolutely clear when we were talking about
4 going to the United Nations the implication was this
5 could lead us into military action against Iraq.

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't think there was any doubt
7 about that at all. If you went back, unless people were
8 not listening to the news or reading the newspapers,
9 which is not my experience of the Cabinet Ministers, it
10 was literally the issue the entire time. What I was having to
do
11 was constantly say to people: "We have not taken the
12 decision on military action. We are not at this stage
13 of having put the ultimatum down."

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Perhaps we can move on to this question
15 of the point of when the Cabinet was asked to take
16 a decision. Firstly, between April 11th, 2002 and
17 23rd September 2002 my understanding is that the Cabinet
18 had no discussions about Iraq, but that was a fairly
19 important period in which the policy was evolving.
20 Within that period we had got very fully engaged in
21 military planning both internally and with the United
22 States. Also in that period you had reached your
23 agreement with President Bush to go to the United
24 Nations with the intention of warning -- delivering
25 a warning to Saddam that if he didn't comply he would

1 face serious consequences. He would effectively face
2 the use of force.

3 Now in this time in which the policy was developing
4 between 11th April and 23rd September did you feel that
5 you had Cabinet endorsement for that policy that was
6 taking us closer towards the point at which military
7 action might be necessary? Had they taken that sort of
8 a decision?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. Their desire was that
10 we went down the United Nations route.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, but did they understand that given
12 that Saddam in your estimation was unlikely to back
13 down, that beyond the United Nations route lay the
14 probability of military action?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, absolutely. I was saying
16 this publicly. I wasn't saying it privately.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No. So you had a clear Cabinet mandate
18 in effect to carry those negotiations through in this
19 period and everybody around that table taking collective
20 responsibility understood what was happening?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I honestly don't think you could
22 have a Cabinet Minister around that table who would say
23 "Oh, my goodness, I didn't know we were saying Saddam
24 had to comply with the UN inspectors or we are going to
25 take military action". I mean, I was saying it. At

1 every Prime Minister's questions I was being asked it.

2 Look, I will go back over the Cabinet minutes, by
3 the way, between April and September to see that we
4 didn't discuss Iraq at all. I'm surprised by that.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If I am wrong on that, please tell me?

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have not checked them myself, so
7 I will do.¹ However, let me just say literally
8 throughout that period there was a perpetual focus on
9 the question of were we going to get the Americans to go
10 down the UN route. The Cabinet, of course, was fully
11 behind that. That's what they wanted, because the
12 Cabinet I think were pretty much in two different -- of
13 two different minds, if you like. One group would
14 have been absolutely with me all the way. The other
15 group were saying: "Well, look, we understand it's a big
16 problem, but let us try to avoid military action if we
17 possibly can and the United Nations route is a good way
18 of doing that."

19 All of us knew that at some point there was going to
20 come a moment of truth or likely to where you had to
21 decide are you seeing it through or are you not seeing
22 it through, and in the end Robin Cook, for example,
23 wasn't with us on that, but there was not a single
24 Cabinet member around that -- I cannot believe anyone
25 would come here and say "I really didn't realise that

¹ At Mr Blair's request the Cabinet Office subsequently advised the Inquiry that, at the Cabinet meeting on 20th June there was a brief discussion on Iraq in the context of a discussion about Afghanistan. The minutes from this Cabinet meeting had not previously been shared with the Inquiry (the Iraq reference had not been spotted until this week, because the subject heading was "Afghanistan"); they have now.

FEMNAL

1 was the policy of the government", because it was being
2 articulated weekly, occasionally daily, by me, because
3 every interview I did at the time, every Prime
4 Minister's question time I did, people were saying to
5 me, "So what's going on here?"

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, what is not clear is at
7 what point you were actually asking the Cabinet to take
8 decisions. You have just said you were saying "We don't
9 have to take a decision on military action now".
10 Sir Stephen Wall, again not only in his evidence with us
11 or earlier occasions, has spoken with admiration of the
12 skill with which you decided the policy and steered it
13 along a course that you had determined. He said in
14 evidence that your style was very much to keep your
15 options as open as you could. Paul Boateng, in giving
16 evidence to us, talking of the September Cabinet
17 meeting, said that it was a full discussion, but it
18 wasn't one in which the Cabinet was discussing options.

19 As we have heard already, the Cabinet had not had
20 any papers on Iraq other than the briefing paper for the
21 Parliamentary Labour Party and in September they all had
22 copies of the dossier. They had not had the options
23 paper. It only went to the Foreign and Defence
24 Secretaries on the face of it. You say the Chancellor
25 also got a copy. It is not clear that even the Deputy

1 Prime Minister got a copy.

2 If you are an ordinary Cabinet Minister not dealing
3 day-to-day with the issue, yes, you read the newspapers,
4 but if you are not seeing the policy papers are you in
5 a position to make a decision, one question? Is the
6 Prime Minister making it clear to you, that "We have got past
7 the point of briefing and discussion. We are actually at
8 this point" -- you are looking to the Cabinet for
9 a decision for endorsement of a very serious decision at
10 a point before we get to the final stage when
11 effectively there aren't any options left before March
12 2003.

13 So can you identify a point before March 2003 at
14 which you specifically sought a decision from the
15 Cabinet rather than kept your options open?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I wasn't keeping my options open.
17 I was stating a policy that was very, very clear and
18 what I will do after this, by the way, is go back,
19 because I appreciate what you are asking me about those
20 Cabinet meetings, but I will go back and give you all
21 the summaries of the discussions at the Cabinet and the
22 summing-up, but the policy was totally clear. The
23 policy was we are going to deal with this issue. Our
24 preference is to deal with it through the United Nations
25 but not dealing with it is not an option.

1 Now that is there in the Cabinet minutes in March
2 and April, never mind September. What the Cabinet did
3 have, of course, was access to the intelligence. By the
4 way, if any Cabinet member came to me and said, "Look, I
5 have got issues about intelligence" and I think there
6 were some who had come and asked to be able to see it,
7 I would send them off to see the intelligence people,
8 but also the issue was being canvassed in the Cabinet in
9 the sense that the facts weren't really in dispute. You
10 couldn't --

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But our military preparations were being
12 made in great secrecy?

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: That's necessary frankly.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Of course it is necessary. They remained
15 pretty secret until pretty near the end of the year.
16 Now the Cabinet handles secret material, Cabinet
17 Committees, senior ministers handle secret material.

18 Do you think it was clear, do you think it was
19 understood within the Cabinet that we actually had
20 military preparations underway?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, of course.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And they were taking collective
23 responsibility for this policy?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course they were taking
25 collective responsibility for the policy because it was

1 being outlined the entire time. They knew you can't
2 simply decide one day that you are going to --
3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They didn't know the military
4 preparations were underway?
5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I would have been astonished if
6 they didn't, because there was discussion of that. I am
7 sure again -- I will have to go back over the notes --
8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although within the MoD people were told
9 to keep it very tight. The logistics boys were not
10 allowed --
11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course. Look, if you are
12 preparing military action, you have to keep it very
13 tight. There was no way, for example -- I am sorry but
14 I would not agree to giving a military planning paper to
15 the general Cabinet.
16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am not asking about a military planning
17 paper going to the Cabinet. It is a question of whether
18 they were aware this was a course they were on?
19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't think anybody was in any
20 doubt about the course they were on.
21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.
22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: If -- you know, that does not mean
23 to say that there were not some who were saying "I wish
24 we weren't on this course", but it really does defy
25 common sense and logic, let alone the discussion, to

1 think that there were people in the Cabinet who didn't
2 know what was -- that we were on a course where the
3 principals of it were absolutely clear. Go down the UN
4 route, get an ultimatum. If he fails to meet the
5 ultimatum we are going to be with America on military
6 action. This is not -- as I say, if you go -- and
7 I will send the committee afterwards several of my
8 public comments at the time. I sent it out with crystal
9 clarity. That was our position. It was a position when
10 I was being under a certain amount of criticism for
11 having, but the Cabinet were completely aware of the
12 fact that's what we were on.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Can I move on to one other aspect
14 of the way the Cabinet processes happened, which is
15 comparing your practice with that of previous Prime
16 Ministers where on major issues of security, defence,
17 possible conflict, the habit had been to have Cabinet
18 committees which would include not only the relevant
19 departmental Ministers, Foreign Affairs and Defence, but
20 other very senior Ministers, people like the Chancellor
21 of the Exchequer, the Deputy Prime Minister, if there
22 was one, who didn't have the burden of the departmental
23 portfolio, could look at that it a bit from the outside,
24 but who in these meetings, being very experienced and
25 very senior, were able to look for weaknesses in the

1 policy, the strategy, stress test it, challenge it, if
2 necessary, even challenge the Prime Minister, which
3 a more junior minister might feel inhibited about doing.

4 Now so far as I can see that didn't happen in the
5 way that you handled this policy. Your meetings, as you
6 said in our previous discussion, tended to be informal,
7 ad hoc with a small A and small H, as you said, and it
8 was the Foreign and Defence Secretaries who were there,
9 but not other Ministers.

10 Do you feel on reflection that having more stress
11 testing of the policy of that kind that I have described
12 might have helped to highlight some of the weaknesses in
13 it such as the weaknesses in aftermath planning that
14 later became apparent which you and President Bush have
15 acknowledged?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, in one sense I would like to
17 say yes, because it would be in a way an easy enough
18 concession to make. My frank belief is it would not
19 have made a great deal of difference, no. The committee
20 meetings that we had, small A, small H, ad hoc meetings,
21 I think there were 28 of them, 14 of which were minuted.
22 I had the right people there, by the way, and I think
23 this comes out in Andrew Turnbull's evidence, no-one was
24 saying to me "Do it a different way". I mean, if
25 someone had I would have listened to it, but I have to

1 say to you in addition when I looked, for example, at
2 Mrs Thatcher's War Cabinet, it didn't have the
3 Chancellor of the Exchequer on it. You know, it is
4 not -- you have there the people that you need there.

5 The bigger point you are making is: but was there
6 anyone really testing the validity of this policy, and
7 my answer to that, Sir Roderic, is this. People were
8 testing it the whole time. So, for example, through
9 this period, because I was frankly concerned about the
10 position that Robin would take -- he was a former
11 Foreign Secretary; he knew this issue very, very well --
12 I had several meetings with him during this time, when
13 he was absolutely saying to me "Well, I don't know. Is
14 it really worth taking him on? He is a terrible man who
15 has done these terrible things but is it really worth
16 it?"

17 In respect of the planning, however, there was
18 a lot of detailed planning going on. The trouble is
19 there was nothing that was putting us on notice about
20 the problem we ended up with.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We are going to come back to that at
22 a later stage.

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I suspect had you had people
24 there, first of all in the run-up to the conflict
25 frankly they would have been stress testing whether

1 military action, rather than the aftermath. Even if
2 they had been there, the questions they would have been
3 asking were the questions we were asking: humanitarian,
4 environmental.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On both counts it might have been useful
6 if they had been stress testing whether military action
7 or perhaps whether military action now. That's another
8 question.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Can I just make a point?

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, of course.

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: When you go through these detailed Cabinet
discussions, you see the

12 summaries of the points people are making. You can
13 see many of these points people were making, but in the
14 end they were -- look, one of the things about this that
15 I think in retrospect and in hindsight we lose is that
16 everybody found this issue difficult. There was
17 nobody -- not even Robin was sitting there saying "Look,
18 I think this is clear".

19 So what was happening throughout was that people
20 were saying to me in a sense, "Look, do your best on
21 this to get the Americans down a multilateral route,
22 because if you can get them down it, it is going to be
23 a lot easier for all of us". People were actually far
24 more worried about the politics than they were about
25 anything else, because, you know, as some of the papers

1 make clear, here we were. We had just been reelected,
2 another landslide. We were probably the most successful
3 centre left government in the world. Suddenly I am
4 about to go into an alliance with a right-wing
5 conservative Republican President. That was the thing
6 that worried them most. The thing they were stress
7 testing most of all was; what are you going to do with
8 the government if we are forced to go into alliance with
9 President Bush? That was the most difficult thing in
10 a way politically, and the thing was throughout, and
11 this is why I go back to September 11th, my view was
12 I was not oblivious to the difficulties, but in the end
13 were we going to stand firm and deal with this threat
14 alongside America or not? That was the issue. You
15 know, you can go round this 1,000 times but you come
16 back to that same basic challenge.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If it wasn't difficult I don't think we
18 would all be sitting here now. We have just spent the
19 last year and a half being asked to conduct an Inquiry
20 into it. It is a very difficult issue.

21 I would like now to move back. We have been
22 discussing the situation in the spring and summer of
23 2002, but I would like to go back a bit to late November
24 and early December 2001.

25 On 26th November President Bush said at a press

1 conference that if Saddam refused to let weapons
2 inspectors back in, he, meaning Saddam, he would "find
3 out" what would happen.

4 Now that set off quite a lot of media speculation,
5 and this is only about, what, ten weeks after 9/11, that
6 the President was shifting towards thoughts of military
7 action against Iraq.

8 In the days that followed that, whether this is
9 coincidental or not I don't know -- the papers don't
10 show -- you received a lot of advice on Iraq and the
11 focus, as I say, up to this point had very much been on
12 Afghanistan. You had a note from Jonathan Powell which
13 he described in his evidence to us rather diffidently,
14 a note which was he said in his evidence about
15 encouraging people in Iraq to resist.

16 You asked for and received from the Foreign Office
17 a note on options over Iraq, and the Foreign Office's
18 advice from the Foreign Secretary's office was that
19 there were "No anti-terrorist grounds for Stage 2
20 military action against Iraq". They suggested
21 a ratcheting up of containment, and they warned that the
22 1991 uprisings had failed for want of outside support
23 and that military intervention for the purpose of regime
24 change would be illegal.

25 So that was the Foreign Office advice.

1 Thirdly, as you mention in your statement to us, you
2 received an expert paper from SIS, the Secret
3 Intelligence Service. Actually in earlier evidence it's
4 been established that there were three papers from SIS.
5 In the published evidence of the Inquiry's last session
6 with Sir David Manning there is a quotation from one of
7 these papers which reads as follows:

8 "We discussed", that is to say a discussion is
9 clearly referring to between SIS and Sir David, "how we
10 could combine an objective of regime change in Baghdad
11 with the need to protect important regional interests
12 which would be at grave risk."

13 That paper was also described in this evidence
14 session as setting out a route map for regime change
15 very openly.

16 Sir David commented on that "That regime change at
17 this stage, of course, is not about invading Iraq."

18 So that advice came in and then on 3rd December you
19 spoke to President Bush on the telephone. Then you sent
20 him a paper which Sir David Manning delivered to
21 Dr Condoleezza Rice during a visit to Washington on 5th
22 December. The paper was dated 4th.

23 Now those records of your phone conversation,
24 Sir David's visit and the paper you sent have not been
25 declassified, but I wonder if you could give us the gist

1 of your conversation with the President on 3rd December
2 and of the message which you then sent to him via
3 Sir David?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. First of all, I have to go
5 back and study that because that was not one of the ones
6 that I thought you would ask me about, but I am very
7 happy to go back to that 3rd December 2001 and look at
8 it again, but the first paper I received, which is the
9 Iraq options paper I think is worth looking at from the
10 Foreign Office, because you say it concluded there are
11 no anti-terrorist grounds for Stage 2 military action
12 against Iraq. That was on the basis we saw no link
13 between Iraq and Al Qaeda. That does not deal with the
14 point, however, that post September 11th WMD takes on
15 a different significance.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because that letter goes on to
18 say:

19 "There is real reason for concern about Iraq's WMD
20 programmes principally chemical, biological weapons and
21 long range missiles."

22 It then has an annex A, which is just worth looking
23 at for a moment, because when it asks -- and this has
24 been declassified:

25 "What is Iraq doing?"

1 This is the answer the Foreign Office gave me:

2 "Iraq is concealing information about large
3 quantities of chemical and biological munitions agents
4 and precursors. It is concealing up to 20 long range Al
5 Hussein missiles. It is actively pursuing chemical and
6 biological weapons and ballistic missiles. It is
7 seeking to rebuild a nuclear weapons programme and most
8 importantly barring entry to the inspectors."

9 Now that was not exactly a reassuring paper on
10 Saddam.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No. That was indeed the existing
12 situation that they were describing, yes. There is no
13 argument about that.

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What I think is very important,
15 because I think when we come to the SIS officer's
16 evidence, and I would like specifically to draw
17 attention to that, because I think it is very important,
18 in his papers, some of which warned -- one of which in
19 a sense said, "Look, this is going to be very, very
20 difficult if you try getting regime change in Iraq, so
21 watch out". Another paper, however, said "On the other
22 hand, leaving him there is also very, very
23 difficult".

24 When he gave evidence to you, I think he gives
25 evidence which is really, really important in

1 understanding that all the way through there were these two
2 views. There was not ever one view, namely containment
3 is working. What on earth are you focusing on regime
4 change for. All the way through the system, in a sense, like
the politicians,

5 were saying "Look, carry on containment and hope that
6 works", but on the other hand I think one of the option
7 papers actually says to me, by implication you cannot
8 stop the WMD programmes unless you actually remove
9 Saddam. I think it actually says that or something like
10 that.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: These were the views. My question is
12 what did you say to President Bush?

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am leading you to that. When
14 you then get to the evidence -- when you then get to my
15 conversation with President Bush I am in a situation
16 then when I am saying to him, "Look, we are going to
17 have to deal with this issue. We accept that. After
18 September 11, the calculus of risk has changed and
19 changed fundamentally. We cannot allow Saddam Hussein
20 to be in breach of UN resolutions". So I am signaling
21 that I am up for the policy of handling and dealing with
22 this issue and we are going to be with America in doing
23 that.

24 We then I think from memory had a discussion about
25 all sorts of different aspects of that and how it might

1 be done, and so on and so forth. For me, as I said
2 again publicly, I was in no doubt it would be beneficial
3 for the world to get rid of Saddam Hussein and to get
4 rid of his regime. On the other hand, I was saying
5 "This is going to be difficult precisely because of the
6 things listed in the paper from the SIS officer".

7 If I just quote from his evidence to you, because
8 I think it is important particularly for the public
9 actually to understand what he was saying. He said in
10 his evidence to you:

11 "I remember saying to somebody at that time that the
12 lack of our response to the re-emergence of Iraq as
13 a serious regional power is like having tea with some
14 very proper people in the drawing room and noticing
15 there was a python getting out of a box in one corner.
16 I was very alarmed at the way that Iraq was eroding the
17 sanctions regime and evading it. It had been successful
18 in seeing us off with propaganda since the end of the
19 First Gulf War."

20 Then he goes on to say:

21 "I want to say something very quickly about WMD. So
22 many people think of WMD as being rather like tanks and
23 missiles and aeroplanes, things you could look at. In
24 my own mind I always thought of WMD as being contained
25 really in the brains of the experts who understood them

1 and were able to produce them sometimes at very short
2 notice. Nuclear would be slightly different under that
3 heading, but we dealt with the Iraqi nuclear threat, but
4 Iraq's potential, its capability in the WMD field was
5 very dramatic. Our understanding was that Iraq cracked
6 the Iran/Iraq war with a sarin attack in which 45,000
7 Iranians died. So the idea of putting an end to this
8 problem was not something I would advocate, but I could
9 see the force of the desire to do it to be decisive."

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I don't think anyone would disagree with
11 that. When you say that discussed with the President
12 how to deal with it, what sort of ideas were you
13 discussing with him? Were you discussing with him --
14 was this beginnings of a discussion about regime change?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, regime change was their
16 policy, so regime change was always part of the
17 discussion.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was it your policy?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it wasn't our policy to have
20 regime change but it was our policy to deal with the WMD
21 issues.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were not proposing at this stage
23 to President Bush that we should join in a policy of
24 regime change? It was their policy, not our policy?

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: All the way through -- and I think

1 this is what I said publicly at that time as well -- if
2 it became the only way of dealing with this issue then
3 we were going to be up for that, but I think from
4 memory, but I will have to go back and look at it,
5 I think the Americans themselves or Condi Rice certainly
6 laid out to David Manning they were looking at three
7 options at the time actually. I think there was the
8 military option obviously, there was containment and
9 possibly regime change with internal opposition. You
10 know, the Americans from 9/11 onwards, this was on their
11 agenda. There is no doubt about that.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The Foreign Office talked about a Stage 2
13 military action against Iraq. There I think I am right
14 in saying they are referring to the idea in Washington
15 that there should be a Stage 2, or a Phase Two I think
16 it was more often called, of the war against terror.
17 Having started with Afghanistan that was not going to be
18 the end of it.

19 Now did you agree with the idea that Iraq should be
20 encompassed in a Phase Two of the war against terror?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Absolutely in this sense, that --

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't think we needed to finish with
23 Afghanistan first?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I thought we had to deal with all
25 problems arising out of this issue. So I think again

1 from memory I actually was raising all sort of issues to
2 do with Somalia. I was raising issues to do with the
3 Middle East peace process. I was raising issues to do
4 with Lebanon. My view was -- this was at the heart of
5 the foreign policy debate that still rages on today. My
6 view was this was all part of one issue in the end, and
7 that you had to deal with each and every individual part
8 of it, that you couldn't, as it were, although it would
9 be good in one way, say, "Look, we will deal with it
10 sequentially. We will tackle Afghanistan now and maybe
11 if there's a problem in Yemen we will tackle that
12 later". That was not my view.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So how did you react to the Foreign
14 Office, the Foreign Secretary's advice through his
15 office, in effect, that proposed ratcheting up of
16 containment and rather steered away from the idea of
17 supporting uprisings, let alone military intervention
18 for the purpose of regime change. Did you agree with
19 that?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, they were not quite saying
21 that. What they were saying was, "Look, there is
22 a policy of containment". We can see this in the
23 options paper. I think from memory it says it has been
24 partially successful and it lists certain successes.
25 They go on to say "However, it's not actually stopped

1 him doing what he is doing". I think there is -- is
2 this declassified, the options paper of 26th March or
3 not?

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: A version of it has appeared in the
5 public domain, the options paper of March. I cannot
6 quote from it directly, but you can quote from the
7 version that has appeared from the public domain under
8 the Cabinet Secretary's rules. I think I am correct in
9 saying that. It is hard to see if I am being corrected
10 by the Chairman. I am not. You can quote from your own
11 paper.

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have not read the press report.
13 That options paper actually gives quite a good summary.
14 I don't suppose there is any problem in reading it. It
15 says:

16 "Tougher containment" -- this is the sort of
17 summary, if you like "would not reintegrate Iraq into
18 the international community as it offers little prospect
19 of removing Saddam. He will continue with his WMD
20 programmes, destabilising the Arab and Islamic world and
21 impoverishing its people, but there is to greater threat
22 now that he will use WMD than there's been in recent
23 years so continuing containment is an option."

24 So that was the two sides of the argument, and then
25 which side you came down on really depended on whether

1 you thought Post-September 11th we had to be change
2 makers or whether we could still be managers. Up to
3 September 11th we had been managing this issue. After
4 September 11th we decided we had to confront and change,
5 and that's, you know -- even today that is the issue,
6 because, as I say, we face exactly the same challenge
7 over Iran. What do you do? Do you say we have to
8 change this or not?

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to come back to Iran later
10 on, if I may. I have been advised I misled you over the
11 quotation. You were meant to quote from the actual
12 version of the paper not the version that appeared in
13 the public domain. So my apologies for that.

14 If I could come back to President Bush and the paper
15 you sent to President Bush. Were you at this stage,
16 which is pretty early in the post-9/11 process, were you
17 inclining at a strategy, looking at a strategy that
18 would build up in stages towards a possibility or
19 probability of military action of some kind or another
20 against Iraq to deal with Saddam Hussein?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, I could see where this was
22 heading the same as everybody else.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were looking at that with the
24 President in a sort of active sense?

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. It was very obvious you had

1 to deal with the issue. There were two ways of dealing
2 with it: change of heart or change of regime. That was
3 more or less as it remained throughout.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So were you looking at specific ways in
5 which one could deal with it?

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course, but in the end the
7 basic issue was how are we going to deal with it and, as
8 I say, when I was giving the shape of our policy
9 development, a lot of people were saying to President
10 Bush: "Never mind the UN and never mind ultimatums. It
11 is our policy of the American government laid down by
12 President Clinton, inherited by you. Go and get him
13 out".

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why did you need to send him a paper,
15 having had a conversation on the phone?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because one thing I found in this
17 was when I was trying to open up the possibility of
18 getting a change in American policy, it helped to set it
19 down in writing to him.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So your Foreign Affairs advisor flies
21 over to Washington with a paper. This is not a casual
22 conversation. Did it then lead to sort of follow-up?

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, then you really have a sort
24 of build-up. I think I got a JIC assessment in March
25 2002. We then went to see the Americans in Crawford in

1 April, but it was -- this was evolving at quite a fast
2 rate, and the question was could we in a sense -- could
3 we in a sense -- this thing was going down a track
4 towards regime change. Could we put it into a somewhat
5 different track where you said ultimatum and then
6 a further different track where you said but through the
7 UN. That's where we were going.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was this effectively the beginning of the
9 track that led towards regime change?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I think the beginning of the
11 track that led towards regime change was straight after
12 September 11th.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But in terms of your discussions with
14 President Bush?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I would say absolutely clear from
16 the very outset. I mean, he was going to change that
17 regime if they didn't let the inspectors back in.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will turn to Sir Martin Gilbert again.
20 Martin.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can I look for a moment at your very
22 important minute to Jonathan Powell of 17th March 2002.
23 I have a number of questions from that. You wrote to
24 Jonathan Powell:

25 "In all my papers I do not have a proper worked out

1 strategy on how we would do it."

2 Can you tell us what the "it" in that sentence
3 means, "how we would do it"?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. How we would either get
5 Saddam to cease being a threat peacefully or to get him
6 out by force.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So this was then the clear view that
8 you had that somehow there was no third way?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I don't think there ever was
10 really after September 11th. As I say, this is not
11 something I was simply saying privately. I was saying
12 it publicly. So by the time you get to April, if you see my
13 press statements with President Bush and the speech
14 I made the next day I was being very open about it, he
15 had to let the inspectors back in any time anywhere or
16 action would follow. Really what this paper is more
17 about is the politics, because I can see politically for
18 the centre left that, you know, they were going to be
19 extremely concerned. I was obviously going to get
20 a huge political problem out of it.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So I suppose on that aspect, on that
22 political aspect, your next remark in the minute, "the
23 immediate WMD problems don't seem obviously worse than
24 three years ago". Does this mean that you on the one
25 hand didn't believe that Saddam was now posing a growing

1 threat or that this would be a difficult case to make?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, it was the case that
3 following September 11th, it wasn't that he was doing
4 any more than he had been before. It was that our
5 assessment of the risk of allowing him to do anything
6 had changed, but also the latter point as well you just
7 made, yes. It was also that, the politics of it.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Another point you make in this minute
9 was:

10 "So we have to reorder our story and message.
11 Increasingly I think it should be about the nature of
12 the regime."

13 We do intervene as per the Chicago speech. What
14 story did you have in mind that had to be reordered?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: The context of this is, as the
16 note makes clear, is if you are going to build
17 a coalition for this, to put it very bluntly, there are
18 people on the right who would basically support this as
19 a security issue very easily. There are people on the
20 left who don't maybe take quite the same view on the
21 security questions. For those people it is the nature
22 of the regime and therefore the combination of the
23 regime and the security threat where the argument would
24 be most persuasive.

25 As I think I said to you in my evidence before, one

1 of the problems here is that there has grown up this
2 very binary distinction between regime change on the one
3 hand and WMD on the other. For me it was always linked
4 together in this sense, that a regime of the nature of
5 Saddam's, and you think of the hundreds of thousands of
6 people he killed, the million casualties in the
7 Iraq/Iran War, the gassing of the Kurds, clearing of the
8 Marsh Arabs, a regime of that nature is clearly a bigger
9 threat with chemical, biological and nuclear capability
10 is a bigger threat than a regime which is benign.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You say: "We have no inhibitions,
12 where we reasonably can, about nation building." Does
13 that essentially mean that the removal of Saddam Hussein
14 is an end in itself justifiable on the nature of his
15 regime?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, again as I have said many,
17 many times on this, the nature of the regime could not
18 justify in itself the intervention. It is, however, why
19 I think we should be proud of having got rid of him. So
20 that's, if you like, the right way of putting it.

21 I mean, you know, as I set out in that Chicago
22 speech, and I still am by inclination on the liberal
23 interventionist side of the debate. Many people aren't,
24 but the basis of this was the security risk changing
25 after September 11th. So if September 11th hadn't

1 happened we would have carried on in the same way
2 frankly that George Bush and I first discussed this back
3 in I think February 2001.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

5 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I'd like to turn to June and July 2002 in
6 the context of your exchanges with President Bush and
7 Donald Rumsfeld. In the Inquiry's statement request to
8 you, Mr Blair, we asked about two specific statements,
9 the one you made to President Bush after the meeting of
10 23rd July 2002, and also to Defence Secretary Rumsfeld
11 in June 2002.

12 The Cabinet Secretary would not agree to their
13 disclosure. In communicating his decision to us, the
14 Cabinet Secretary wrote and I quote:

15 "A UK Prime Minister may be less likely to have
16 these exchanges or allow them to be recorded if he is
17 concerned that this information would be disclosed at
18 a later time against his wishes."

19 Are you content to tell the Inquiry what was in
20 these statements?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am very content to discuss the
22 basis of them. What I do believe and I am not going to
23 hide behind the Cabinet Secretary -- it is not my way --
24 I think it is extremely important that the British Prime
25 Minister and the American President are able to

1 communicate in confidence, and if something is given in
2 confidence it should be treated like that, but I am very
3 happy to tell you the basis of what I said.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Regarding your comment first
5 of all to President Bush in the note of July 2002,
6 Sir David Manning told us about his concern regarding
7 the opening sentence, he told us, and I quote him, "It
8 was too sweeping" and that he tried to talk you out of
9 it. He said it seemed to him -- his phrasing was "To
10 close off options" and he didn't think that was
11 a sensible place to be.

12 Concluding this quotation:

13 "It went further than we should have gone."

14 Nonetheless you did retain the opening sentence.

15 Can I ask why did you think it was particularly
16 important?

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think I did actually change the
18 opening sentence, but in -- however --

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I was going to ask whether you amended
20 the original wording?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: So I did actually accept one
22 suggestion of David's. Frankly I think he would have
23 preferred me not to have given any undertaking at all.

24 What I was saying to President Bush was very clear
25 and simple. It is: You can count on us. We are going

1 to be with you in tackling this, but here are the
2 difficulties. As you see, the rest of the note is
3 actually about all the issues and difficulties.

4 Look, in the end you have a very clear and simple
5 decision to take here. America is going to tackle this
6 issue. The first question is: do we want it to be
7 a coalition? My belief was it was extremely important
8 for the international community to hold together at this
9 point. I didn't see September 11th as an attack on
10 America. It is an attack on us, if you like, the west.

11 American could do it unilaterally. Of course they
12 could, but I would prefer them to do it multilaterally.
13 So in a sense what I was saying to America was "look" --
14 and by the way I am absolutely sure this is how George
15 Bush took it "Whatever the political heat, if I think
16 this is the right thing to do I am going to be with you.
17 I am not going to back out because the going gets tough.
18 On the other hand, here are the difficulties and this is
19 why I think the UN route is the right way to go".

20 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The Andrew Rawnsley book quotes you
21 saying at about the end of July, so it must be the same
22 event, Rawnsley quotes you as saying, having said to
23 President Bush, quoting from Rawnsley, quoting you:

24 "You know, George, whatever you decide to do, I am
25 with you."

1 Is that about right?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it is not what I said. What
3 I said is what I said in the note, and with the greatest
4 respect to Andrew Rawnsley I don't think he was present
5 at the meeting.

6 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: No. He was quoting what you said to him².

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What I said to him.

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So I understand.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have not heard about that.

10 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I suppose just to round off on this,
11 because it is very important and central as to how far
12 there was a commitment and what the nature of the
13 commitment was, thinking also about what you said to
14 Donald Rumsfeld on 5th June, you said in your statement
15 to us about that:

16 "I could not and did not offer some kind of blank
17 cheque in how we accomplished our shared objective."

18 But if you used the sort of language that Rawnsley
19 cites or that we have seen in the note you sent to
20 President Bush, are those wholly consistent in terms of
21 the understanding that the Americans formed?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sure. I don't think the Americans
23 were in any doubt at all about what was being said and
24 why it was being said. I can't recall all the precise
25 conversations I had, but by the way, this is entirely

² Andrew Rawnsley in his book *The End of the Party* refers to interviews with officials as the basis for his material.

1 consistent also with what I was saying publicly.
2 I don't think it was a great secret that I was right
3 alongside America after September 11th and continued to
4 be, and one of the reasons why when we had the Crawford
5 meeting there was so much international focus is that
6 Britain and America were standing together.

7 What I was saying to the Americans was this, because
8 I was trying to get them very substantially to amend
9 their position. Their position had been "We are going
10 to do it". Then their position had been because I had
11 asked them "Okay with an ultimatum." Now their position
12 with huge opposition within his system was going to be
13 "We are going to put this back in the lap of the United
14 Nations". Some of the people in his administration were
15 saying "You are crazy. You are going to put it back
16 into the bureaucracy of the UN. They will swallow it
17 up. You will be back to all this playing around. In
18 the meantime you have this guy doing what he is doing,
19 sitting there and nothing happening."

20 So I was having to persuade him to take a view
21 radically different from any of the people in his
22 administration. So what I was saying to him is "I am
23 going to be with you in handling it this way. I am not
24 going to push you down this path and then back out when
25 it gets too hot politically, because it is going to get

1 hot for me politically, very, very much so."

2 I did this because I believed in it. I thought it
3 was the right thing to do. I also believe it is
4 consistent with my public statements and, frankly,
5 whatever phrasing I used, I accept entirely I was saying
6 "I am going to be with America in handling this.
7 However, we should handle it this way". That was in the
8 end what he agreed to do. The single thing that is most
9 important over anything else in this whole business
10 about the politics about the decision before we went to
11 war, is that 1441 represented a huge compromise on his
12 part and a huge opportunity for the international
13 community to get its act together.

14 Once it became clear that Saddam had not changed but
15 was carrying on in the same way, I think it would have
16 been profoundly wrong of us to have gone back to the
17 Americans and said, "I know we said that we would be
18 with you in handling this, but now we are not".

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I'd like to ask Sir Roderic
20 to pick up on Resolution 1441. Just before I do I think
21 I would like to say for the record, because I said to
22 the Cabinet Secretary that we were disappointed that it
23 was not possible to see the statement, which, of course,
24 we have seen, and that disappointment continues, but
25 there it is.

1 Roderic?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: You, of course, have got all these
3 notes.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Indeed.

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just a short question on the Attorney
7 General's involvement in advising on Resolution 1441, as
8 you will have seen, Lord Goldsmith said in his statement
9 that he was not being sufficiently involved in the
10 meetings and discussions about Resolution 1441 and the
11 policy behind it that were taking place at Ministerial
12 level, and he says:

13 "I made this point on a number of occasions."

14 Given the importance that you have placed on Lord
15 Goldsmith's understanding of the negotiations, why
16 wasn't he allowed to be more closely involved in the
17 negotiation of 1441 as well as in the discussions which
18 lay behind it?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I have to say I think I had
20 more to do with Peter Goldsmith on this resolution than
21 I can ever recall on any previous military action that
22 we took. Now --

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: 1441?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. Now I have read what Peter
25 has said now, and obviously that's something it would be

1 sensible to have the Attorney General -- I think in
2 retrospect it would have been sensible to have had him
3 absolutely in touch with the negotiating machinery all
4 the way through, because I think then we wouldn't
5 probably have got into the situation where he thought
6 provisionally, at least, that we needed another
7 resolution, because I think had he known of the
8 negotiating history real time as we were going through
9 it we could have avoided some of the problems later.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, I think he would agree with
11 you there. Obviously he has quoted in his statement
12 a precedent where an earlier Attorney General under your
13 government was much more closely involved in 1998 in the
14 negotiating of Resolutions 1154 and 1205.

15 So the regret is obviously mutual.

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have to say that I actually
17 don't recall being involved much with the Attorney
18 before in the 1998 thing, but obviously I have read what
19 Peter said.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, the Attorney was involved in the
21 negotiations and was involved extensively I think with
22 the Foreign Office and the FCO's legal advisers in 1998.
23 It was being led from there.

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Right.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, in his statement he says that he

1 wasn't involved in discussions about 1441. Between the
2 time of his meeting with you on 22nd October, when he
3 told you that the draft then in contemplation did not
4 authorise the use of force, until 7th November when the
5 text was, as he puts it, all but agreed, but you say you
6 were very much involved with him over this resolution.
7 These two statements don't seem to fit together.

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. What I am saying is I was
9 more involved -- I recall having more meetings with
10 Peter about the legality of this issue than I did on any
11 of the other occasions.

12 I did actually -- there was a meeting I think on
13 17th October, which we then minuted out, including to
14 Peter, where we set the objectives for the resolution.
15 Then he and I had the meeting on 22nd October, and --
16 I mean, I agree in retrospect it would be better if he
17 had been there, because we would have then -- he would
18 have been sensitised to the evidence that has been given
19 to you by Stephen Pattison and by Iain Macleod, Stephen
20 Patterson being the head of the then Department of the
21 Foreign Office, and Iain Macleod being the legal advisor
22 and the legal counsellor for the UN process and they
23 explained why the Resolution 1441 did meet our
24 objectives and significantly changed in the days leading
25 up to its adoption.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Iain Macleod is the legal counsellor
2 advising Jeremy Greenstock in New York. The Foreign
3 Office legal advisors working in London, Sir Michael
4 Wood and those working to him, as has come out from the
5 respective evidence, took a very different view. They
6 took the same view as the Attorney General, and the
7 Attorney General took the view, as you know, that at
8 this time he took the view that 1441 did not authorise
9 use of force unless there was a further resolution, but
10 you have said in your statement that 1441 "Achieved our
11 objectives".

12 Now how could it have achieved our objectives if
13 your Attorney General, your senior legal officer was
14 telling you that it hadn't?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, this is the very point that
16 I am making. What was happening was -- and this is why
17 frankly with retrospect it would have been better if he
18 had been very closely involved with this negotiation --
19 because what was happening was we had agreed on 17th
20 October that there were clear objectives for the
21 resolution and those objectives were, and I think we
22 actually say this very plainly, the ultimatum goes into
23 1441. If he breaches the ultimatum action follows. So
24 this was the instruction given. I mean, I can't
25 remember exactly what I said after 22nd October, but

1 I should imagine I said "Well, you had better make sure
2 it does meet our objectives".

3 As Stephen Pattison's evidence to you makes clear,
4 there were changes the Americans put in in the final
5 evolving stages of this negotiation, and the thing that
6 was problematic for me throughout, and it is why, you
7 know, I wrote on a later note from Peter "I just don't
8 understand this" is that the whole point about our
9 instructions to our negotiators were, "Make sure that
10 this resolution is sufficient because we can't guarantee
11 we are going to go back into a further iteration of this
12 or a second resolution".

13 My view -- let's not go through all this again --
14 was the important thing about 1441 is that it said "This
15 is your final opportunity" and what's more it specified
16 what constituted a breach, namely a failure to fully,
17 unconditionally and immediately to comply with the UN
18 inspectors. So we believed that out of this we got
19 a resolution that was valid, but, of course, that became
20 a continuing debate with Peter then over the next two or
21 three months.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So clearly there was no disagreement
23 between you and him about the objectives that were
24 supposed to be achieved, but at the end of it he said
25 that one specific objective, authorising use of force

1 without need for recourse to a further resolution, had
2 not been achieved, and that must have been
3 a disappointment to you, but we should I think probably
4 --

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: More than that. We had to make
6 sure it did. I don't know -- I mean, as I say, I have
7 no recollection of specific instructions going out after
8 that meeting, but I am sure I would have said to our
9 folks "He had better make sure it does meet that
10 objective".

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it didn't. He is saying at the end
12 it didn't.

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What he said -- as I just pointed
14 out to you -- the resolution did evolve even after 22nd
15 October. I didn't know this, by the way, at the time,
16 so I am not relying on that, as it were. Peter came to
17 the view first that on balance it still required
18 a second resolution, and then once he went through the
19 negotiating history that actually it didn't.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At the time the resolution was adopted
21 and, indeed, through until February the following year
22 he took the position that a further resolution was
23 needed, that it hadn't achieved the objectives,
24 precisely because as he sets out in his note, changes
25 had been made in the wording that gave him great

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The period I was referring to was between
2 April and September and therefore obviously would
3 include the summer recess.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I would like to ask some general
5 questions about legal advice, because Lord Goldsmith in
6 his witness statement states that he felt he was being
7 discouraged from providing his advice and cites his
8 conversation with Jonathan Powell on 11th November and
9 his meeting with Jonathan Powell, Sir David Manning and
10 Baroness Morgan on 19th December as examples. Were you
11 aware that he felt he was being discouraged from giving
12 formal advice?

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think it was more that we knew
14 obviously when we came to the point of decision we were
15 going to need formal advice. We knew also this was
16 a very tricky and difficult question. It was important
17 actually that he gave this advice. I think the only
18 concern, and I am speaking from memory here; generating
19 bits of paper the entire time on it, but, I mean, it was
20 obviously important that he was involved.

21 I should say something about my approach to the
22 office of the Attorney General. I actually changed, in
23 a sense, the traditional way Attorney Generals were
24 appointed. Up until about 20, 30 years ago and
25 certainly going back in time they were usually Members

1 of Parliament who were lawyers, barristers and who were
2 eminent barristers but MPs at the same time.

3 With the changing circumstances with people
4 expecting, perfectly understandably, MPs to be more
5 full-time, it became actually quite rare to have
6 significant practicing barristers who were MPs. So
7 usually the Attorney General had been an MP, John
8 Morris, for example. He was pretty much the last of his
9 kind.

10 I decided really it was best to go and take a person
11 who was what I would call a proper lawyer and then put
12 them in the House of Lords and make them Attorney
13 General. I did that first with Charles Falconer and
14 then with Peter Goldsmith. That were amongst probably
15 the top ten lawyers of their generation. So someone
16 like Peter was a lawyer through and through and a very,
17 very good one. So if he was giving advice it had to be
18 taken seriously.

19 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. So he was not wrong in
20 supposing that he was not being encouraged to put advice
21 in writing from time to time?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: And my understanding was, and this
23 is how we had done it up to now, was that once you got
24 to the position of asking for advice you get a formal
25 advice. Now I had not previously had a situation --

1 I don't see why you shouldn't, by the way, on
2 reflection, but I had not previously been in a situation
3 where I was getting advice of a provisional nature in
4 writing.

5 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You said in your own statement that Lord
6 Goldsmith's advice on 1441 was always going to be
7 influenced by knowledge of the negotiating history of
8 1441, which was adopted in New York on 8th
9 November 2002. I wonder then why did it take until the
10 end of January/early February 2003 before it was
11 arranged for him to meet Sir Jeremy Greenstock and the
12 American lawyers, when he had been raising these
13 concerns ever since October.

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: And in retrospect it would have
15 been better if we had put him alongside them
16 straightaway. I think that was probably because we were
17 then saying; okay, it may be we can get a second
18 resolution. Right. It's not because we believe it is
19 legally necessary. I didn't believe it was legally
20 necessary. Peter was advising it was. That gave us
21 an added incentive, if you like, to go and try to get
22 it. I think politically at that time that was the
23 pre-occupation. How did you get that second resolution,
24 because we had been -- it was certainly politically
25 a lot easier to do it. As Peter himself was saying, if

1 you could get it in the right terms that would take
2 account of any legal issues, but I am very happy to say
3 in retrospect I would have had him alongside the
4 negotiating team and it would have been better if he had
5 been seeing the American lawyers back in November 2002,
6 and indeed, I mean, I was -- I thought of this as I was
7 going back over the papers again, I can only say the
8 political pressure was just enormous at that time in
9 December, January, February 2002/2003, and I think it
10 would have been very hard not to have pushed for the
11 second resolution, but I wonder in retrospect whether it
12 would have been better simply to have -- I know, if we
13 had done it differently and had him there alongside, as
14 I say, the lawyers at the beginning, we would have just
15 camped on that resolution.

16 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: When you received Lord Goldsmith's draft
17 advice of 14th January 2003, Jonathan Powell suggested,
18 and I am quoting:

19 "We should get Jeremy Greenstock over to suggest
20 alternatives to him", him being Lord Goldsmith, and you
21 said, and I quote:

22 "We need to explore whether we can revive
23 self-defence or whether the United Nations Security
24 Council could have a discussion that makes plain there
25 is a breach without a second resolution."

1 Now those comments suggest that you were focusing
2 not only or mostly on the importance of a negotiating
3 history, but rather that you were keen to find
4 an alternative that might convince Lord Goldsmith there
5 was a legal base for military action. Was that really how it
6 was?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think it was both actually.
8 I think I am right in saying that Peter himself
9 mentioned -- I think this is in square brackets -- that
10 it had been suggested he talk to Jeremy Greenstock and
11 indeed that he should. So in a sense he had already
12 raised that issue. I was -- I think I was simply
13 casting about. I mean, this was -- I was saying "Have
14 a look at this point. Have a look at that", but the key
15 thing was indeed that he was to speak to Jeremy.
16 I can't remember when the issue of him speaking to the
17 Americans came up, but all the time what I was -- this
18 was also part of the negotiating history for the second
19 resolution. All the time -- and this is why in the
20 end -- because there had been an original concept
21 actually about the second resolution. I mean, I have
22 now gone back through these papers and frankly seen
23 papers I wouldn't have seen at the time.

24 There was a concept at some point of having a kind
25 of two-step thing where you had a resolution where the

1 UN Security Council would express a readiness to
2 authorise all necessary means followed by another
3 resolution if there was a breach. That was really on
4 the understanding that we would have with the other
5 members of the Security Council that if Blix said "They
6 are not cooperating", then you would have, as it were,
7 almost automatically necessary resolution authorising
8 necessary means would flow.

9 Then at a later time we thought, "No, we can't get
10 into that" because supposing the Russians and French say
11 "We are not authorising action", then it is better to
12 encompass it all in that one resolution.

13 So I was still in my mind thinking what happens,
14 though, if one of the Permanent Members of the Security
15 Council accepts there is a breach and so Resolution 1441
16 should apply in reviving 678, but they then just say "We
17 are not going to do it".

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we would like to pursue that
19 thread a little later on.

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Okay.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just on the point about Lord
22 Goldsmith's -- the evolution of his advice. Throughout
23 the time when he was advising there was no legal base
24 for military action in 1441 alone, the policy -- your
25 policy of joining with the US in military action did not

1 change. Did that mean you assumed he would eventually
2 be brought to change his mind?

3 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, but, you know, I was in the
4 situation where he had given this provisional advice.
5 There was a debate still going on, and remember I was
6 keeping maximum pressure on Saddam and I was trying to
7 keep this coalition together, because by then we had got
8 over 40 nations in this coalition. Right? So we had
9 actually created a situation which I desired, which is
10 it wasn't just the US and it wasn't even just the US and
11 the UK. By then Australia was in it. We had Japan in
12 it. We had south Korea in it. We had a majority at
13 that time of the European Union members. My desire was
14 to keep maximum pressure on Saddam because I hoped we
15 could get a second resolution with an ultimatum because
16 that meant we would avoid the conflict altogether, or
17 then have a clear consensus for removing Saddam. So
18 I was having to carry on whilst this internal legal
19 debate was continuing and try to hope we could overcome
20 it.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Roderic, over to you on legal
22 matters.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just following through this point, you
24 have referred in your statement to provisional advice
25 and you have just referred to it again from Lord

1 Goldsmith. There is one specific point I would really
2 like to clarify with you.

3 This is that on 30th January, knowing you were going
4 to see President Bush the following day, Lord Goldsmith
5 wrote you a specific letter reiterating his advice on
6 whether or not the resolution authorised the use of
7 force. He said:

8 "You might wish to know where I stand on this."

9 He notes that on 14th January he has given you
10 a note setting out his provisional views and says he is
11 preparing a more detailed note of advice.

12 Having said that and that he still has to have
13 further consideration of that, including he hopes with
14 his American counterparts, but having said all of that,
15 he says:

16 "I'm not convinced this will make any difference to
17 my view."

18 He then says:

19 "I remain of the view that the correct legal
20 interpretation of Resolution 1441 is that it does not
21 authorise the use of military force without a further
22 determination by the Security Council."

23 He reiterates that at the end of his letter:

24 "Having considered the arguments on both sides, my
25 view remains that a further decision is required."

1 So on this specific point he is not expressing
2 himself tentatively. He is saying "Before you see
3 President Bush will you please register that this is
4 where I stand?" Sir David Manning minuted to you "Clear
5 advice from the Attorney General on the need for further
6 resolution".

7 Having had that advice, what you actually said to
8 the President, as you say in your statement, was that
9 you repeated your strong commitment, given publicly and
10 privately, to do what it took to disarm Saddam.

11 Did you not feel constrained in making that
12 commitment by the advice that the Attorney General was
13 continuing to give you?

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. I was going to take the view,
15 and I did right throughout that period, there might come
16 a point at which I had to say to the President of the
17 United States, to all the other allies "I can't be with
18 you". I might have said that on legal grounds if
19 Peter's advice had not, having seen what the Americans
20 told him about the negotiating process, come down on the
21 other side. I might have had to do that politically.
22 I was in a very, very difficult situation politically.
23 It was by no means certain that we would get this thing
24 through the House of Commons and so on.

25 So I was going to continue giving absolute and firm

1 commitment until the point at which definitively
2 I couldn't, because had I raised any doubt at that time,
3 if I had suddenly said "Well, I can't be sure we have
4 got the right legal basis". If I started to say that to
5 President Bush, if I had said that publicly, when I was
6 being pressed the whole time "Do you need a second
7 resolution, is it essential you get a second
8 resolution?" and I was having to hold that line very
9 uncomfortably, by the way, especially in the light of
10 what Peter had said, but I wasn't going to be in
11 a position where I stepped back until I knew I had to,
12 because I believed that if I started to articulate this,
13 in a sense saying "Look, I can't be sure", the effect of
14 that both on the Americans, on the coalition and most
15 importantly on Saddam, would have been dramatic. If the
16 leading ally had stood up and said "Well, I can't be
17 sure".

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Surely if you had privately warned the
19 President your Attorney General was advising you that
20 you needed a second resolution that would have
21 reinforced the argument with him for getting one?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: He knew perfectly well we needed
23 a second resolution. We had been saying that to him
24 throughout. If I had started raising -- we had not had
25 the final advice yet, and he had not been through the

1 different iterations. As he explained to you in his
2 evidence -- one of the things about how the legal advice
3 is presented, if Peter was absolutely definitive one way
4 and then came absolutely definitive the other, what he
5 actually says throughout is "It is on balance this". On
6 balance it was this side. He saw Jeremy Greenstock
7 which moved him somewhat because he was aware of the UK
8 side of the negotiation. Then when he saw the Americans
9 it moved him over the line to the position where he said
10 on balance it is lawful.

11 Now I was not going to be in a position where I was
12 going to start putting that problem before the President
13 of the United States until I was in a position where
14 I knew definitively I had to.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although in the period in question your
16 senior advisor in his conversations with President
17 Bush's national security advisor presumably was
18 conveying the message that this was pretty difficult for
19 you?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I mean, that would not have been
21 a revelation.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't want to say that to the
23 President?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, he knew it was pretty
25 difficult on the politics. If I had started raising

1 legal issues at that point with the President, I think
2 it would have started to make him concerned as to
3 whether we were really going to be there or not and what
4 was really going to happen.

5 Now I would have had to have done that, by the way,
6 because in the end whatever I thought about the legal
7 position, the person whose thoughts mattered most and
8 definitively were Peter's, but I wasn't going to do that
9 until I was sure about that.

10 Now was it difficult throughout that period? Very,
11 very difficult, as you rightly say to me in the
12 statement. I was answering questions in the House of
13 Commons interviews and so on. I was having to hold the
14 political line in circumstances where there was this
15 unresolved finally debate within the UK government about
16 the legal position, but I was aware of the fact I had
17 not just the United States as our key ally and our
18 military alongside their military -- right -- working on
19 the basis they were going to be there, 40 nations lined
20 up, all of whom had real political difficulties backing
21 this, and obviously the prospect, which is still the
22 prospect I hope we find ourselves in, with Saddam
23 confronted by an international consensus.

24 If I had through that period in January and February
25 gone out and said anything that indicated there was

1 a breach in the British position, that there was a chink
2 of light that had opened up, it would have been
3 a political catastrophe for us.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think there is a difference between saying it
5 privately to the President and exposing that flank in
6 public.

7 I wonder if I can just seek clarification on another
8 one of these complicated legal points where I am of course at
the disadvantage of not being a lawyer but you touched on
9 just now.

10
11 On 15th January 2003 you told the House of Commons
12 that, and I quote all of this:

13 "There are circumstances in which a UN resolution is
14 not necessary, because it is necessary to be able to say
15 in circumstances where an unreasonable veto is put down
16 that we would still act."

17 Now Lord Goldsmith, as you know, has said in his
18 statement to us that these words of yours were not
19 compatible with the advice that he had given to you the
20 day before.

21 Did you understand at the time that your words about
22 an unreasonable veto were inconsistent with the legal
23 advice?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I was making basically a political
25 point. However, I accept entirely that there was

1 an inconsistency between what he was saying and what
2 I was saying there, but I was saying it not in a sense
3 as a lawyer, but politically. One thing I just point
4 out here is that -- because this was a very, very
5 difficult situation. I was trying to hold the line, as
6 I say, and my position was a little more elaborate than
7 the two quotes that you've taken from either the news --
8 I think it was a Newsnight thing, an interview --

9
10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I was quoting from the House of Commons,
11 but you made a similar point to Jeremy Paxman on
12 6th February.

13 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have gone back through both the
14 House of Commons and the interview. Elsewhere in both
15 I expressed it slightly differently. It is worth just
16 letting me say how I expressed it there.

17 I was actually trying to deal with this point.
18 I fully accept, and this is really what Peter was
19 saying, you can't have a situation where there is a veto
20 but I come along and say "There is a veto but I just
21 don't agree I am afraid. I think it is unreasonable, so
22 we are acting anyway".

23 My point was this, and that's why I phrased it
24 differently in other answers in the House of Commons and in
25 other answers in that interview. My point was this, and it

1 goes back to something else I said in the papers, what
2 happens if it is accepted there's a breach but still they
3 veto?

4 Now I think Peter -- and that's why in the end
5 I didn't pursue this point -- would just say "tough.
6 That is just the way it is". My point is this. If the
7 whole point of 1441 was to say "This is your final
8 opportunity. You have to comply fully," and it was
9 accepted he is not complying fully, how come the revival
10 argument didn't work, because those were precisely the
11 circumstances in which 678 should be revived?

12 So I was making a slightly different point there,
13 and in any event I was making a political point, but,
14 you know, I think Peter says it was uncomfortable for
15 him. It was uncomfortable for me. That's why, by the
16 way, at that time I was saying "We have to get him
17 together with the Americans and resolve this once and for
18 all".

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you really distinguish when you are
20 speaking to the House of Commons as Prime Minister
21 between making a political point and a legal point when
22 you are making a point about a legal interpretation of
23 UN resolutions? If you say to the House of Commons "I
24 am not going to defer to an unreasonable veto," would
25 they not assume that you are speaking with authority as

1 a Prime Minister, not just making a political point
2 while your Attorney the day before has told you "This is
3 not a valid point"?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I understand that. The fact is
5 what I was being asked about was whether a second
6 resolution -- if you go back to the House of Commons,
7 for example, the then leader of the Conservative Party
8 was saying "Well, is it essential or is it merely
9 preferable? I had said it was preferable. Clare Short
10 I think said it was essential. I was trying to hold
11 that line in circumstances where, as I say, it was very,
12 difficult but I wasn't -- I mean, look, in the end I was
13 less making a legal declaration, as it were, because
14 I could not do that, but a political point, if there was
15 a breach we had to be able to act, and the thing that I
16 think is worth just pointing out throughout this period
17 of time is that we were going for this second
18 resolution. It was always going to be difficult to get
19 it, but we thought we might. You know, the
20 conversations the Americans were having with the French
21 really turned bad, I would say, in February, as it were.
22 just a bit earlier than that it had been a little more
23 hopeful. Both President Bush and myself were trying to
24 work on the Russians and President Putin. So I was
25 trying to keep up maximum pressure to get that then.

1 Now if I had started saying -- if I had, as it were,
2 really put into their hand the fact that, you know, he
3 is desperate for it and can't do without it --
4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You would have put your neck on the
5 block. I think I do now understand this and thank you
6 for that clarification. Essentially you are in
7 a situation in which you can't be totally confident,
8 rightly, as it turns out, that you are going to get
9 a second resolution. You know there is resistance not
10 only from the French but from the Russians and others.
11 They signalled that at the time 1441 was passed in their
12 explanations to vote. Therefore you don't want to put
13 your head in the noose by committing to the proposition
14 "I have to have it for legal reasons". In order to
15 preserve that point politically and not cross that line
16 politically you end up having to cross the line of legal
17 advice drawn by the Attorney General?
18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: In the end it is not the basis on
19 which we took the action.
20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, but I am talking about the basis on
21 which you spoke to the House of Commons on 15th January.
22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: As I say, when you actually --
23 I tried to choose my words carefully all the way
24 through. In the two quotes you have I chose them less
25 carefully, but actually earlier I made it very clear

1 I was talking in circumstances where -- I think
2 I actually say in the Newsnight interview where a member
3 accepts there is a breach but nonetheless vetoes.
4 I will send you those quotes.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have those quotes. Thank you.

6 I think that point is clear.

7 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I will turn now to
8 Sir Lawrence Freedman, who would like to talk about
9 inspections. Lawrence.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. You told us before the
11 break the public demand from November 2001 was to get
12 the inspectors back in. When making this demand from
13 that point did you ask for and receive advice about what
14 would happen if the inspectors did get back in? Did you
15 ever have grounds for supposing that the return of the
16 inspectors would be able to find proof one way or the
17 other on WMD? I am talking now before the inspectors
18 did actually go back in?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, I think the view of our
20 systems was, and certainly the intelligence services was
21 the likelihood Saddam would play around, but I always
22 thought it was possible he would realise that this was
23 the moment of choice. As I say in my statement to you,
24 I think one very interesting thing is to compare Gaddafi
25 in Libya with Saddam in Iraq. Gaddafi in Libya came to

1 a view and they opened themselves -- this was after the
2 Iraq invasion Libya basically made full disclosure. It
3 cooperated properly. Its experts talked to the
4 inspectors. They disarmed. If you look at South
5 Africa, again it was through the people responsible for
6 the programme talking to the inspectors they disarmed.

7 Now Saddam -- look, you would have to say I was
8 pretty doubtful and so was our system that he would
9 cooperate, but it was possible he would.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You received advice from officials
11 in July that the inspectors would need at least six
12 months. Is that the amount of time you had in mind
13 going into 1441 that UNMOVIC would need to do its job?

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: For me it was never a matter of
15 time but a matter of attitude. You could have given him
16 longer than six months if he was cooperating but if he
17 was not cooperating it wouldn't really matter whether --
18 we can come to this later because I think it is a very,
19 very important, because I do not accept that if Blix had
20 carried on doing his inspections we would have found out
21 the truth.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will be coming to that very soon.
23 I just want to get the groundwork sorted out beforehand.

24 Under Resolution 1284, which set up UNMOVIC, there
25 had been a clear timetable that they would operate to,

1 which potentially included at the end the suspension at
2 least of sanctions and you understood that that was the
3 potential timetable involved?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course. I had absolutely no
5 problem given time once it was clear he had, as it were,
6 opened up and decided "This is it. I know now the
7 choice I face and I am going to choose to cooperate".
8 Then I think it would have been a completely different
9 situation.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: From what you say in your statement
11 and your book you appear to have concluded quite early
12 on in December 2002, following the Iraqi declaration of
13 7th December, that there was no prospect of Saddam
14 complying with the requirements of 1441. Is that
15 basically correct?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. It's basically correct,
17 because the -- I think you have the intelligence
18 reports. The intelligence reports were that he didn't
19 intend to cooperate, that the declaration wasn't
20 correct, but there was also a very significant piece of
21 intelligence at that time, which was -- and this by the
22 way remains valid as far as I know -- that Saddam had
23 said that anybody who cooperated with overseas
24 interviews would be treated as a spy, in other words,
25 executed.

1 Look, I mean, the information as such that was
2 coming to me was not looking very optimistic.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the inspectors only went in on
4 November 27th?

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sure. Absolutely.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So they had not really had a chance
7 to find out for themselves yet?

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. That is why it was very
9 important obviously to wait until Blix had come back and
10 started to report.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So basically you have the inspectors
12 back in, which had been the demand, but you are already
13 anxious about whether having this demand acceded to is
14 going to really change the game. The issue now is not
15 having inspectors back in but how well they do.

16 Now you have talked about timetable. You said you
17 didn't care how long it took, but you also told us in
18 your statement or acknowledged that President Bush was
19 expecting to launch a military attack on 10th March.
20 That changed by about a week.

21 Did that ever leave you enough time to see whether
22 UNMOVIC could do its job?

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the timeline was pressing it
24 is true, and that was again a very complicated
25 situation, because -- the Americans took the view it was

1 absurd to think Saddam was going to change his mind,
2 because he wasn't. Therefore -- and also by the way
3 they and our own military were by then fully ramping up.
4 Indeed, as the prospects of military action got closer,
5 so Saddam began to cooperate a little bit more.

6 So, no, the reason I sought yet a further
7 postponement with another ultimatum at the end was in
8 order to give more time, but I have to say, to be very
9 frank about it, more time would not have bought us
10 anything unless it had been absolutely clear that it
11 came with an ultimatum.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will explore that a bit more in
13 a moment.

14 Sir Jeremy Greenstock told us:

15 "We were on a timetable of American making which we
16 couldn't escape from."

17 So is it fair to say that we were caught between the
18 American desire for early action with an international
19 desire for the inspectors just to get on with the job?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, yes, of course it was
21 a pressure that we were under, and my way out of this
22 ultimately, because this is what I decided to do -- the
23 whole reason that I came out with this idea at the end,
24 which was to say, "Okay. We will get Blix to set out
25 five benchmarks of what Saddam has to do", because some

1 people are saying give them more time. The Americans
2 are saying let's go for it. So I tried to find a way
3 through at that point which said "Here are the
4 benchmarks. We will take them from Blix himself but it
5 has to have an ultimatum in it".

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think it would have been
7 helpful if the benchmarks had been set right from the
8 start, because one of the problems with this process was
9 until that point there was not a clear sense of what
10 would constitute a resolution?

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Except that -- you might have done
12 that, except that 1441 I think it actually specifies the
13 things he is supposed to do.

14 Now what you then get during the course of the
15 initial inspections is some practical sense of where
16 there's a problem, and really this all came to
17 interviews for me in the end. That was the critical
18 thing, because, you know, I had -- I don't know exactly
19 when I did this, but I had studied -- we had not got to
20 Libya by that stage -- I had studied some of the
21 disarmament frameworks that had been successful up to
22 then, and it all depended on your technical experts
23 sitting down with the inspectors and saying, "Look, this
24 is what happened. Here is the genesis of our programme.
25 This is what we have been doing". When you come at

1 a later time, as I say, it is actually very instructive
2 to look at how the Libyans disarmed. It wasn't the
3 political leaders they gave the instruction. The actual
4 work was done by the technical experts.

5 Now the problem all the way through, and we can go
6 through this about Blix, and Hans Blix was -- we have
7 had a profound disagreement about Iraq but he is a very
8 decent and honourable man and I am sorry we have had
9 this disagreement, but in the end I think it is clear
10 from his statements at the time that this cooperation
11 specifically on interviews wasn't forthcoming.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I am not sure that's the case. Can
13 I quote to you directly from his March 7th report, which
14 was the last one he made? He explains in his March
15 7th report that there had been improvement on this
16 issue. The Iraqi side seems to have encouraged
17 interviewees not to request the presence of Iraqi
18 officials, the so-called minders, or the taping of the
19 interviews." He talks about the possibility of taking
20 them outside Iraq. "Nevertheless, despite remaining
21 shortcomings, interviews are useful. Since we started
22 requesting interviews, 38 individuals were asked to
23 private interviews, of which ten accepted our terms,
24 seven of these during the last week".

25 So it is not the case that there was a complete

1 blank on interviews. They were happening and they were
2 happening -- and he again told us in evidence to us,
3 under the conditions that UNMOVIC wished for.

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, by 7th March it is
5 absolutely correct the Iraqis were being more
6 forthcoming than they had been earlier, not surprising
7 since we had approximately 300,000 troops down there,
8 but if you actually track the development of this -- by
9 the way, the very point you are making, Sir Lawrence is
10 the reason I have tried to come to the benchmarks. So I
11 will come to that in a moment.

12 If we actually go through it, interviews without
13 minders is turned down on 17th January. On 6th February
14 Blix comes to see me and again says he is worried about
15 the interviews. By the way, one of the things he is
16 saying to me throughout is, "I am very worried about
17 this idea that you ask for interviews abroad, because
18 their families may be killed". Well, you know, as
19 I used to say to him, "Hans, if he is going to kill
20 their family, it doesn't exactly constitute full
21 cooperation with the ...

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then --

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: If I just say at the 6th February
24 meeting it is worth quoting what El Baradei, who was also
25 there, admittedly not in charge of that part of the

1 inspection, but is the head of the Atomic Energy Agency.

2 "El Baradei made the following points", it says. "The
3 next Baghdad visit would be crucial. The Security
4 Council was clear. Not all members agreed with the US
5 timing but all recognised it. Iraq was not cooperating.
6 Unless there were clear signs of an Iraqi change of
7 heart on cooperation, both process including interviews
8 and substance, UN Resolution 1441 would have to be
9 implemented. Not allowing interviews was a lack of full
10 cooperation."

11 By then we were several --

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The message was now also getting
13 through and the suggestion that nothing was changing
14 clearly is incorrect. Things are changing. You
15 mentioned the desire to get people to come out of the
16 country, which, as you say, Blix was very worried about
17 and had been worried about right from the start of
18 Resolution 1441 being passed. In that same statement
19 I cited earlier, the March 7th, one: "Interviews outside
20 the country might provide such assurance. It is our
21 intention to request such interviews shortly."

22 Then he told us in evidence:

23 "I never thought you would get very much out of it.
24 Not only would it have been trouble but we would have
25 been driven to it in the end. I think the push was so

1 hard. So we would have persuaded the Iraqis and said
2 this is what you need to do, if you pick up someone you
3 should order them to come along with us".

4 The point is that you were getting progressively
5 more cooperation at this time?

6 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Let me make two points in relation
7 to this. The first is we were going to get more
8 cooperation progressively because he knew he was about
9 to be invaded if he didn't cooperate. If you track this
10 through -- I think even Hans Blix admits this -- the
11 pressure on him was the threat of military action. That
12 wasn't going to be what would remove this issue. What
13 we needed was not a tactical belief by him that he
14 should string out some more cooperation as the advent of
15 military action came closer. We needed a genuine change
16 of heart on his part that meant that the past was going
17 to be changed and he would adopt a different
18 perspective, and the importance of the Iraq Survey Group
19 report, which is the authoritative report which is what
20 they found after they could conduct interviews, is that
21 he never changed his heart on this issue at all.

22 The second point I would make, however is this. You
23 are right in this way. One of the puzzles to me all the
24 way through was how do I get out of a situation where
25 the French are saying, "Look, he is cooperating. Okay.

1 It is not what 1441 says but he is doing some
2 cooperation. So give it more time", with the Americans
3 saying, "Look, we made a deal with everyone. One final
4 chance. Full unconditional immediate cooperation or
5 else. So he is not fully cooperating so why are we
6 still debating this?"

7 So for the very reason you give, Sir Lawrence, what
8 I was trying to do at the end then is say, "Okay. How
9 do we find a way through those two Polar positions? It
10 is to say you, the Americans, must agree to a situation
11 where there is a specific agreed set of benchmarks and
12 he knows what he has to do, of which interviews is
13 actually the critical one, and you, the French, have got
14 to agree that if he breaches that ultimatum, then action
15 follows".

16 The trouble was I couldn't get the two bits together
17 I am afraid.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will talk about that difficulty
19 in a moment. Can I just go through quickly through the
20 points you have just made there? First on intent, and
21 obviously anybody who has read the ISG report knows they
22 stress that the intent was there, although in the
23 short-term the intent was to develop tactical chemical
24 weapons and ballistic missiles and the ballistic missile
25 part of that was being dealt with by UNMOVIC. They were

1 destroying engines and missiles.

2 However, under Resolution 1284 one of the things
3 that UNMOVIC was supposed to do was to set up
4 an on-going monitoring and verification system so that
5 even if sanctions were lifted, and they might only have
6 been suspended, there was still a way of monitoring what
7 was going on. There would still have been an arms
8 embargo. There would still have been a safeguards
9 agreement and IEA inspectors could go back in. It
10 wasn't as if he would suddenly be unleashed and be free
11 if the inspections had been able to run its course?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. Here is the situation and
13 here is the judgement you have to make about it. Saddam
14 Hussein had known for many years that he should be
15 letting inspectors back in. The demand to put back in
16 inspectors was not a new demand. He had been in breach
17 of UN resolutions going back over ten years. The
18 inspectors had effectively left in 1998 as a result of
19 non-cooperation. There was a history of concealment and
20 deception. I think we can agree on that.

21 He finally under threat of military action agrees to
22 let the inspectors back in. Now let's suppose in
23 March 2003, and this is why ultimately I am on the
24 American side of this argument, let's suppose in March
25 2003 we had said "Okay. He is doing enough. We will

1 stand down the troops. We'll let UNMOVIC carry on its
2 task and we will try and set up this new institution.
3 We will have a new smart sanctions rather than the
4 broader sanctions than before", my point is very simple.
5 I don't doubt there are all sorts of things we could have
6 persuaded him to do with 300,000 troops down there. The
7 question is, though, because at some point those troops
8 would have to go back home, if he had not changed his
9 mind about his essential belief in the importance of
10 these weapons, and the evidence is -- I mean, I know it
11 is never described, because no-one describes it -- but
12 it is not just the ISG, Robin Butler's report also, that
13 he continued to harbour both nuclear and chemical
14 ambitions. What we have to pose is not a question of in
15 March 2003 would he have carried on cooperating? Would
16 he have carried on cooperating when all that military
17 pressure was off him, when he would then have had no
18 tough sanctions, unlimited amount of oil money? As we
19 know from these papers, he retained the technical
20 know-how, the scientists and the intent. Is that a risk
21 that even knowing what we know now we should run?
22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Your difficulty was that you set in
23 motion a process -- you got the international community
24 to agree under Resolution 1441. You had been demanding
25 the inspectors to return. The inspectors had returned.

1 The initial cooperation had not been good. Now the
2 initial cooperation was much better. Hans Blix was
3 saying this progressively. It wasn't just military
4 force as you mentioned in your statement. Getting
5 sanctions lifted was obviously a major incentive for him
6 as well.

7 The problem with the argument you have just put is
8 why bother with the inspections process at all, because
9 the cooperation was coming. There was more of it. If
10 you still didn't think this was going to do the job, why
11 set the process in motion at all?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because here is the situation.

13 You declare 1441. You have given him a final chance for
14 full, immediate and unconditional cooperation. Now at
15 that point he can make a big decision, which is to say,
16 "I am going to put aside my concealment, my lack of
17 cooperation, all the things I have done in the past and
18 I am going to cooperate fully". He doesn't.

19 So he is in breach of 1441. The part of the problem
20 in this is frankly that those who supported 1441, which
21 was not on the American side of the argument, got
22 buyer's remorse in the end. They agreed they could be
23 given a final opportunity. Then they wanted another
24 opportunity.

25 The point about his change of heart and the

1 important point about the Iraq Survey Group and the rest
2 of the evidence is that if he had not taken that
3 decision really to put the past behind him and turn over
4 a new leaf, yes, it's true whilst that military pressure
5 was there he might cooperate, but when it wasn't there
6 he was going to be back and he was going to be back with
7 far more money with, the international community having
8 built up this great consensus, it would then have
9 disintegrated.

10 That's why I think when you look at this today and
11 you ask. Okay. Supposing we had all backed off in
12 March 2003 and left Saddam there, what do we actually
13 think would be happening today? Personally I think it
14 is at least as arguable -- I am not going to say it is
15 certain because nobody knows -- it is at least as
16 arguable that he would have been developing in
17 competition with Iran.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It may or may not. We will come
19 back to the problem --

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sir Lawrence, it is really
21 important. "May have been" is my justification for this.
22 I was not prepared to run this --

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You had set in motion a process
24 which was rather abruptly discontinued.

25 Can I just ask you about this "clusters" proposals

1 you are putting forward and why it had difficulty.
2 According to Jonathan Powell you did try to extend the
3 timetable. You had asked the Americans for nine more
4 weeks. President Bush he said that he wouldn't have
5 agreed to this. He might have agreed to a little time but
6 not nine more weeks. Do you recall that?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. We were asking -- I don't
8 know exactly what the timeline was, but yes, we were
9 asking for more time. The Americans I think -- I am not
10 sure about this, but I think our own military would have
11 been also anxious about a time that long -- but, you
12 know, we could have probably come to a compromise
13 somewhere on it I guess. That's not the problem we got
14 into in the end. The problem was, and this is where
15 this whole business to do with the Second Resolution and
16 the attitude of France which would I like to deal with
17 in light of things that have been said to you, the
18 problem was that there was no consent for an ultimatum,
19 and whether it was nine weeks or one week, without
20 an ultimatum it would be pointless.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I will come on to that in a second.
22 Can I just check on the military position? We
23 understand that you were briefed by the chiefs on 15th
24 January. Were you advised that it would be possible to
25 maintain combat readiness for a number of months beyond

1 March?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I can't recall exactly what I was
3 advised about. I am very happy if that was the case. I
4 am sure at a pinch we could have done it, yes. By the
5 way, that wouldn't have stopped -- you know, if we had
6 managed to get the ultimatum and the debate had simply
7 been about time, I think that would have been a very
8 interesting discussion with the Americans that would
9 have been quite difficult I think.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on that in terms of our
11 relationship with the Americans at the time, on
12 6th March Geoff Hoon's Private Secretary wrote to David
13 Manning that for a variety of reasons:

14 "One UK division is now likely to represent a higher
15 and more significant proportion of the overall combat
16 power available in the early stages of the ground
17 campaign. For example, on current assumptions it is
18 likely to contain nearly 30% of the available tanks."

19 So this doesn't make it sound like an optional
20 extra?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, by then we were absolutely
22 essential to it which is exactly what gave us the
23 leverage in the situation.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you did think you had leverage in
25 asking for more time?

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I can assure you when I went to
2 President Bush and said to him "Look, I want to put a
3 new resolution down with benchmarks and an ultimatum."
4 It was a very difficult conversation, because he was
5 saying "Look, we have gone through this. This is the
6 evolution. Okay. We first of all agreed to you having
7 an ultimatum and not just doing it. Then we agreed to
8 the UN route for doing the ultimatum and we agreed that
9 the inspectors should go in and we can try to resolve it
10 peacefully. Now you are telling me six months or five
11 months on from that when actually it is clear he is not
12 cooperating fully, that you want another ultimatum".

13 So it was a difficult conversation, but we did have
14 real leverage in that situation and I was prepared to
15 use it. The problem was we couldn't get agreement to
16 the ultimatum, because I would not have been in favour
17 of another resolution, never mind him, which didn't have
18 a clear authorisation of force at the end of it.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I will carry on but Baroness Prashar
20 has a question.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much. Mr Blair,
22 I want to ask a couple of questions about what finally
23 brought the UN process to an end. In your statement you
24 deal with your attempt to secure the support of Mexico
25 and Chile in order to get at least a majority vote in

1 the United Nations Security Council. You say in your
2 statement that:

3 "On 9th March President Bush said he thought there
4 were nine votes which would be enough".

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Or maybe eight. If that's what
6 I said that's ...

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's what you said in your
8 statement.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Okay.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You said in the House of Commons on
11 18th March "Last Monday we were getting very close with
12 it. We very nearly had the majority agreement", but
13 Sir Jeremy Greenstock told us that he never felt "We got
14 close to having nine positive votes in the bag." How
15 close did you believe you were to a majority of votes?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I thought we had come pretty close
17 to it actually. I mean, I have somewhere a list of the
18 calls I was making at that time and I was literally on
19 the go virtually round the clock trying to herd up the
20 members of the Security Council. The Americans, you
21 know, who can be pretty emphatic in these circumstances
22 with their allies, were putting major pressure on.
23 President Bush said to me in that call, if I said nine
24 then nine it is, but in any event we were there to get
25 a majority. I think we could have got Chile and Mexico

1 actually if the French position had been less emphatic,
2 but it wasn't in the end, and they felt unhappy.

3 So, I mean, Jeremy is right. It was always going to
4 be difficult. On the other hand, I thought it was
5 possible, yes.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was it the French position or was it
7 that President Bush was losing patience with the United
8 Nations process?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it was really more to do with
10 the fact here was the situation. You see, we had been
11 carrying on discussions with the French and Germans as
12 well -- although they didn't have a veto, they were
13 an important player because of their relationship with
14 France -- so both President Bush and I were having quite
15 close conversations with the Germans. You know, we
16 thought at a certain time that the French with a little
17 bit of German pressure actually might abstain rather
18 than veto, and you never knew what might happen with the
19 Russians, because they would calculate it on a pretty
20 tough assessment of their interests in the end, but it
21 was possible that the Russians could be persuaded by the
22 Americans not to veto.

23 So no, he hadn't lost patience, but what then
24 started to happen going into February I think, the
25 French position hardened and then I think it became very

1 obvious to me that the old traditional divide was back,
2 you know. The British were going to be with the
3 Americans. The French were going to be the people who
4 marketed themselves as not being with the Americans.
5 After all this was a big -- you know, we can talk about
6 how this was affecting our relationships around the
7 world, but countries were also looking at how they
8 looked in this situation for their allies, and I think
9 in the end Russia and France decided look -- I am sure
10 they were sincerely against it but they also decided we
11 are going to make a point of being here against it.
12 Sometimes people are against things but they don't push
13 it too far. Ourselves and other traditional allies were
14 going to be with America. I don't think it is that
15 President Bush lost patience with it. I think it is
16 just became apparent then we were not going to get
17 a second resolution passed in the Security Council.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My understanding is -- you talked
19 earlier about benchmarks -- Chile and Mexico wanted
20 three weeks and President Bush would not agree, would
21 only give a week. Do you think that was a factor?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I think had I gone back
23 to him and said "I have got the ultimatum. I have got
24 agreement to an ultimatum", I think we would have got
25 the extra time. The problem was, as he kept saying to

1 me perfectly understandably, "Look, I hear what you are
2 saying, but can you guarantee you can get the French on
3 board for this?" And of course I couldn't.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you are saying you didn't go back
5 to him because you thought the French position was
6 hardening?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I thought actually by then I think
8 the French position had hardened to the point where they
9 were clearly going to veto a resolution with
10 an ultimatum.

11 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Sir Lawrence, back to you.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just stay on this for a moment
13 because it is quite an important moment? You said in
14 your statement that the French statements of opposition
15 and Chilean internal politics made President Lagos say
16 that he could not support what was going to be not only
17 a resolution doomed to a veto but one strongly attacked
18 by certain P5 members. Presumably the French statements
19 of opposition is President Chirac's press conference?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well more generally I think. It
21 was being made -- the position for the non-P5 members on
22 the Security Council, particularly countries like Chile
23 and Mexico, when a situation like this happens, they are
24 caught effectively between a rock and a hard place. At
25 one level they want to be with America. They are major

1 allies of America in one sense. On the other hand, they
2 have public opinion but most important they have
3 Permanent Members of the Security Council taking a hard
4 line against this, and in those circumstances those --
5 I mean, in my experience the non-permanent members of
6 the Security Council say "Look, I don't want to get into
7 this really". So I think whereas President Lagos was at
8 one level quite sympathetic and he is a very smart,
9 intelligent, capable leader and he was looking for a way
10 to be constructive, when France came out with such
11 a heavy position, then I think he decided "Look, this is
12 going to be too difficult". Also because once France
13 said "we are going to veto anything with an ultimatum in
14 it", it was going to be pointless anyway.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think -- let's leave what the
16 French actually said for a second. Can you just clarify
17 the importance of a point Baroness Prashar raised about
18 the impact of the reluctance of the Americans to extend
19 the deadline, because you rather dismissed the
20 importance of that, but can I just quote you from
21 President Bush's memoir Decision Points on page 247
22 where he describes his conversation with President
23 Lagos:

24 "He talked about giving Saddam an additional two or
25 three weeks. I told him a few more weeks would make no

1 difference. Saddam has already had years to comply. It
2 is sad to have come down to this, I said. I said one
3 last time how he planned to vote. He said no."

4 On that it is reasonably clear that what decided
5 President Lagos was that the amount of time he thought
6 it reasonable to put for an ultimatum was not there?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I don't think that was
8 the -- I mean, it's difficult at this time to judge, but
9 that wasn't his basic concern. The basic concern of
10 President Lagos was that you are asking me -- this is me
11 asking him -- you are asking me to put myself in
12 a position where I am going to line up with you guys in
13 circumstances where the French and Russians are going to
14 attack this very heavily and in circumstances where
15 because they are going to veto, you are not going to get
16 the resolution anyway, so ...

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, as we know, President
18 Chirac's statement was specifically "ce soir". That was
19 a very strong statement. Another and although two or
20 three weeks may not have made a difference to him, it
21 was not necessarily ruling out a deadline. There are
22 two factors at work here. There is certainly a strong
23 French view but there is a strong American
24 view. You described it to us earlier in our
25 conversation they were caught in a sense between these

1 two views?

2 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, that's true, but I have to
3 emphasise this, particularly in the light of all the
4 things that have been said about whether we are
5 misrepresenting the French view or not. We never
6 misrepresented the French view. The French view was
7 absolutely clear. It wasn't that they were against any
8 second resolution. They would perfectly happily have
9 agreed a second resolution provided it meant a third
10 resolution and they would agree a third resolution
11 provided it meant a fourth one.

12 What they were not prepared to do in any set of
13 circumstances, never mind ce soir, was that they were
14 not prepared to agree to a resolution with an ultimatum.
15 So we were caught in a situation where the Americans
16 were quite rightly saying to us "What they are prepared
17 to agree is basically a rerun of 1441 except possibly
18 weaker. Well, that's useless."

19 In the end, and I am very happy because I have the
20 French President's interview here to go through it, he
21 had come to the view that inspections were working, and
22 therefore that should be the route that we dealt with
23 Saddam and we should not deal with him by force,
24 whatever the circumstances, and that anything with
25 an ultimatum -- his point was not time. Jacques

1 Chirac's point was not the time for this resolution to
2 operate. His point was if it has an ultimatum in it,
3 I don't want it.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The French had earlier talked about
5 the possibility of a time limit and I think we have been
6 through the question of what the French actually said.

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It is just important in the light
8 of what Stephen said to you. We have not misrepresented
9 their position. Their position was absolutely clear.
10 Anything with an ultimatum they were going to veto.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just, just to conclude this
12 and Sir Roderic wants to come in on this point as well,
13 on the afternoon of 12th March you had a conversation
14 with President Bush. Again we have to rely on you to
15 tell us what it said. Presumably you discussed whether
16 Chile and Mexico were coming along and had to accept
17 that they weren't.

18 Did you discuss the line that you should take about
19 the role of France in the failure to set a second
20 resolution?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I can't recall. I mean, I will go
22 back and again refresh my mind on the note, but, I mean,
23 it wouldn't have mattered much frankly. I mean, the
24 line we were going to take on France was the line.
25 I mean, it was the line we took, and that was as much

1 for our own reasons.

2 I mean, the French/American relationship by then had
3 become very scratchy and very difficult. I was actually
4 always very keen to remain on good personal terms with
5 Jacques Chirac, and despite what everyone always writes
6 about this, I actually both liked, admired him and had
7 a great deal of time for him both as an individual and as
8 a leader. We just both disagreed on this fundamental
9 question of extremism and what to do about it. You
10 know, we wouldn't have wanted frankly to take the same
11 position as America, who were after France in a rather
12 more aggressive way.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to clear this up, because you
14 have alluded to it already, we have been told by Matthew
15 Rycroft there was a conscious decision for domestic
16 political presentation to be conveyed on the French when
17 he failed to get Chile and Mexico to sign up.

18 Sir Stephen Wall told us that it was his view that
19 Chirac's words did not rule out the possibility of
20 French future support for resolution, that you knew that
21 and that you knew what you were claiming was not what
22 Chirac had said, which I am sure you would like to
23 comment on?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, I would like to comment on
25 it, because it is simply not correct. I have a great

1 admiration for Stephen and he was a fantastic colleague
2 to work in Number 10 with me, but he was not handling
3 this particular issue, and the fact is that the French
4 were, of course, going to various people and saying "Oh,
5 no, the British are quite wrong about this. We are not
6 opposed to a second resolution." That was absolutely
7 correct with one rider, which often wasn't added, which
8 is as long as it has not got an ultimatum in it.

9 So when you go to the French President's actual
10 interview, which I have somewhere here. In that
11 interview what President Chirac said was:

12 "There is this proposal of a new resolution setting
13 an ultimatum."

14 It goes on:

15 "To start with there was talk of 17th March, then of
16 a possibility of a British amendment to postpone the
17 date of the ultimatum a bit. It is of little
18 consequence, in other words we move from the course of
19 action involving the pursuit of the inspectors in order
20 to disarm Iraq to a different one consisting of in so
21 many days go to war. The question is you don't want
22 that. France won't accept it and so will refuse that
23 solution."

24 That's the context which he then goes on to say
25 "Regardless of the circumstances, France will vote no".

1 I then say when I am asked in the House of
2 Commons -- I am asked what is the French objection and
3 I say on 18th March, the debate authorising conflict:

4 "The problem with the diplomacy was that when it came to
5 an end -- it came to an end after the position of France
6 was made public and repeated in a private conversation,"
7 between myself and President Chirac, "and it said it
8 would block by veto any resolution that contained
9 an ultimatum."

10 So I was not alleging they would say no to any
11 resolution. They, of course, would say -- they would
12 agree to a resolution that didn't have an ultimatum in
13 it because that would then mean a further resolution
14 afterwards. So the position was really very clear on
15 both sides.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I wouldn't give a textual exegesis,
17 but you could say it was the particular ultimatum of
18 about a week on offer, but I think Sir Roderic wanted to
19 ...

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, but it is the very point that
21 he is making here, Jacques Chirac, is that time isn't
22 the issue for him. It is the ultimatum that's the
23 issue.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just one slightly separate but similar
25 point on that same episode. I mean, what is clear is

1 that the Americans had a deadline for military action,
2 as you yourself have said, and therefore they must have
3 wanted very much to wrap up the process of negotiations
4 at the United Nations on a possible second resolution
5 and bring it to an end.

6 What is not clear is why we continued those
7 negotiations for nearly a week after President Chirac
8 had made a statement which the government in its motion
9 to the House of Commons on 18th March described as
10 making it not possible to secure a second resolution in
11 the United Nations.

12 In your book you say that you had decided that we
13 should table the five tests anyway. We did so in the
14 early hours of Thursday, 13th March. They were
15 immediately rejected by France. Jacques Chirac gave
16 a very strong statement that he would not support
17 military action whatever the circumstances.

18 But he had actually made his statement on 10th
19 March, which was four days before you tabled the five
20 tests.

21 Why did you go ahead and continue those
22 negotiations, and indeed they continued beyond 13th, and
23 effectively I think to the following Monday that Jeremy
24 Greenstock finally withdrew the draft resolution? Was
25 it because you didn't really believe that Chirac's

1 statements ignored the end of the process, but were we
2 continuing negotiations at this point not in
3 particularly good faith?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. It was very simply this, that
5 obviously this was a second best thing now, because
6 France had made it clear, you are right, on 10th
7 March -- I think it was actually Dominique de Villepin
8 put the statement out on 13th March, but what we decided
9 was, look, even if you can't get the resolution because
10 they have said they will veto, nonetheless you would
11 have some greater, if you like, political authority if
12 you could at least get a majority of members of the
13 Security Council to say they would agree such
14 a resolution even vetoed. So it wasn't --

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mean by voting for it?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, by voting for it.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Then you would have had a vetoed
18 resolution?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: You would have a vetoed
20 resolution.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That would undermine the authority that
22 you had in 1441 for going to war?

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, it would not have undermined
24 that because we were saying that we accept that we
25 believed we had authority anyway in 1441, but it would

1 have allowed us politically to say we had the majority
2 of the Security Council. So had we ended up in
3 a situation where Chile and Mexico had said "We are with
4 you". We would have probably put this resolution down,
5 had it vetoed --

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now it is clear you have not got them?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It became clear during that period
8 we had not got them.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was certainly clear by the Wednesday
10 and on the Thursday you table the clusters and the
11 negotiations go on for another four days?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: We were trying to do everything we
13 could to build that majority. I am not sure exactly the
14 time when it became clear we are not going to get
15 anywhere.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, didn't you agree with President
17 Bush when you spoke to him on the afternoon of the
18 14th that the game was up?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: The game was up in the sense that
20 it was we were not going to get a resolution. This was
21 the second best. Okay. Our preference was to have got
22 a resolution that passed the Security Council, but, as
23 I recall it, what then took place was a thought that
24 I had that at least you might -- and I think this was
25 stimulated also in conversations with Cabinet colleagues

1 as well -- and, you know, I was very conscious that
2 I had Cabinet members who were unhappy about this or --
3 and so on, that it might give us some political weight,
4 I mean not much frankly, but some if we could say at
5 least we have a majority of members on our side, even
6 though we knew we were not going to get the resolution.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am not sure it is entirely clear at
8 this point, but I don't think we should spend too much
9 time on it because I know we have a lot of material to
10 go through, so perhaps we should move on.

11 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It is simply a political point.
12 If you can say "Well, we didn't get the resolution
13 because France vetoed but nonetheless we got the
14 majority of the Security Council in our favour," it
15 would allow us to say that. At that point you are right
16 that the political -- you know, you are at the point of
17 political decision. You know you are going to have the
18 vote in the House of Commons, because we actually gave
19 the House of Commons a vote on this. it would have
20 helped me. I would have definitely used this in terms
21 of the presentation of the case if I had been able to
22 stand up and say "Well, we didn't get the resolution,
23 but nonetheless we had a majority of the Security
24 Council with us".

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I can see that it helped the presentation

1 of the case that we appeared to be going on with
2 negotiations up to the last moment, and I note that by
3 Wednesday we had effectively concluded that we weren't
4 going to get the nine votes. I think that's probably
5 where we are left. This is I think a point of tactical
6 detail.

7 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. Back to you, Lawrence. Time is
8 beginning to press.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Jack Straw told Parliament on 25th
10 November 2002 and I quote:

11 "Material breach means something significant, some
12 behaviour or pattern of behaviour that is serious.
13 Among such breaches could be action by the government of
14 Iraq seriously to obstruct or to impede the inspectors,
15 to intimidate witnesses or a pattern of behaviour where
16 any single action appears relatively minor but the
17 actions as a whole add up to something deliberately and
18 more significant, something that shows Iraq's intention
19 not to comply."

20 Would you agree with that as a definition of
21 material breach?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, absolutely.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's not a low bar, the point that
24 Jack Straw would make?

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. You could have made

1 an argument that said the declaration in December was
2 a breach. I think some of the American system at that
3 time tried to claim that actually. My attitude was
4 "Look, it is" -- and this is the advice given to me,
5 "Look, this is not a proper declaration" and on and so
6 forth, but you can't just say "Okay. We are going to
7 take action now".

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The previous time you had taken
9 action against Iraq in December 1998 Richard Butler as
10 head of UNSCOM reported to the Security Council that
11 Saddam was not cooperating with the inspectors. Was it
12 your expectation that Hans Blix would be able to do the
13 same or would do the same? I mean we are talking now
14 December/January.

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, he was obviously going to be
16 coming back to the Security Council, as indeed he did
17 regularly to report. I mean, it would be a matter for
18 him to cite how often he did that, but given the history
19 of this we were going to expect very early and
20 significant signs that Saddam had genuinely changed the
21 position of his regime.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Hans Blix clearly wasn't giving you
23 a definitive statement that Iraq was not complying.
24 Indeed, he was saying cooperation was improving. The
25 Attorney General's office wrote to you on 14th March

1 asking you to confirm that it was your view that Iraq
2 had committed further material breaches as specified in
3 Resolution 1441 and Matthew Rycroft replied the next day
4 confirming that.

5 When you replied were you working with the sort of
6 definition I cited earlier from Jack Straw in mind?

7 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, absolutely.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you tell me the process that you
9 followed then before giving that determination?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: We went back over the Blix reports
11 and it was very obvious to me, particularly on the
12 subject of interviews, that they weren't cooperating.
13 They were cooperating more, as you rightly say. They
14 started to give out a little bit more, but there was
15 absolutely nothing to suggest that this cooperation was
16 full, immediate and unconditional. It was actually not
17 full, not immediate. In fact, even Blix himself said it
18 wasn't immediate even on 7th March and not
19 unconditional.

20 In addition to that I had I think JIC assessments as
21 well, which I think are still outstanding, where it was
22 clear that Saddam was putting heavy pressure internally
23 on people not to cooperate. Although I did not know
24 this at the time, but we now know he actually sent the
25 Vice President along to address a whole group of Iraqi

1 scientists and experts to say "You had better not be
2 found with any material that is a problem for the
3 inspectors", whereas, of course, his actual obligation
4 was that they should have been offering any material.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, there is an interpretation
6 of that, which is simply that he was nervous that there
7 had been freelancing and that the point of that was to
8 make sure nobody did have anything, because they
9 shouldn't.

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, we can -- yes. I think
11 freelancing and Saddam --

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have both read the ISG report.
13 Can I just clarify when you said "We ought", who was the
14 "we"? Was it just your office or did you consult more
15 widely?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am sure I would have spoken to
17 Jack particularly at the time. I mean, I don't
18 recollect this. This literally was the whole time
19 a conversation going on. I mean, our view was that he
20 was not cooperating in the terms of 1441, and that by
21 the way remains my view today that he wasn't, and that
22 he, in fact, never had any intention of doing that.

23 Now it is correct, as you rightly say, and we have
24 been over this once before, that he was offering up
25 more, but he was not offering up -- you know, even in

1 February he wasn't offering up what they were asking
2 him.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally on this you mentioned
4 something from Hans Blix that you quoted in your book,
5 and this is from the 7th March statement and you quote
6 at page 427 of your book:

7 "It is obvious that while the numerous initiatives
8 which are now taken by the Iraqi side with a view to
9 resolving some longstanding, open disarmament issues can
10 be seen as active or even proactive, these initiatives
11 three to four months into the new resolution cannot be
12 said to constitute immediate cooperation, nor do they
13 necessarily cover all areas of relevance."

14 The paragraph then continues:

15 "They are nevertheless welcome and UNMOVIC is
16 responding to them in the hope of solving presently
17 unresolved disarmament issues."

18 This brings us back to the crux of the issue, that
19 you stopped the process at a time when it was getting
20 more results, where the Iraqis had agreed to aerial
21 surveillance, where they had agreed to interviews, and
22 UNMOVIC was already starting to destroy ballistic
23 missiles, and when the IEA had been able to say there
24 was no nuclear programme.

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, but what we have to do is

1 make a judgement here, Sir Lawrence. Was the reason
2 why -- first of all, 1441 didn't say, "Over the coming
3 period of time you should increase your levels of
4 cooperation". It said there had to be full, immediate
5 and unconditional cooperation, and there plainly wasn't.

6 Now the judgment you have to make about this is:
7 does that pattern of behaviour, very reminiscent of his
8 previous behaviour, does that indicate that actually if
9 once you withdrew -- because you were going to have to
10 get rid of the troops at some point. You couldn't keep
11 them there forever. Right? So does that pattern of
12 behaviour indicate that this is someone who, once the
13 threat of military action was withdrawn, was then going
14 to be carrying on with this, you know, eking out of bits
15 of cooperation, or is your judgment that in the end,
16 once the threat of military action was withdrawn, he'd
17 be back to his old games?

18 Look, we don't know the answer to that question, but
19 I do point to the Iraq Survey Group and say it is at
20 least as arguable he would have been back to his old
21 games as it is arguable he would have become a different
22 Saddam.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The basic problem was you had to
24 make that determination at that time, because that's
25 when the Americans wished to go to war, and whilst not

1 talking about eking it out indefinitely, a few more
2 weeks might in the end have made a lot of difference.

3 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: You see, the question is -- this
4 is the whole nub of this, which is -- the question is:
5 would it have made a difference? Yes, it is absolutely
6 true that he may have carried on giving more
7 concessions. That wouldn't have removed the problem of
8 Saddam unless those concessions were made in good faith,
9 in good heart, because he decided to change.

10 Now you are right the American military timetable,
11 of course, it was a pressure, and that's very clear and
12 obvious, but the whole purpose of tabling that
13 resolution at the last gasp, as it were, was to give us
14 a way of resolving particularly this issue of interviews
15 through the ultimatum.

16 You know, this is the debate that even now people
17 still have, you know. Would it have been a situation
18 where Saddam would have changed genuinely or would it
19 have been a situation where once more he out-foxed the
20 international community and had gone back to his old
21 games?

22 We can't answer that question now, but I say if you
23 look back on the record of the man, the things he did,
24 you know, it is not as if he never developed these
25 weapons. He developed them and used them, and we now

1 know that he saw their use as essential to having
2 defeated the Iranians, and that he saw having nuclear
3 and chemical capability as a central part of the
4 stability and maintenance of his regime.

5 Now all I say to you is we can't tell at this point
6 in time whether he would have changed or not, but I say
7 it is at least surely, surely arguable that he would
8 have not changed, been there with a lot of money and
9 still with the same intent, in which case he was a risk,
10 and in which case if we are being in my view prudent and
11 responsible about it, it is not a risk we should be
12 running.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That assumes that the process had to
14 end at that point, but --

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It doesn't just assume that
16 actually. It assumes he had a change of heart, but
17 anyway I think we've ...

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In just a few minutes we will take a
19 very short break, but before we do I will ask Sir Martin
20 to open up a new question. Martin.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could stay with the pre-March 20th
22 period and look at the question of how the decision was
23 made for the United Kingdom to take responsibility for
24 southern Iraq, in your previous evidence to us you said:

25 "I think from January onwards it was clear that we

1 were going to have responsibility for the south",
2 but on 6th March 2003 you are recorded as saying in
3 a document we released today:

4 "The issue of sectorisation would need to be
5 addressed. This should be covered in the Phase IV
6 plan."

7 In your statement to us you say:

8 "We took the decision to take on responsibility for
9 the south sector following Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon's
10 note to me of 19th March",

11 but that note said that:

12 "It would be premature to take a view on the merit
13 of sectors at a time when Iraq still wasn't in
14 a stabilised situation under our control."

15 Can you tell us exactly when the decision was made
16 for the United Kingdom to take responsibility for the
17 south and who was involved in that decision?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Right. I mean, because you
19 helpfully indicated you wanted to ask me about this, I
20 have gone back through the papers again. I mean, look,
21 from January 2003 it was obvious -- not obvious,
22 sorry -- it was agreed we would be going in through the
23 south.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Militarily.

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. So we would be, as it were,

1 with de facto responsibility for that area. I think
2 Mike Jackson gave evidence to you which said really in
3 a sense our responsibility for the aftermath in that
4 sector grew out of the fact that this was our area of
5 operations in the conflict.

6 We then -- it is correct we had a meeting on
7 6th March, which I have a briefing note for, on
8 sectorisation. I didn't resolve that finally then.

9 There was then a Cabinet Office note of 19th March
10 to Matthew Rycroft for the ministerial meeting saying,
11 "We should decide on sectors, and then a joint Foreign
12 and Defence Secretary minute is coming to you" -- that's
13 the one on 19th -- "and then David Manning thinks this
14 should go on the agenda for tomorrow, but Clare Short
15 wants a chance to comment on her return on 21st March,
16 so we will put it on tomorrow's agenda".

17 So we didn't take a final view then, but their note
18 to me was the expectation is the UK forces would be
19 responsible for a task focused on Basra. I then had
20 that meeting with them.

21 On 21st March Matthew Rycroft then notes out to the
22 Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence:

23 "The Prime Minister is grateful for the joint minute
24 from the Foreign and Defence Secretaries. He agrees
25 with the Foreign and Defence Secretaries' proposals,

1 provided there is a satisfactory resolution",

2 and then I list certain issues.

3 Then again the Foreign Office write to Matthew
4 Rycroft, and then what happens is that we establish at
5 some point then the Ad Hoc Committee, capital A, capital
6 H this time, with Jack Straw in charge, and out of that
7 comes the view we should be responsible for that sector
8 and this should be part of a joint occupying power and
9 responsibility. I have to say, though, it was always
10 pretty obvious that's where we would end up.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yet there was no specific decision
12 during this time when obviously a lot of pre-planning
13 was going on?

14 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think the specific decision
15 ultimately was taken when we then got resolution 1483.
16 Most of the discussion here was not really about whether
17 we should be responsible for the south or not. It was
18 about the UN role. Then what happened was there were
19 these Ad Hoc Committee meetings that Jack was chairing
20 were happening day in and day out. They were going
21 through all this in an immense amount of detail, legal
22 advice and so on. Peter Goldsmith was on it. Then we
23 got 1483, reported it to Cabinet and agreed it.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In your statement you say to us, "I was
25 also keen that this be our area of operation, the south,

1 because it seemed to me the south would be more
2 manageable",

3 but in the Joint Intelligence Committee assessment
4 of 19th February, which has been declassified and is now
5 published, it concludes:

6 "We have limited intelligence on the particular
7 conditions in the south and also that post-Saddam the
8 security situation in the south will be unpredictable."

9 How was this caveat factored into the decision?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, it was obviously going to
11 be -- sorry. I have got the paper here now. It was
12 obviously going to be unpredictable. I mean, these
13 situations always are, but, you know, my calculation
14 about this was really very deliberate.

15 One of the things that we were always very concerned
16 about was obviously Sunni/Shia divisions and
17 difficulties, and then also with the Kurds obviously
18 potentially a problem there too. So one thing that
19 there was a lot of thought the whole time was we had to
20 make sure that we dealt with this issue.

21 The benefit of the south was that it was Shia
22 absolutely predominantly. So I felt we were going to be
23 in an area of operation where it was frankly going to be
24 easier for us, and actually if you look at the overall
25 levels of violence, I think I am right in saying that

1 overall I think the figure -- it may even be -- I think
2 overall I think only about 1% or 2% of the violence
3 overall in Iraq following the invasion was actually
4 centred in or around Basra.

5 So that was the reason why I was -- I mean, you
6 know, what they were warning of was obviously right and
7 important, but we felt that we had a better chance of
8 managing this.

9 I would just draw attention also to what they say
10 about Iran too, because basically they conclude -- and
11 this is what obviously changed very dramatically --
12 their basic view is that it is unlikely that Iran would
13 be aggressive.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Mr Blair, we are going to deal with Iran
15 after the break.

16 Can I suggest we take a break at this moment?
17 Ten minutes. Can I ask everyone in the room, if you
18 must leave the hearing room, please be back within
19 ten minutes. Please start coming back as soon as you
20 can. Thank you very much.

21 (Short break)

22 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, let's resume, and I will turn to
23 Baroness Prashar to start some questions.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

25 Mr Blair, now moving on to the question of the

1 aftermath and planning and so on, in your book you
2 comment, and I will quote:

3 "We are going to be in a position of nation
4 building. We must accept the responsibility and
5 acknowledge it and plan for it at the outset. There was
6 clearly a failing in respect of Iraq."

7 Now you obviously accept there was a failing. Why
8 do you think that planning didn't take place early on?
9 Because we have declassified Jonathan Powell's note to
10 you, which was sent to you on 19th July, when he said
11 that:

12 "We need to plan for the day after. Loya Jirga and
13 the peace meeting in Afghanistan have worked, but we had
14 to scramble to get them ready in time. We need to be
15 working on this now for Iraq."

16 So obviously there were a number of other people
17 warning you about early planning. Why didn't the
18 planning take place early on?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Planning did take place. The
20 question now is, I mean, in the light of what we now
21 know and with hindsight: should we have been focusing on
22 different things? So in September, as you have heard in
23 the evidence to you, the officials were meeting. We had
24 ad hoc meetings ourselves. There was a lot of meeting
25 going on in the Ministry of Defence, the Department of

1 International Development, in the Foreign Office.

2 The trouble was we were planning (a) on an
3 assumption that Iraq had a functioning bureaucracy and
4 civil service, which in the end it didn't, and (b) our
5 focus really was on humanitarian, environmental and the
6 possibility of use of chemical/biological weapons and so
7 on. I mean, I would say there was a significant amount
8 of planning that went on, unfortunately directed at the
9 wrong things.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But I think the humanitarian
11 planning only covered the immediate consequence of the
12 invasion. What we want to know is what is the longer
13 term planning for post-Saddam, because in a way, yes,
14 things were considered. It is the longer term planning,
15 because in his recent book Lord Mandelson writes:

16 "What happens after you have won?', I asked Tony in
17 January 2003. 'You can go in there, you can take out
18 Saddam, but what to do you do with Iraq? You are going
19 to have a country on your hands and I don't know what
20 your plan is. Who is going to run the place?'"

21 You replied:

22 "'That's the American responsibility. It's down to
23 the Americans'."

24 Again in early March when according to an interview
25 with Andrew Rawnsley Iain Duncan Smith expressed concern

1 to you there was no clear plan and you reportedly
2 replied, "Don't worry. That's in hand."

3 In your statement you say of the aftermath planning:

4 "Of course, as with everything else, the bulk of the
5 planning would be done by the US, who were going to
6 provide over 90% of the assets for the operation."

7 So was the assumption, that the Americans would
8 actually do most of the planning?

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, the Americans, of course,
10 would have the primary responsibility, but let me be
11 absolutely clear I was most certainly not thinking it
12 was to be left to the Americans. The reason why we had
13 done a lot of planning ourselves was precisely because
14 we knew we were going to be part of the aftermath, and
15 there was planning that really fitted into three
16 categories. One was in the Ministry of Defence, the
17 other was the Department for International Development
18 and the other was the Foreign Office.

19 The reason there was all the iterations even before
20 the invasion of what would be the structure of
21 government, how would we transit from Saddam to the
22 coalition and out through a legitimate form of Iraqi
23 authority, I most certainly was not thinking it should
24 just be left to the Americans.

25 Now it is true, and it is a real issue, this, to be

1 very blunt about, and one of the things I will refer to
2 in the lessons learned, that where the Americans are
3 going to be providing well over 90% of the assets, you
4 know, you are not going to be in a position where you
5 are the driving party, for example, of what was
6 happening in Baghdad.

7 One of the reasons why I was keen for us to
8 concentrate on the south was precisely because I thought
9 the south was an area where we would be in charge, as it
10 were, and, you know, we would have an interaction with
11 the Americans in Baghdad, but we weren't going to be in
12 a position where the Americans were going to give us
13 a veto over everything that happened. That was not
14 going to be the case.

15 The one thing -- I think when we look back on this
16 now, but particularly in the light of our experience in
17 Iraq and in Afghanistan, I think there are things that
18 we didn't believe would be problems then that obviously
19 are going to be problems in this type of situation, and
20 I also think that you need a far deeper analysis of the
21 type of nation building and state building capacity that
22 you require. All of that I would agree. What
23 I wouldn't say is we were not focusing on these things,
24 because we were.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: If I were to suggest to you that

1 that deeper understanding and planning could have taken
2 place, because earlier this morning when you were
3 talking to Sir Roderic Lyne, you talked about you did
4 not test the policy, because the policy was agreed, but
5 were the implications of the policy understood, because
6 Lord Williams of Baglan, who, as you know, was a special
7 advisor to Robin Cook and to Jack Straw, has made
8 a statement and says, and I quote him:

9 "Plans for a military campaign are usually based on
10 calculations of risks involved, but it is apparent that
11 in the case of the Iraq this was only done in the most
12 narrow sense".

13 We were focusing on a military campaign but we did
14 not really test out what the implications were, so we
15 did not equip ourselves with the capacity, the resources
16 and so on.

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think that's far too stark
18 a comment made with the benefit of hindsight frankly.
19 As you have heard from many people who were engaged in
20 this planning process -- for example, I think, Karen
21 Miller was talking to you about the interactions there
22 were in government from September onwards with
23 officials, with the whole Foreign Office infrastructure
24 on things like how would we work out the right form of
25 Iraqi government and so on and so forth? You know, DFID

1 weren't simply looking at humanitarian. They were
2 looking at reconstruction issues and so on. Clare
3 Short's letters to me in October 2002, which we can go
4 to, describe in detail all the things that DFID are
5 doing about the various issues they are concerned with.
6 Of course, in the immediate aftermath the Ministry of
7 Defence and the military were going to be in charge.

8 You know, one of the things I want to say about this
9 planning -- because I accept in retrospect failings in
10 the American system have been set out in their report
11 that was done on them and they've accepted them. Certainly if
12 we knew then what we know now, of course, we would be
13 looking at different things.

14 I do make this point, however. Yes, it is true that
15 when we got in there, we found a very different
16 situation. I think Andy Bearpark gave you evidence,
17 however, that basically about 10% of the original plan
18 survives from contact with the reality on the ground.
19 That's true in Bosnia. It's true in Kosovo. It's true
20 everywhere.

21 These problems that we had were resolvable very
22 fast. That wasn't the problem we got into. The fact is
23 if we had carried on with the same security situation in
24 2003 into 2005 and 2006, we would not have had the
25 problem we ended up with.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Let me just go back to the
2 pre-planning stage, because I think we were aware about
3 how dysfunctional the US system was. Conversations were
4 taking place. Do you think we had sufficient visibility
5 of the Americans, what they were doing? Were we making
6 enough effort to influence them? Were you yourself
7 taking an interest in this area?

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, I was. I mean, I was raising
9 this with President Bush. Look, there was an issue
10 which you know, because you have had evidence about it,
11 which was this switch from the State Department in I
12 think January 2003 to the Department of Defense. That's
13 one of the things that the Americans themselves have
14 gone back over.

15 The only thing I say -- for interest -- I didn't see
16 this at the time -- I went back and looked at the State
17 Department plans, which were very detailed.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When would that be?

19 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have only looked at them -- I've
20 only seen them, as it were, now. They were published or
21 they were brought into being, these plans, I think
22 around about January 2003.

23 The thing I would emphasise, though, is when you
24 read their plans, they were on the same assumption as
25 us, which is look, there is a functioning infrastructure

1 of government, and your basic -- yes, you may get
2 security issues and so on and so forth, but your basic
3 problem will be humanitarian.

4 Those State Department plans are very detailed and
5 very good. They don't address the problem we ended up
6 with.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Would it be true to say there was so
8 much concentration on the second resolution, on the
9 diplomatic course and on the campaign planning itself
10 that attention wasn't paid to a clear strategy for the
11 aftermath?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. Again I think -- look, you
13 are absolutely right in saying there was a huge amount
14 of -- I mean, my -- I was absorbed enormously by the
15 politics and I accept that.

16 However, I think at virtually every meeting you have
17 got a minute of I continually say the aftermath is
18 vital. Sometimes I even say the aftermath is the issue.

19 Insofar as we were getting information about what we
20 thought would happen, you know, we were trying to draw
21 this in from all sorts of sources, including Iraqis who
22 had recently left the country, and so on.

23 When I look at what actually happened really after
24 March 2003 -- and by the way I don't minimise the
25 problems, because when I went to Iraq at the end of May

1 2003, I came back in a high state of anxiety -- but none
2 of these issues were insurmountable. They were
3 surmountable.

4 Now if we were to plan something like this again,
5 would we do it differently? Yes, of course we would.
6 Of course we would, not just in the light of the
7 knowledge we have now about the security problem, but
8 also I think there are far better government mechanisms,
9 like the Stabilisation Unit that we set up in 2004.
10 Yes, I think all of this is very sensible.

11 I want to make one other point about it, by the way,
12 which is I think there is not just a need for us to have
13 that capacity. I think it is a vital thing for the EU,
14 possibly for NATO and for the UN to have that capacity
15 as well. I am not sure from my experience since leaving
16 office that that capacity is there in the way it needs
17 to be.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, I really want to concentrate
19 in terms of our planning pre-the invasion, but you would
20 accept we could have done better than we did?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I do accept that, yes. I have
22 made it clear all the way through that -- I mean,
23 I don't believe it would have resolved -- any changes we
24 made would have resolved our basic problem, since
25 I think the problem is far more fundamental than

1 anything to do with bureaucracy or right structures of
2 government and so on, but yes, of course. If we were
3 sitting down today now, if we were in a situation of
4 nation building again, I think there are changes in our
5 approach that certainly should be done. I mean, I have
6 got thoughts on those which I can give you later.

7 I think there isn't -- the single most important
8 thing, though, I would say about the planning is the
9 real issue is what you focus on less than the structure;
10 in other words, you could say that we should have had
11 one Minister focusing on the pre-planning, but I would
12 debate that actually, but you may conclude that, but
13 I don't think that was the core of the problem. The
14 core of the problem was the focus of what that planning
15 was.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Well, it seems to me that the focus
17 of the problem was the assumptions we made and we didn't
18 actually try to work closely with the Americans, but we
19 will move on.

20 I want to look at the question now --

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think we did try. It wasn't
22 always very easy.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I want to move on to the question of
24 resourcing the occupation. Your statement implies that
25 you were not aware that there were serious concerns

1 about resourcing issues, yet on 5th March in advance of
2 a Ministerial discussion on 6th the Iraq Planning Unit
3 advised Ministers, including yourself, that:

4 "A UK division's likely area might contain up to 20%
5 of the Iraqi population and somewhere between
6 \$400 million and \$2.4 billion might be needed in the
7 first year. This is well beyond the financial and
8 implementing capacity of DFID and MoD and there is
9 a risk that UK could end up becoming responsible for
10 a large and expensive commitment potentially in the
11 medium term. If you become responsible for funding,
12 staffing as well as implementing reconstruction in the
13 British sector, the burden will be onerous. We judge
14 this would be very likely to be beyond the resources of
15 the UK alone."

16 Now in the face of this advice, did you seek to
17 limit the UK's liability in Iraq?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, I didn't, because --

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why?

20 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Because I was absolutely sure,
21 one, that if we required more resources, we'd provide
22 them.

23 I mean, I have gone back through these papers and
24 I cannot recall a time when someone said to me, "We need
25 this resource in order to make sure that the Iraqi

1 effort succeeds" and I was saying "No".

2 Gordon Brown made it very clear throughout in the
3 meetings we had, and I believe, to be fair, that he
4 honoured that commitment, that we would provide the
5 resources necessary.

6 However, what I did do as a result of that -- so it
7 wouldn't make me reduce our commitment at all. What
8 I did do, though -- and this was part of the discussion
9 we had with the Americans as well, as we obviously had
10 to get international support for this as well -- we then
11 put in train a whole thing of debt relief I think for
12 the Iraqis. Then there was an international pledging
13 conference. We were raising money for them, but money
14 wasn't the problem. It really wasn't the problem.

15 I mean, one of the things I am somewhat frustrated
16 by when I re-read the evidence, and I think there is
17 again possibly a lesson here, is that obviously further
18 down the chain there were people saying to you, "Look,
19 we have got resources issues here and problems that we
20 had". I was saying to the people we sent out to Basra,
21 "If you have a problem, tell me. I want to know".

22 Now I think there was a time in May or June 2003
23 when I have a vague recollection of Hilary Benn actually
24 asking for more money, some \$30 million or something.
25 He got it. You know, if people wanted -- this was so

1 important for us that if it had been a resource problem,
2 we would have paid the bill.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As you say in your statement, you do
4 say:

5 "There was never any suggestion the UK troop levels
6 might be inadequate to fulfil our obligation as
7 an occupying power."

8 Does this mean that you were actively told that
9 there would be adequate troops, or no-one told you there
10 would be a problem, or did you seek advice on this
11 point?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, they were giving me advice,
13 which is, "This is what we think we can do". My
14 assumption is if they are saying they think they can do
15 it, then they can do it.

16 Now, of course, we would have had discussions about
17 that at the time, but in essence we had both the troops
18 and the resources to manage this if the security
19 situation hadn't dramatically changed, and the
20 difference between this and Bosnia or Kosovo is the
21 heart of the problem.

22 Look, I actually went back and looked at some of the
23 papers in relation to Kosovo. People were making the
24 same complaints there. When we went in, we found chaos
25 and difficulty. There were all sorts of problems arose.

1 We couldn't get the people there fast enough. There
2 were issues to do with the resources. They all got
3 resolved.

4 These ones would have been resolved in the end. If
5 you -- I mean, I know what Hilary Synnott said to you in
6 his evidence, but if you actually track his telegrams,
7 there is anxiety and concern occasionally flagged up
8 very strongly, but when he leaves in 2004, he is on
9 balance optimistic, not pessimistic.

10 You know, I think one of the most interesting pieces
11 of evidence was given to you by General Dutton I think
12 it was, who said when he was asked to go out in 2005, he
13 was asked to go out really on the basis this thing is
14 moving in the right direction. Now this is two years
15 after we are in there. So any of the planning problems
16 or the bureaucracy issues, long we could have resolved
17 those.

18 The problem, General Dutton goes on to say, is
19 mid-2005, because I think his term of duty straddled
20 that period. Suddenly it flips. It flipped not because
21 we were not taking the right decisions back home, but
22 because the enemy we ended up fighting, which was
23 militia backed by Iran, were causing us the trouble.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The sense you get from some of the
25 evidence is you were very ambitious. For example, if

1 you look at the question of policing, Sir Jeremy
2 Greenstock said to us you wanted it done quickly:

3 "... and he said, 'Try and do it by the end of 2003
4 if you possibly can', and John and I looked at each
5 other. We decided we'd better see whether we could do
6 anything to help, but we realised it was an extremely
7 ambitious request."

8 So there was pressure in terms of doing things
9 quickly and the ambitions were high, but it was never
10 backed up by any proper analysis of the resources and
11 what capability was required in terms of staffing.

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, not quite, because I think,
13 I mean, so far as resources was concerned, I mean, that
14 was not the issue being raised with me. If someone said
15 to me, "I have a great plan but I need the resources",
16 I would have said, "You will have them".

17 The thing about the military and civilian is you are
18 always looking for a situation where you are in the
19 civilian phase, because the military phase is very
20 expensive. These civilian sums of money we are talking
21 about from DFID, I mean, okay, they are large sums of
22 money, but in government terms hundreds of millions.
23 When you're talking military, you're talking billions.
24 So for us if there had been a resource issue around
25 policing, that would have been easily resolved.

1 Now I saw that evidence from Jeremy. It is true
2 I was urgently trying to get this going. I think again
3 -- and I have read the evidence that has been given to
4 you by various of the police people we sent out there --
5 I think actually civil policing -- and I can speak to
6 this a bit in my responsibility now out in Palestine --
7 civil policing is a vital part of the picture, I think
8 far more so than we realised at the time, and I would
9 certainly say that going into any such situation in the
10 future, you have to have a fully and comprehensively
11 worked out plan for that, because you will almost
12 certainly find that the police resources that are there
13 are corrupt or useless.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In your statement you refer to the
15 common challenge of delivery. Do you feel the
16 government machine was up to delivering your aspirations
17 for Iraq?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think they were up to
19 delivering it, and I think they were delivering it.
20 I mean, the officials we sent out there and the people
21 working for us out there were fantastic people. I mean,
22 they were amazingly committed people.

23 The trouble was the security situation then
24 basically dislocated the reconstruction effort, and the
25 thing is occasionally through this you get a kind of

1 theme, which is: well, if you moved faster on
2 reconstruction, you may not have got the same security
3 problem.

4 I would really dispute that. I mean, the whole
5 point about these terrorist activities is that they were
6 directed at stopping the progress. They were not
7 expressions of frustration at the progress. They used
8 to -- we would repair the electricity. These militia
9 would come in and blow them up. You know, they would
10 try to stop the oil production, you know. Even today,
11 I mean -- we can come to where there are many, many
12 improvements in Iraq today, but the terrorism, as we
13 have seen from the last few days, continues. The
14 Americans are drawn down. The British are out. It
15 carries on. That's because the purpose of this
16 terrorism was nothing to do with standing up for Iraq.
17 It was to do with preventing Iraq getting on its feet as
18 a functioning democracy. That's still the aim of the
19 terrorists, which is why it's still important today that
20 the decent people in Iraq, and they are the majority,
21 actually succeed.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the question of
23 consultation with the USA and being an occupying power?

24 Now in your statement you say:

25 "It is correct that we sought a formal memorandum of

1 understanding with the USA about ORHA. It was quickly
2 superseded by arrangements we agreed at the meeting in
3 April 2003 at Hillsborough with President Bush and in
4 discussion at various levels between the US and the UK
5 governments."

6 In our reading of the record of Hillsborough we
7 could find no reference to these arrangements.
8 Furthermore, there is clear evidence of you seeing
9 colleagues and officials expressing frustration with the
10 lack of US consultation two months after Hillsborough.

11 I think Jack Straw wrote to you on 5th June saying:

12 "We are jointly liable for all decisions but there
13 are many complaints that we are being sidelined in CPA
14 below Sawers' level."

15 If all this had been resolved at Hillsborough, why
16 did these concerns still persist?

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I don't think they were all
18 resolved at Hillsborough. In the end the thing with
19 Hillsborough was we were back into another UN situation.
20 That was the focus point of my meeting with George Bush,
21 plus the Middle East peace process. So the issue
22 between the two of us there at Hillsborough was over the
23 United Nations' role, because again American did not
24 want the UN in. We were clear that the UN had to be in,
25 and I got a paper from the Iraq Planning Unit saying in

1 essence that Iraq couldn't be run by the UN and the UN
2 didn't want the lead role, but the UN had to have an
3 important role, and this was raised with President Bush
4 and finally resolved.

5 We also had an issue on the peace process, because I
6 was very determined -- I can't remember exactly when the
7 road map was published, but this was all to do with the
8 Middle East peace process, and I also was very fixed on
9 that.

10 Now on the consultation with the Americans, look,
11 I think there were, and probably there always will be --
12 you know, you are not going to get a situation in which
13 everyone is happy with everyone and so on, but one of
14 the reasons why I was sending people of the calibre of
15 John Sawers, who had worked for me, Jeremy, who was our
16 key guy at the UN, was I wanted a top level person in
17 there making sure as things transited to Ambassador
18 Bremer that we had the opportunity to make our views
19 known.

20 Now sometimes that didn't work, and Jack's note is
21 an expression at the frustration of that, but, look,
22 given the disparity of the assets that were being
23 deployed and given the fact down in the south we were
24 really running our own show, I think it would be
25 a little harsh actually to say the Americans were not

1 consulting us at all, and I know they would certainly
2 disagree with that.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But when you talk about the
4 individuals, do you think we were putting too much
5 premium on the individuals solving the problem without
6 really getting the relationship right, because, okay,
7 the disparity of the resources was there, but we had
8 ultimately joint responsibility, and therefore we had
9 the right to be consulted?

10 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Sure, and I think what the
11 Americans would say is that they did. I mean, you ask
12 whether the particular individuals matter. In my view
13 this is all about individuals. So with someone like
14 John Sawers I would have complete confidence that he --

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I didn't say that. I said were we
16 putting too much premium on individuals without having
17 a framework within which to work at having a strategy?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. What I was really going to
19 say was because you can't predict all these situations
20 as they are arising, really in the end -- look, you
21 could have agreed some formal memorandum with the
22 Americans. That wouldn't have been what made it work.
23 What would have made it work was my relationship with
24 the President obviously, Jack's relationship and so on.
25 David Manning and Condi Rice were constantly talking --

1 I mean, David Manning and Condi Rice had an
2 extraordinarily close working relationship. I should
3 imagine they were speaking to each other often several times
4 a day. You will see from all the various different
5 notes David was often raising these issues with her.

6 The key thing was to have someone like John
7 alongside Ambassador Bremer, because I formed a very
8 clear view of Ambassador Bremer when I met him, which
9 was he was a really able, tough-minded person. You
10 know, he was someone who knew his own mind, so I wanted
11 a strong person alongside him.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, prior to the United Nations
13 Security Council Resolution 1483 the UK was the
14 occupying power for the ground it occupied in Iraq, but
15 after the 1483 it was joint occupying power for all
16 Iraq, and in your statement you say:

17 "I was fully aware of the responsibility that came
18 with this and so were my colleagues."

19 You also say:

20 "It is correct that as the joint occupying power we
21 would share legal responsibility for the whole of Iraq
22 with the US whilst in effect the responsibility for
23 practical implementation would be with the US. It has
24 to be emphasised that, although we together with the US
25 were to constitute the occupying power under the UN

1 resolution, the US was providing the overwhelming amount
2 of manpower and resources."

3 How did you think the UK was going to exercise its
4 obligations as a joint occupying power?

5 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It was more how was it going to
6 make sure that it got alongside the decision-making
7 process? I mean, this issue to do with whether we were
8 solely responsible for the south and the Americans
9 responsible for the rest or we were joint occupying
10 powers, I mean, that's an interesting debate, but
11 I think our view -- and, you know, there was an Ad Hoc
12 Committee meeting every day resolving and talking about
13 these issues -- was it was going to be to our advantage
14 actually to make sure we were joint partners with the
15 US, because that both gave us a locus in Baghdad but
16 also meant they had some responsibility for our area
17 too.

18 So I think this was a perfectly satisfactory way of
19 resolving it. We did actually have a lot of people in
20 and alongside the US. You have the evidence of Andy
21 Bearpark. Andy went in from us. Andy, you know, is
22 a sort of colourful character. I mean, he was
23 effectively handling large amounts of American money and
24 resources. Just to put this in perspective, what he was
25 handling up to Baghdad, despite the fact we actually

1 weren't there, was more than the whole of what was going
2 into the south.

3 So, you know, when people say the Americans were
4 sort of not treating us properly, I really don't think
5 that's correct, you know. I think in any of these
6 situations you are going to get glitches, friction,
7 difficulties. They were resolvable.

8 One thing I would like to say about Ambassador
9 Bremer and his time -- and I know he has given you his
10 statement -- I actually think he did a pretty good job
11 in charge of the CPA. The fact is when he was there,
12 Iraq was on an upward path, and really it was in later
13 times that we got into the difficulties.

14 You know, I know there's a lot of debate about
15 de-Ba'athification and so on, and you will have heard
16 a lot of evidence on that, but he was someone who knew
17 his own mind, but I have to say I did not get the
18 impression he was refusing to discuss it with the
19 British. On the contrary, we had Brits working
20 alongside in very senior positions.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I want to come back again. Why did
22 Jack Straw write to you on 7th April, when he said:

23 "Colleagues also felt strongly the US must not be
24 allowed to take UK support for granted, otherwise, as
25 the US ultimately call the shots, we risk being caught

1 in a position of sharing responsibility for events in
2 Iraq without holding corresponding power to influence
3 them"?

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Of course they are absolutely
5 right, which is why we would be pushing the whole time
6 but that's a struggle you would expect to have. You are
7 going to be in a situation where you are in there
8 working alongside the US. I should imagine exactly the
9 same thing would have happened in Bosnia, Kosovo,
10 Afghanistan. It is just the way it is. Jack was
11 perfectly rightly passing on to me from colleagues in
12 a sense "Look, get on to your partner Bush and tell him
13 we have to be properly involved in this".

14 After I came back from Iraq on the 29th I made sure
15 I met President Bush and frankly gave him a pretty clear
16 situation -- sit rep up of what was happening and the
17 problems.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How effective was that channel of
19 communications because a number of witnesses have
20 commented on the importance of the channel of
21 communication for resolving issues. Were you confident
22 what you agreed with President Bush would be translated
23 into action on the ground, because if a lot rested on
24 that channel of communication, how effective was it in
25 practice?

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: The truth is these things are only
2 as effective as the two top decision makers can be in
3 circumstances where they are not actually on the ground.
4 So you had to have in parallel to that -- that was why I
5 chose John Sawers particularly and then later Jeremy to
6 go alongside the Americans -- you have to have people
7 who are there on the spot, because whatever President
8 Bush and I agree, you then have systems and the American
9 system, you know, if anyone has ever dealt with them --
10 I have now dealt with three different Presidents and
11 those in charge of their systems -- it is a vast
12 behemoth of a system. You need to make sure messages
13 are getting in at the ground level as well as the top
14 level.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How confident are you what was said
16 between you and President Bush was percolating down to
17 the ground and that action was actually taken?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I have to say I think they did
19 take action. You will have seen from what happened with
20 Ambassador Bremer, I mean, he got moving pretty quickly.
21 He did start to turn things round.

22 Now, you know, was it difficult in the first bit
23 with the transition from ORHA to the CPA? Yes, it was
24 and the Americans in their own analysis of planning say
25 this should have been done completely differently now

1 and I think Jerry Bremer would say that to you as well.
2 I can't say there were things where I was ringing the
3 alarm bell with President Bush and he was not doing
4 anything. On the contrary when I met him and went through
5 item by item the things that had to happened. When I
6 went to him, and again his system was completely
7 resistant to this, to get the UN into Iraq, they did
8 come in.

9 It is very important to understand this, and I think
10 it comes out from some of the evidence, our concept was
11 very, very clear. The suggestion is somewhere in the
12 question to me that somehow we had different objectives
13 moving from the different stages of this transition, it
14 was absolutely clear we wanted to go from coalition to
15 a sort of provisional authority, Iraqi governing
16 council, and the purpose was to put the UN in so that in
17 our view the UN over time took over.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That we know, but I just want to
19 come back to how effective the channel of communication
20 was, because you referred to Andy Bearpark, but he also
21 told us "If you are in a Downing Street/White House
22 conversation there is a limit to how many issues can be
23 raised and certainly a very distinct limit as to how
24 many issues can be resolved."

25 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: That's true. I would accept that

1 completely. What I am saying is when you have big
2 issues -- the UN coming in was a big, big issue. If you
3 get the UN in this situation the great advantage is that
4 it has a whole set of infrastructures itself that deal
5 with things like development, schooling.

6 If you take the situation that I am involved in now,
7 if you took the UN out of Gaza there would be very
8 little there. So the UN has this huge infrastructure of
9 capacity. Our purpose was to bring the UN in in
10 an important role. Sergio Vieira de Mello was obviously
11 critical to this and was an exceptional leader and
12 person. Unfortunately, and this is why, as I say, the
13 issue is what happened to security, because what
14 happened was they killed him and many of his staff in
15 August 2003.

16 You know, one of the things that's important to
17 recognise, and some people -- I think Lord Williams
18 suggests this -- is without the UN authority you don't
19 have the necessary consent amongst the population. The
20 truth is those people we were fighting in Iraq didn't
21 care about the UN. In fact, they wanted the UN out as
22 much as us.

23 In the end I think any of these questions -- yes, it
24 is true you can't resolve everything in a telephone
25 conversation between Prime Minister and President, but

1 the big ticket items I was absolutely on those with
2 President Bush and as far as I know action was following
3 from that.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Okay. Can I move on to -- because
5 you raised earlier the question of Iraq's bureaucratic
6 capacity. Again in your memoirs you imply you were
7 depending on a functioning Civil Service, that the basic
8 infrastructure of government was intact and capable, but
9 given that Iraq had been under the grip of
10 brutal and corrupt tyrants and had been through mass
11 insurrections and two debilitating wars and, as was
12 widely reported, had been further debilitated by
13 12 years of sanctions, had its leadership removed by
14 a third war, so was it prudent to plan on the assumption
15 of a functioning rather than a degraded state apparatus?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: When you look back on this with
17 hindsight, you can say "no". All I say to you is that at
18 the time there was quite a lot of work on this. What is
19 interesting, I came across the other day in preparing
20 for the Inquiry is a comment of Kofi Annan's that he
21 made at a press conference in April 2003, where he
22 referred to a functioning Iraqi Civil Service, and the
23 Americans and ourselves were of the view that with this
24 in part because of the nature of the Saddam regime,
25 there must be a pretty good functioning Civil Service

1 there. We were obviously taking advice as well from
2 people who had recently left Iraq.

3 One of the lessons of this undoubtedly is that in
4 any situation where you are removing an oppressive and
5 brutal regime assume the worst, assume actually as
6 a result of that brutality and oppression what you may
7 have is a hard security apparatus, but actually not
8 a governing bureaucracy with any integrity there.

9 Again, by the way, I think that was a resolvable
10 problem. If we had got into essentially a security
11 situation where we had had internal elements and former
12 Saddam regime people and so on and a certain amount of
13 looting, criminality all of that, we could have managed
14 that and formed the governing structures of Iraq fairly
15 easily.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I bring you back? You said that that
17 was your information, but we have declassified a letter
18 which was sent by Matthew Rycroft and he wanted some
19 information that you requested on the assessment of the state of
the
20 Iraqi civil service and bureaucracy. Can you recall
21 whether you received that information and what was the
22 assessment made?

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. What actually happened there
24 was I think, if this is I think in early April 2003?

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: What happened is obviously when we
2 were in there after the conflict had begun and now we
3 are actually in Iraq, we were going to get -- have real
4 time real information, as it were. We were not going to
5 be relying on reports. We would have our own people on
6 the ground, and, of course, what became very, very
7 apparent very quickly was that the assumption that had
8 been made about the state of the Iraqi bureaucracy was
9 not correct.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But, you know, there was a JIC
11 assessment report, I think it was 19th February and
12 again that stated:

13 "Overall there is a risk of a wider breakdown as the
14 regime's authority crumbles."

15 So there was information, there were signs there if
16 you looked very carefully what the likely consequences
17 were going to be?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Look, again, in hindsight you can
19 go back and pick out these things and say "We should
20 have considered this more important". I actually think
21 now when I look back on it the intelligence that Al
22 Qaeda sent to Al-Zarqawi into Iraq in 2002, May 2002,
23 that should have triggered an assessment on our part
24 that was rather different from the assessment we came
25 to, but this is with the benefit of hindsight.

1 If you take the overall impression of all the bits
2 of information we had, this was not my conclusion.
3 Andrew Turnbull has given you his evidence. The
4 conclusion of the system, both ours and the Americans,
5 and what I am saying to you is interestingly the same
6 conclusion was reached by the UN bureaucracy, was that
7 this wouldn't be a collapsed government. You might have
8 all sorts of different problems, but that was not going
9 to be a problem.

10 I just want to emphasise, however, I think again
11 that would have been a resolvable problem but for the
12 issue we got into.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I will turn now to Sir Martin
15 Gilbert about what happened.

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I'd like to look briefly, Mr Blair,
17 into the insurgency story. We will come on to the roles
18 of Iran and AQ in a moment, as you commented yourself it
19 merits a special section. I want to ask you about your
20 statement to us that what we found in Iraq was not what
21 we anticipated. You told us no-one identified what came
22 to be the problem.

23 We have published the declassified records of your
24 meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on 15th January 2003,
25 that is more than two months before the beginning of the

1 conflict. This highlights the risk of serious violence
2 in the event of rapid collapse of Saddam's regime.

3 Two particular phrases. It speaks of internecine
4 fighting between the Sunni and Shia populations and
5 ethnic groups that irretrievably fracture the country.

6 Can you tell us what you did to ensure that these
7 risks would be addressed?

8 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes. There was a real worry about
9 the Shia/Sunni issue, and what we did to address it was
10 to make sure that as soon as possible we had some
11 governing council, and that's why we formed the Iraqi
12 governing council, and that was formed very quickly
13 within months, precisely in order to make sure that the
14 Sunni and Shia and, of course, the Kurds were all
15 represented on it. So that was an issue.

16 Actually we didn't get -- the Sunni/Shia fighting
17 did not start until probably 2006 in earnest after the
18 Samarra Mosque was bombed deliberately to create such
19 sectarianism. We were aware of the fact you might get
20 criminality and looting. People were prepared to deal
21 with that, and we could have dealt with that. Actually
22 we did.

23 There is an interesting telegram in late May 2003
24 which actually describes that because of the easing of
25 the security situation in the south, UK troops were

1 engaged more in reconstruction.

2 So, you know, we faced these problems absolutely as
3 they predicted down in the south. They were not of
4 an order that gave us concern that the mission might not
5 succeed. Very quickly we were able to overcome that.

6 Now really that issue, the problem of security, they
7 weren't warning me of what eventually took place. On
8 the contrary I think most people thought, most of the
9 intelligence was a view -- maybe that's more of
10 a problem you will face in Britain than in Iraq but in
11 Iran they will want to promote stability.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You say in your book that:

13 "Iraq..." -- we are looking now forward I suppose to
14 2005 and 2006 -- "...was not Vietnam, which was a battle
15 fought against a genuine insurgency".

16 You have argued without the intervention of Al Qaeda
17 and Iran the situation would have been manageable.
18 That's your phrase, but was there not insurgency in
19 Iraq? Were there not several insurgencies happening in
20 parallel?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I am not meaning to suggest there
22 were not former regime elements, disaffected Sunnis that
23 were operating here, and that's why in the end the
24 so-called Awakening Policy and the Sons of Iraq policy
25 was so important. So I am not suggesting there was not

1 an internal problem.

2 What I am suggesting, however, is that what gave it
3 a completely different complexion was AQ on one side and
4 Iran on the other.

5 Let me explain that. I think about AQ and its
6 bombing campaigns were that they were the kind of
7 spectacles -- again to go back to the evidence you
8 have about 2003, what were two critical elements? The
9 two critical elements were the bombing of the UN
10 headquarters in which so many people tragically died,
11 which was a massive moment really, and then later the
12 bombing of I think it was the Al-Rashid Hotel in
13 October. It was Al Qaeda that were really focusing on
14 killing the people who were trying to get the country on
15 its feet, and, you know, I'm not saying that without Al
16 Qaeda there wouldn't have been a problem, but, I mean,
17 thousands died. I mean, they are still doing it now.

18 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we would like to pursue this Al
19 Qaeda point, if we may. It is really one for
20 Sir Roderic Lyne. Rod.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I wonder if I can run through two or
22 three points quite quickly, because I think time is
23 running along.

24 On Al Qaeda, which you devote a section of your
25 statement to, Al Qaeda and Iran, you have pointed out

1 that the -- you have argued that the JIC should have
2 made rather more of the fact that Zarqawi was in
3 Northern Iraq. I wonder if this whole area is one in
4 which on reflection you feel that the advice given to
5 you, the analysis that was made, obviously not in the
6 Prime Minister's office but by experts of different
7 kinds, was wrong and should have been better. To be
8 fair to the JIC, they did make a clear judgment before
9 the invasion, 10th February, that the threat from Al
10 Qaeda will increase at the onset of any military action
11 against Iraq. Attacks on western interests are likely.
12 Of course, they were not just referring to interests in
13 Iraq but globally.

14 So probably rather understated, but given that we
15 had by this stage been engaged with the United States
16 for two years in a global war on terror, as President
17 Bush called it, and we were about to invade and occupy
18 an Islamic country with a substantial Sunni population,
19 shouldn't the experts have anticipated -- I am wary of
20 hindsight -- wasn't it actually rather obvious that Al Qaeda
21 would seek to exploit such a situation against us? Why
22 didn't they tell you that more strongly if they did tell
23 you that but not very strongly?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, I don't think anyone
25 predicted it in the way that it came to be. I have

1 an explanation of this but it may be different from
2 others. By the way, they gave me -- they did
3 an extremely good job for me throughout so I have no
4 complaint about it at all. I think our understanding of
5 this is far better now than it was then globally,
6 I think there was a feeling back then -- there are
7 really two ways of looking at the extremism. In a sense
8 this is also -- it comes out in the difference of point
9 of view. For example, between someone like Jacques
10 Chirac and someone like me as to how you deal with all
11 of this.

12 One view of the extremism, which was I think fairly
13 prevalent at the time, was that this extremism was
14 a kind of alien encrustment on Islam, on the Muslim
15 countries and so on, that, yes, it was based on
16 a perversion of Islam but it was really a very small
17 number of people who were engaged in this, and that view
18 I think is still shared by many people today.

19 Now my view is actually different from that.
20 I think the numbers of people who are engaged in
21 terrorism or become suicide bombers is very, very
22 limited, but I think the global ideology that gives rise
23 to this extremism has far deeper roots, and, you know,
24 I am out in the Middle East a lot of the time now and
25 it's the same issue everywhere. It comes up -- it

1 doesn't always come up in issues to do with terrorism or
2 violence. It is about modernisation. It is about
3 attitudes to the west and it is deep. It's a lot
4 deeper.

5 So what happened when you got Al Qaeda coming into
6 this situation is that it was more than just a few
7 terrorists. It was backed with the ability to push
8 an ideology that said the west is fundamentally hostile
9 to Islam and that's why we have to wage war against
10 these people and we have to wage war against them and
11 against the leaders that deal with them.

12 Now that ideology in terms of how it results in
13 violence is very few people. That narrative about Islam
14 and the west I fear has a far greater reach than we
15 would like to accept which is why this problem is not
16 confined to one area in the world today.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As you rightly say they came into
18 a situation and they came into a situation that was very
19 fertile ground for them. We have heard from actually
20 many witnesses a picture in which during and after the
21 campaign the situation inside Iraq became very chaotic.
22 In fact, looting started almost immediately. The
23 invading and then occupying forces were not able to
24 ensure law and order. Even arms dumps were not guarded.
25 We had, of course, dismantled the regime self-evidently,

1 but we had in the course of doing that -- we went on to
2 dismantle much of the public service through
3 de-Ba'athification. We disbanded the army. Much of it
4 melted away, but we could have brought quite a lot of it
5 back. We didn't.

6 As a result of this post-conflict situation in what
7 was already a fragile and unstable country a power
8 vacuum developed and in that situation according to this
9 line of evidence that we have had, essentially what
10 happened then was an internal and intercommunal struggle
11 for power and resources which involved many different
12 groups.

13 The team that subsequently analysed this for General
14 Petraeus and General Odierno identified nine drivers of
15 instability, one of which was Al Qaeda. Essentially it
16 was an internal conflict which Al Qaeda came into.

17 What I suppose concerns us is whether, given what
18 was known at the time -- as you rightly say we know more
19 about it now -- this should not have been factored in
20 more to the planning and preparations so that enough
21 resources would have been there on the ground -- they
22 would have been predominantly American but British

23 too -- to prevent that power vacuum developing in this very
chaotic
24 early situation. That was where our preparations went
25 wrong?

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think there is something in that
2 but I think you can make far too much of it. Yes, of
3 course, again the Americans have accepted they probably
4 should have had more and different troops even for the
5 aftermath. One of the lessons of this undoubtedly is
6 that what you require by way of way of fighting the war
7 is quite different from what you require afterwards.
8 That I fully accept.

9 But I think -- because this really does matter as
10 a lesson -- I don't think that Al Qaeda stepped into
11 a power vacuum. You know, if you take Pakistan today --
12 and after all there have been more people killed in
13 terrorism in Pakistan in 2010 that I think either Iraq
14 or Afghanistan -- you can't say that's not a well
15 functioning state and security services and everything.
16 Where you have people who are prepared with suicide
17 bombing to destabilise a country, they don't need
18 a power vacuum. They simply need people who are
19 prepared to go and blow themselves up in a street
20 market. When that happens you destabilise the country.
21 That's the purpose of it. That is why it's such
22 a frightening phenomenon. That's what these people do
23 and they do it, I am afraid, all over.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think nobody is disputing how
25 unpleasant or ruthless Al Qaeda are or the trouble they

1 are creating in Pakistan, but, of course, the majority
2 of the people who made Iraq virtually unmanageable were
3 Iraqis. They were internal. They came from different
4 groups. Not all of the extremists were Al Qaeda by any
5 means. In fact, almost every group in the struggle for
6 power had extremist elements in it and, indeed, still
7 does to this day, as we see from the pattern of
8 continuing terrorism that goes on.

9 So to pin quite so much on Al Qaeda, who became
10 a bigger factor after a while, but the initial phrase was
11 surely important too, wasn't it?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Yes, the initial stage was
13 important and that's why it is important to get this
14 right because otherwise -- my view, and I will come to
15 this in a moment -- in any situation where you are going
16 to engage and have to engage in nation building, where
17 this Islamist extremism is a factor, whatever you think,
18 and whatever amount of planning you do, you are going to
19 be in for a hard, relentless struggle, because that's
20 the nature of it.

21 You see, it's correct that there was this power
22 vacuum that was there, but actually -- and this is why
23 I referred you to General Dutton's evidence earlier --
24 2005, Iraq was getting there, because let's be clear,
25 whatever these extremist groups were doing the majority

1 of Iraqis were coming out and voting in their elections.
2 They were in favour, indeed still are today.

3 I mean, I spoke to Minister Allawi, who has won the
4 most seats in the Iraqi election the other day and he
5 just said to me "Look, it is very challenging but there
6 is hope in this country today. We defeated Saddam. We
7 will defeat the terrorists in the end and your people
8 and your forces should be proud of what they have done".
9 These groups in 2004/2005, yes, there was struggle and
10 fighting, but in the first half of 2004 there were 30
11 suicide attacks. The first half of 2005 there are 200.

12 Now that's way past these early teething issues to
13 do with bureaucracy and problems we had and the power
14 vacuum and so on. This by now is a deliberate attempt
15 to destabilise the country.

16 The point I would make to you about Al Qaeda is
17 this. These other groups that were fighting and doing
18 things, I am not minimising the importance, but the thing
19 that made it toughest for all of us and toughest
20 particularly with public opinion, because we were trying
21 to have to keep our public opinion for a long struggle
22 here, and I am afraid this is what these groups have
23 learned from their experience in Afghanistan and Iraq,
24 is that these -- (a) if you do these spectacular,
25 ghastly suicide bombings you create an image of a county

1 in chaos. So it is not just the numbers you kill; it is
2 the image you portray.

3 Secondly, with the roadside bombs, the IEDs, EFPs
4 and so on, and this is where the Iranian part comes in,
5 you can aim it at the soldiers of the countries coming
6 in and the country providing those forces becomes
7 demoralised by this.

8 So I really do believe this is a fundamental point
9 here.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Nobody, I think, has or would question
11 that. We went over that at enormous length last year
12 and we have covered it elsewhere. We are now
13 unfortunately short of time. I mean, the important
14 point is really how do we counter it in a specific
15 situation like Iraq or how do we minimise the chance of
16 it growing up? Did we have enough troops there
17 ourselves? We have heard from General Shirreff that he
18 was only able to deploy in a really bad time in
19 Basra 200 hundred troops on to the streets of the city
20 of 1.3 million, which compared in his view very badly
21 with Northern Ireland. I am sorry we do not have
22 a chance to pursue all of this now.

23 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: If they had said to me "We need
24 more forces," I would have been talking to them about
25 it.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I am agreeing with you on the importance
2 of Al Qaeda and the need for further thought on it which
3 is obviously a lesson.

4 Can I ask just two very quick questions on Iran and then
5 we have to move on, because Iran you highlighted as part
6 of the problem.

7 Again the JIC, as you said earlier in the
8 declassified report of 19th February, told you that Iran
9 was unlikely to be aggressive, although they had also
10 warned that Iran would try to meddle in Iraq and would
11 want to ensure a leading role for its proteges, would
12 want to minimise the size and duration of a US presence
13 post-Saddam, had interests throughout Iraq and might
14 pursue them in the south through armed Shia groups such
15 as the Badr Corps, all of which turned out to be fairly accurate
16 but perhaps to a degree understated.

17 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I also think there were many
18 comments in that that basically said Iran was not going
19 to take an aggressive posture.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's what I just said and it says, and
21 it also talked about active neutrality.

22 My question to you is to what extent should the
23 advice to you about this have been better, given that it
24 is no surprise to anybody that the Iranians do not like
25 the USA and the UK, as Great Satan and Little Satan, and

1 were not likely to share our objectives and particularly
2 were not likely to welcome a democratic state, which we
3 would try to create, being installed in Iraq with the
4 help of the Americans and the British.

5 So shouldn't the JIC, shouldn't other advisers have
6 worked on a rather more pessimistic assumption that Iraq
7 was going to seek to try to interfere with our success
8 rather than cooperate with it or preserve a neutral
9 stance towards it? If I can just have a fairly short
10 answer on that, because again we covered quite a lot of
11 this last year?

12 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I think you might say with
13 hindsight, yes, but I honestly think it is with
14 hindsight. At the time people didn't think that. You
15 know, we had been engaging with Iran over this. We had
16 been engaging with the new sanctions debate and so on
17 and no, I think we -- and this brings me to my point,
18 because you made a point earlier that -- you see, I also
19 think needs amendment.

20 How do you deal with Al Qaeda? You can't deal with
21 them unless you deal with the bigger picture, which
22 includes Iran. That's my view, because I don't think
23 this is -- I think Iran took a strategic decision and
24 has now gone down a path of where it believes that it is
25 an existential threat to the maintenance of this

1 bureaucracy to have progress and modernisation happening
2 in that region.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That neatly brings me to my
4 positively final question, which is that one of the
5 drivers of the decision to deal with Saddam and Iraq, as
6 we have heard from again numerous witnesses, was the
7 hope that this would send a very powerful signal to
8 nations like -- particularly Iran and North Korea that
9 were trying to develop nuclear weapons, of course,
10 contacts with Libya were already underway
11 and
12 as I think we discussed last year, that
13 led to a success in the autumn of 2003. Iran with North
14 Korea was a county of highest concern and it is
15 a country of even higher concern now for exactly the
16 reasons you have given.

17 So was the effect of the action we took in Iraq, at
18 least with regard to the nuclear proliferation the
19 reverse nuclear proliferation in Iran, the reverse of
20 what we had intended? Is that how it has actually
21 turned out?

22 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, I don't think so.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mean it has deterred Iran?

24 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No. I think to begin with there
25 was real pressure on Iran. I think we restarted

1 negotiations with them over their nuclear programme.
2 North Korea came back into six party talks. I think now
3 we are in a different situation.

4 I want to make this point very clearly, because it
5 comes out in the paper of Lord Williams, the single
6 thing that is said most often to me in the Middle East by people
7 who opposed what I did, was nothing to do with it was a
8 bad idea to get rid of Saddam. They are well rid of him
9 and believe that. They said, "You have made Iran more
10 powerful by getting rid of Saddam". My answer to that
11 is very simple and it is fundamental to this whole
12 question. The answer to Iran is not Saddam. That was
13 our policy back in the 1980s, and all we did was then
14 create a monster we could not control.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: By getting rid of Saddam's nuclear
16 weapons by decapitating the regime send a signal to Iran
17 not to go on developing nuclear weapons?

18 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Obviously it sent a signal to
19 everyone which is why Libya --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, how did the Iranians react?

21 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Initially they felt that pressure,
22 now they don't feel the same pressure.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Don't they feel they need them more in
24 case the Americans have the same intentions towards
25 them?

1 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, that is not the reason why
2 Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was doing it even under the Shah.

4 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: It is a rather different regime
5 today. People can take two views about Iran today, but
6 I will give you my view very, very strongly indeed,
7 because this is a looming and coming challenge. I am
8 out in that region the whole time. I see the impact and
9 influence of Iran everywhere. It is negative,
10 destabilising. It is supportive of terrorist groups.
11 It is doing everything it can to impede progress in the
12 Middle East peace process and to facilitate a situation
13 in which that region cannot embark on the process of
14 modernisation it urgently needs.

15 This is not because we have done something. You
16 know, at some point -- and I say this to you with all
17 the passion I possibly can -- the West has to get out of
18 this what I think is a wretched policy or posture of
19 apology for believing that we are causing what the
20 Iranians are doing or what these extremists are doing.
21 We are not. The fact is they are doing it because they
22 disagree fundamentally with our way of life and they
23 will carry on doing it unless they are met with the
24 requisite determination and if necessary force.

25 The fact that -- look, President Obama, not

1 President Bush -- this is an important point --
2 President Obama goes in March 2009 to Cairo in the heart
3 of Islam. He makes a speech where he says effectively
4 "Put aside the Bush era. I am now offering the hand of
5 friendship. You, Iran can come into partnership. You
6 are an ancient proud civilisation. We will welcome you
7 in".

8 What's the response he gets? They carry on with the
9 terrorism. They carry on with the destabilisation.
10 They carry on with the nuclear weapons programme. At
11 some point we have to get our heads out of the sand and
12 understand they are going to carry on with this. Iraq
13 is one part of a far bigger picture and right across
14 that region people are facing that struggle.

15 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Mr Blair, in a moment we are going to ask
16 you for the lessons you want to draw from Iraq in
17 particular and more broadly. Before we do that, and we
18 have only moments left I think, Sir Martin Gilbert would
19 like to ask one final question.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to ask a final question
21 about your stewardship of our Iraqi policy and that's
22 the Afghan dimension. In your statement to us you
23 commented:

24 "Afghanistan did not affect decisions on drawing
25 down troop levels in Iraq. There was explicit

1 confirmation from the military that our proposed
2 increased deployment in Afghanistan was not dependent on
3 sticking to the scheduled drawdown."

4 You previously confirmed to us that the suggestion
5 for raising troop levels in Afghanistan came from the
6 MoD. General Shirreff told us in his evidence that in
7 his view a decision had been taken to open up the second
8 front in Afghanistan before the situation in Iraq was
9 satisfactorily resolved. Lord Walker told us in his
10 evidence that the Afghan uplift, as he put it, was
11 absolutely a breach of the Defence Planning Assumptions.

12 Should the military advice on whether it was
13 possible to sustain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan
14 simultaneously have been revised as the situation in
15 Iraq deteriorated and did you seek such advice?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: Well, my recollection is that we
17 very specifically did ask whether if we were going to
18 increase our position in Afghanistan, that was going to
19 be a problem for us in Iraq and could we maintain both
20 the uplift and the commitment to Iraq, and my
21 recollection is that John Reid actually very
22 specifically asked for this to be done.

23 So yes, this was very much part of our thinking.
24 Now it would have been difficult as the security
25 situation -- again, you know, to go back to it, in the

1 first half of 2005 we were still on track. It was in
2 the second half of 2005/2006 that this thing went bad,
3 but I would have expected them to come to me and say,
4 you know, "We can't do this". I am not aware that they
5 did, although the thing about the military is they are
6 just fantastically good people in the sense -- if you
7 ask them to do it, they will do it.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In our difficulties in Basra when we
9 had eventually to withdraw from Basra and go to the
10 airport and so on, by then there was simply no way in
11 which you could readjust the military balance. Wouldn't
12 it be true to say once Maliki went down into Basra that
13 we had to abandon our options and certainly abandon any
14 winning strategy?

15 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: No, look, again I think what is
16 happening in Basra today is that for all the challenges
17 that still remain they are getting somewhere as a city,
18 and that's because the British forces were there for
19 years as Iraqi capability built up, but where Basra was
20 very different from Baghdad was that in Baghdad there
21 were -- the problem were the attacks on the civilians.
22 In Basra the attacks were on us. So it was -- I think
23 the view of the military, and this is where I think
24 General Dannatt at some point in 2006 actually says "We
25 are in danger of becoming the problem here". So our

1 perception always was in Basra you needed to get to the
2 point where the Iraqis did the operation.

3 Now what we did was we wanted to do what I think it
4 was called operation Salamanca. We then downgraded that
5 because Maliki said to me "Look, I want to do this as
6 an Iraqi operation." So we downgraded it somewhat but
7 in the end the charge of the knights was very
8 successful. It was done actually, by the way, with
9 British support and it is why we should hold our heads
10 high about what we did in Basra.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

12 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Mr Blair, I know you wanted ten minutes
13 or so to offer us some lessons that you think a future
14 Prime Minister might benefit from. Would that be a good
15 moment?

16 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I will do that and I will try to
17 do that briefly, if I may, Sir John.

18 Actually just before I got to those lessons learned,
19 I wanted to say something else.

20 At the conclusion of the last hearing you asked me
21 whether I had any regrets. I took that as a question
22 about the decision to go to war and I answered that
23 I took responsibility.

24 That was taken as my meaning that I had no regrets
25 about the loss of life and that was never my meaning or

1 my intention. I wanted to make that clear that, of
2 course, I regret deeply and profoundly the loss of life,
3 whether from our own armed forces, those of other
4 nations, the civilians who helped people in Iraq or the
5 Iraqis themselves. I just wanted to say that, because
6 I think it is right to say it and it is what I feel.

7 (Interruption from public gallery)

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Be quiet, please. Mr Blair.

9 THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR: I will then go to the lessons
10 learned. I have certain lessons here which I am just
11 going to give you, which are really to do with the
12 planning. I then have one or two other political
13 lessons. One of those political lessons is to do with
14 the link between AQ and Iran and what I want to say --
15 this is what I was saying before, so I needn't repeat
16 myself now -- I wanted to make it very clear to you that
17 I think you need to look at this issue to do with AQ and
18 Iran in a broader context and also the linkages between
19 the two, because I think there are a whole series of
20 particularly defence intelligence reports from 2005 and
21 2006 which are very, very important in this regard and
22 which detail quite extensively the nature of those
23 activities. So that is one aspect, as it were, on the
24 political.

25 The second is -- and again I have committed these to

1 writing, which I will give you -- is on our relationship
2 with America, because I think one recurrent theme of
3 this is, you know, this decision that we were going to
4 stand shoulder to shoulder with America, we would be
5 with America, this American partnership is tough to do.
6 I mean, it is easy to say; it is tough to do.

7 That is particularly so in circumstances where in
8 any operation of this size, I mean, America frankly is
9 going to be in the lead and going to have the
10 overwhelming amount of resources and assets.

11 So the question that people raise perfectly
12 naturally is: Is it worth it? I mean, is the pain/gain
13 ratio really worth it? I think you do have to consider
14 that. My view obviously is clear that it is. I think
15 when I look back to Kosovo, I don't think we could
16 possibly have done that without American intervention.
17 I think that intervention was absolutely central to
18 being able to deal with that, and so I believe it's
19 important we keep that relationship together, but
20 I think we have to be realistic about it. When we are
21 in a situation like this we are going to have to accept
22 that it's going to be difficult and hard, because there
23 will be situations in which America is determined to go
24 its own way and where our influence may be at some
25 levels very great but at other levels they will have

1 their own strategy and their own interests.

2 I do think that means that our emphasis on other
3 multilateral relationships is also extremely important.
4 I personally think there is an even stronger argument
5 today for developing both European defence capability
6 and also nation building capacity, because I think in
7 both of those areas we could do far more and therefore
8 have more weight and more leverage if we were in
9 alongside others.

10 I think that's also true, by the way, of the way the
11 United Nations do this too. In the work I do now with
12 the Palestinian authority, where actually we are doing
13 precisely those things in a sense that were also the
14 challenge in Iraq, building institutional capacity,
15 building civil policing and security and so on, what I
16 have found from that is that no one nation, actually not even
17 America, is capable of doing that on its own. It is
18 a cooperative effort and the capacity should be built on
19 a cooperative basis.

20 The final thing I would say is this, and this is
21 through my experience of being Prime Minister, not just
22 in this situation but in other situations too. I think
23 what does come across as very frustrating is when I read
24 the evidence of people who have come to you and said
25 "Well, we can see there was a real problem here

1 particularly on the resource question," and I am in
2 Downing Street having given a strong instruction to say
3 "If there is a resource issue, pay the money" and the
4 Chancellor is agreeable to that.

5 We need to think about when we are in a situation
6 like this and particularly in the first critical stages
7 of nation building I think you need a transmission
8 system of information to the Prime Minister that is
9 qualitatively different from the one we had.

10 I think, you know, that bit of it I think -- you
11 know, I changed the Downing Street structure, as you
12 know, because originally you have one foreign policy
13 advisor dealing with all foreign policy and Northern
14 Ireland. I then switched it into effectively three
15 actually, but one foreign policy dealing with Europe,
16 and one foreign policy advisor dealing with the rest of
17 the issues, but I think in retrospect for that first
18 period you actually need the right situation in the
19 Cabinet Office/Number 10, a top level ability headed by
20 a senior person that is going to go direct to the Prime
21 Minister. That's not to say that your Foreign Secretary
22 and your Defence Secretaries, your Development
23 Secretaries are not going to be involved in this, but
24 what does come out to me from some of the pages of the evidence
that
25 have been given to me is a frustration about this.

