

1 Friday, 29 January 2010
2 (9.30 am)

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. Today the
5 Iraq Inquiry will be hearing from the Rt Hon Tony Blair,
6 the Prime Minister until June 2007.

7 We have much to cover today and the Committee hopes
8 we can go about our business in an orderly way and, in
9 fairness to all, not be distracted by disruptions. As
10 in all our hearings, the right of our witness to respond
11 must be respected and those here today were selected
12 through a free public ballot overseen by an independent
13 arbiter. We remind them of the behaviour they are
14 expected to observe.

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

21 Good morning.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Good morning.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to start by welcoming our
24 witness and the others who join us at the
25 QE2 Conference Centre here today, as well as all those

1 who are watching this session, either on television or
2 through the Internet.

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

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

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

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

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

21 The Inquiry is not a trial.

22 The committee before you is independent and
23 non-political. We come to our work with no
24 preconceptions and we are committed to doing a thorough
25 job based on the evidence. We aim to deliver our report

1 around the end of this year.

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

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

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

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

1 Iraq.

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

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

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

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

19 There have been many public speeches, statements,
20 interviews and Parliamentary Committee hearings about
21 Iraq. But in fairness to everyone concerned, and to our
22 witness, we shall want, throughout today, to pursue this
23 broad question which lies behind many of the very
24 specific issues we shall be examining in the course of
25 today's hearing.

1 I shall now turn to Sir Roderic Lyne to open the
2 questions. Sir Roderic?

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

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

23 We will come in detail on to the WMD issues later
24 on. The policy that your government and the
25 United States administration under the newly elected

1 President Bush adopted in 2001 through parallel reviews
2 of Iraq policy was to reinforce this strategy of
3 containment, to strengthen it, and the two governments
4 led the way in putting forward what was called a smart
5 sanctions resolution at the United Nations, didn't
6 succeed in getting the UN Security Council to adopt that
7 in the summer of 2001, though it was eventually adopted
8 in May of 2002, as Security Council Resolution 1409.

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

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

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

1 back in 1998, against Saddam.

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

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

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

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

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

22 Would that be a fair summary?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the way I would put it is this:
24 that the sanctions were obviously eroding, we couldn't
25 get support for them. This so-called smart sanctions

1 framework, we actually, prior to September 11, couldn't
2 get support for at that time. So we were in a bit of
3 a difficulty there, and, of course, the fact is that
4 Saddam -- as I say, we had taken military action in
5 1998. There was a very long history, of course, of the
6 dealings with Saddam. One of the things I have done for
7 the purpose of the Inquiry is go back through my
8 speeches prior to September 11 and -- I mean, I have
9 actually got one or two of them here, but it is actually
10 quite interesting.

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

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me summarise their impact then.

14 Their impact is, regularly, through 1997, 1998, 1999,
15 2000 and 2001, I am saying Saddam must comply with the
16 UN Resolutions and force is an option, but all of this,
17 frankly, was in circumstances where this wasn't the top
18 priority for us, and I remember at the very first
19 meeting that we had, myself and President Bush,
20 in February 2001, just after he had come to power as
21 President of the United States, we dealt with Iraq with
22 Colin Powell, but it was very much in the context of
23 trying to get a different sanctions framework in place.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So if I put it in rather simple terms: he
25 hadn't, at this point, broken out of the box that he had

1 been put in, although there were some holes in the box.

2 Would that be --

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

4 substantial.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, they needed attention.

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

7 Sir Roderic, forgive me for interrupting, but it is

8 absolutely essential to realise this: if September 11

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

10 Saddam any possibility of him reconstituting his

11 programmes would not have been the same. But

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

13 I will explain what a difference that made to the

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

15 view, changed, and changed dramatically.

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

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

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

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

20 a massive shock, which changed the international

21 environment, and particularly, with regard to this

22 question -- and your former Foreign Secretary spoke

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

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

25 the United States perceived the world. It changed the

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

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

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

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

19 The point about this terrorist act was that over
20 3,000 people had been killed on the streets of New York,
21 an absolutely horrific event, but this is what really
22 changed my perception of risk, the calculus of risk for
23 me: if those people, inspired by this religious
24 fanaticism could have killed 30,000, they would have.

25 For those of us who dealt with terrorism from the

1 IRA, and, incidentally, I don't want to minimise the
2 impact of that terrorism; each act of terrorism is
3 wicked and wrong and to be deplored. But the terrorism
4 that an organisation like the IRA were engaged in was
5 terrorism directed towards a political purpose, maybe
6 unjustified, but it was within a certain framework that
7 you could understand.

8 The point about this act in New York was that, had
9 they been able to kill even more people than those
10 3,000, they would have, and so, after that time, my view
11 was you could not take risks with this issue at all, and
12 one dimension of it, because we were advised, obviously,
13 that these people would use chemical or biological
14 weapons or a nuclear device, if they could get hold of
15 them -- that completely changed our assessment of where
16 the risks for security lay, and just so that we make
17 this absolutely clear, this was not an American
18 position, this was my position and the British position,
19 very, very clearly, and so, from September 11 onwards --
20 we obviously had to deal with Afghanistan, but from that
21 moment, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Iraq, the machinery,
22 as you know, of AQ Khan, who was the former Pakistani
23 nuclear scientist and who had been engaged in illicit
24 activities and in distributing this material, all of
25 this had to be brought to an end.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So that was your perception of the way in
2 general the risks, the global risks, had changed; that
3 one had to think about them differently. But Saddam
4 himself was not a sponsor of Al-Qaeda, he hadn't been
5 involved in 9/11 in any shape or form.

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

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

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

21 At this point, now, let's say, in the first half of
22 2002, where did that leave containment? Was it still,
23 if one could reinforce it, a sustainable strategy?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think this is a really important
25 point, actually, and I have looked at it quite

1 carefully, because I did at the time -- and it is really
2 worth reflecting on for a moment now -- and that is the
3 nature of this replacement sanctions framework.

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

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

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

20 Now, the issue was whether this successor, so-called
21 smart sanctions regime or framework would be a valid way
22 of containing him. It is worth just going to the -- and
23 I think -- but forgive me if I mention a document and if
24 you haven't -- but I think you have got the options
25 paper we got before --

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The March options paper is in the public
2 domain. You can get it on the Internet. I'm not
3 certain offhand whether or not it has been
4 declassified --

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

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

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

13 If you read the paper, what they are saying is, it
14 is possible it might work, but, equally, it is possible
15 it won't. But here is a point that I think is really,
16 really important on the so-called smart sanctions, that
17 there was then, following that paper, a whole series of
18 government discussions about these smart sanctions.

19 Each of them were indicating that they might work but
20 they could give no guarantee of it working. The
21 previous regime had obviously not yielded -- the
22 previous sanctions framework had not yielded the
23 benefits that we thought, in terms of sustainability,
24 and the thing that I think is very important about this
25 is the paper which I think has been declassified,

1 because I think that was done just yesterday, which is
2 about Iraq, the new policy framework. This is the paper
3 on 7 March 2001.

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

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

1 you get to May 2002.

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What I felt was exactly what I was being

1 advised, and I think the common sense of it might have
2 worked, it might not have worked, but it was at least as
3 likely, if not more likely, I would say, that it
4 wouldn't work.

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

17 So the trade sanctions part of this, which we know
18 he had been breaking under the previous regime was not
19 a peripheral, but an essential part of that sanctions
20 framework being valid, and so the problem was -- I mean,
21 an accurate summary of the position -- I don't think
22 anyone could really dispute this at the time -- is that
23 containment through sanctions had basically been
24 eroding, we now had a new sanctions framework, but this
25 new sanctions framework, to get it through the UN had

1 been watered down in the absolutely vital component of
2 the trade restrictions.

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

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

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That is the reason we called for the
23 options paper. I mean, the options were basically
24 these: we had taken a decision, post-September 11, that
25 this issue had been to be confronted and there were

1 a number of different ways it could be confronted. It
2 could be confronted by an effective sanctions framework,
3 it could be confronted by Saddam allowing the inspectors
4 back in to do their work properly and compliance with
5 the UN Resolutions, or, in the final analysis, if he was
6 not prepared -- if sanctions could not contain him and
7 he was not prepared to allow the UN inspectors back in,
8 then the option of removing Saddam was there.

9 That option, incidentally, had always been there.
10 After September 11 what changed, as I say, was our
11 calculation, mine and I think the Americans' as well,
12 that we couldn't go on like this.

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

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

22 Having got that paper, what did you do in order to
23 have it discussed and reviewed and looked at? What kind
24 of meetings did you hold about it? Whom did you
25 consult?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously we were talking -- I was
2 speaking very closely with Jack Straw, with those who
3 were advising me at the time, we were talking obviously
4 to the Ministry of Defence people and the
5 Defence Secretary as well, and we were trying to get an
6 assessment -- that's why, as I say, there was a lot of
7 discussion inside government: is this new sanctions
8 framework really going to do it or not, is it going to
9 be effective?

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

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you have an actual meeting to discuss
13 the paper and take a decision on it?

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

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think you got the paper in March, you
21 were seeing President Bush in April, and before you went
22 to see President Bush, you had a meeting at Chequers
23 with number of people which was a sort of briefing
24 meeting for Crawford, but you didn't have anything like
25 a Cabinet Committee meeting which looked at this paper

1 and had a sort of structured debate about it?

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did have a very structured debate

3 with the people. I mean, the fact that it happened at

4 Chequers rather than Downing Street I don't think is

5 particularly relevant to it, but I think the simple

6 answer is: did we consider those other options?

7 Absolutely. That's why we had the paper drawn up.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you considered those options, how

9 diverse was the range of advice you were getting on

10 them? Were you getting advice fed into you from people

11 with a real knowledge of the Middle East and Iraq, and

12 were you having people challenging the paper and

13 pointing out some of the possible downsides, if you went

14 this way or that way?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The one thing I found throughout this

16 whole matter from a very early stage is that I was never

17 short of people challenging me on it.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you identify who they were?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There were people within the Cabinet,

20 obviously; for example, Robin Cook and from time to time

21 Clare Short.

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

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they weren't, but we discussed this,

24 obviously, prior to the invasion of Iraq. I think there

25 were no fewer than 24 different Cabinet meetings. This

1 was a topic that was right through the mainstream --

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you didn't discuss the options paper

3 in Cabinet?

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We didn't discuss the options paper

5 specifically in Cabinet.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It didn't even go to all the Cabinet.

7 I mean, Clare Short didn't get a paper. She complained

8 that she hadn't got it in the first place.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But the discussion that we had in

10 Cabinet was substantive discussion. We had it again and

11 again and again, and the options were very simple. The

12 options were: a sanctions framework that was effective;

13 alternatively, the UN inspectors doing the job;

14 alternatively, you have to remove Saddam.

15 Those were the options.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What were the downside arguments being

17 put to you about removing Saddam?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, the downside arguments -- and this

19 was partly from, for example -- you know, I was reading

20 telegrams coming in from ambassadors abroad and so on.

21 The downside arguments were obviously going to be that,

22 not merely is military action always something that you

23 should consider only as a last resort, but there were

24 issues to do with relationships in the Muslim world,

25 there were issues to do with what the effect would be in

1 the Arab world and so on.

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

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Most of the advice was a worry about

1 a humanitarian catastrophe if Saddam was removed. There
2 was advice -- and I actually called for papers on this,
3 I think a little bit later -- on what the Sunni Shia
4 relationship would be. That was obviously an issue. It
5 was an issue we raised within our own deliberations with
6 the Americans and elsewhere.

7 So all of these things were factors that we had to
8 take into account, but the primary consideration for me
9 was to send an absolutely powerful, clear and
10 unremitting message that, after September 11, if you
11 were a regime engaged in WMD, you had to stop.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That brings me, I think, to the final
13 points that I want to ask, because from the evidence
14 that we have heard so far, from now a large number of
15 witnesses, and from the documents we have read, it does
16 begin to appear that by about March or April of 2002 you
17 were strongly attracted to the idea of changing the
18 regime in Iraq, and, in a sense, in doing so, you were
19 building on a philosophy of humanitarian intervention
20 that you had first, I think, set out in a very public
21 way in your Chicago speech of April 1999, and you
22 in April, of course, of 2002, after your meeting with
23 President Bush, returned to it in your speech at the
24 George Bush Presidential Library at College Station when
25 you said, talking in general of regime change, not

1 specifically in this paragraph about Iraq:

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Okay. Let me make it quite clear. In

1 the Chicago speech, in 1999, what I was doing was
2 setting out very clearly what I thought the consequences
3 were of an interdependent world, and what I was really
4 saying was this: that whereas in the past people might
5 have thought that a security problem in one part of the
6 world can be divorced from its impact on another part,
7 in the world that was developing, we were no longer able
8 to do that, not financially, not in terms of security,
9 not in terms, actually, of the cultural issues.

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

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

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

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

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is an important speech.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, because, if you read the speech,
22 you will see very clearly that the basis for what I'm
23 saying is not that I now believe that we should apply,
24 rather than a test of national interest, a moral test --
25 I mean, I think there are moral issues to do with

1 dictators and so on. What I was saying was that, from
2 now on, in the new world that is developing, we should
3 realise that it is in our national interest to
4 understand that the problem in a different part of the
5 world can come back and hit us in ours.

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

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

20 "We cannot, of course, intervene in all cases, but
21 where countries are engaged in the terror or WMD
22 business, we should not shrink from confronting them.
23 Some can be offered a way out, a route to
24 respectability. I hope in time that Syria, Iran and
25 even North Korea can accept the need to change their

1 relationships with the outside world. A new
2 relationship is on offer. But they must know that
3 sponsoring terrorism or WMD is unacceptable."

4 Then I go on to deal with Iraq:

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

9 Then I go on:

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

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

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

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

22 I think there is a danger that we end up with a very
23 sort of binary distinction between regime change here
24 and WMD here. The truth of the matter is that a regime
25 that is brutal and oppressive, that, for example, has

1 used WMD against its own people, as Saddam did, and had
2 killed tens of thousands of people by the use of
3 chemical weapons, such a regime is a bigger threat, if
4 it has WMD, than one that is otherwise benign.

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

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

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Let me deal with the Fern Britton

1 interview. Sir Roderic, even with all my experience in
2 dealing with interviews, it still indicates that I have
3 got something to learn about it. This was an issue, let
4 me just explain, that was given some weeks before your
5 Inquiry began.

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

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

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was recorded.

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

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

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

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In November.

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

23 It was in no sense a change of the position, and
24 I just simply say to you, the position was that it was
25 the breach of the United Nations Resolutions on WMD.

1 That was the cause. It was then, and it remains.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in April -- this is my final point

3 before I hand over -- of 2002, you were not taking the

4 view that the need to change the regime in Iraq should

5 be the main driver of your strategy because the

6 situation on WMD essentially hadn't changed very much

7 over the previous three or more years?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, the position on WMD had changed

9 dramatically as a result of September 11.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The facts on WMD had not changed; the

11 perception of the risk had changed, but not the risk

12 itself.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. Look, one of the things that you

14 always have to do in this situation -- you are

15 absolutely right to draw attention to it -- is you have

16 to, when you are charged with the responsibility of

17 trying to protect your country -- and that should be the

18 job of the Prime Minister -- you have to take an

19 assessment of risk.

20 Now, my assessment of risk prior to September 11 was

21 that Saddam was a menace, that he was a threat, he was

22 a monster, but we would have to try and make best.

23 If you had asked me prior to September 11, did

24 I have any real belief in his good faith. No, I didn't.

25 Did I really think that a new sanctions framework was

1 going to do the trick? No, I didn't.

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

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

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

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Just before Baroness Prashar comes on, the

1 government last night declassified two documents. We
2 weren't proposing to put them up on the website because
3 in themselves they only tell a very small part of the
4 story, but since our witness has referred to one of
5 them, we shall now put both of them up on the website.
6 They are declassified.

7 Baroness Prashar?

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

9 Mr Blair, I want to pick up the more detailed
10 developments in policy, particularly at the beginning of
11 2002, because it was, I think, eight years ago to date
12 when President Bush told the Congress in his annual
13 State of the Union address about the "Axis of Evil", and
14 I think your two advisers, Mr Jonathan Powell and
15 Sir David Manning, said that, in a sense, there was
16 a shift in emphasis, particularly when regime change had
17 actually become an active policy for the USA, because
18 although it had been -- there had been the
19 Iraq Liberation Act and it was a policy, but it wasn't
20 an active policy. It actually became an active policy
21 at that stage.

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I would say that the shift really

1 happened straight after September 11. I mean, I think,
2 if I may just quote from -- straight after September 11,
3 what I actually said on this issue, when I reflected on
4 the terrorism was:

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We intended to respond by saying, "From

1 now on we have to deal with it".

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So the preparation for the meeting

3 at Crawford that took place at Chequers, I think was

4 a preparation meeting for Crawford, and according to

5 Alastair Campbell's diaries, you told the Chequers

6 meeting it was regime change in part because of WMD, but

7 more broadly because of a threat to the region and the

8 world. That's true?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think these things were sort of

10 conjoined, really. I mean, the fact is it was an

11 appalling regime and we couldn't run the risk of such

12 a regime being allowed to develop WMD.

13 Can I just make one point which I think is quite

14 important as well? Of course, it was President Clinton

15 in 1998 that signed the Iraq Liberation Act and that

16 policy of regime change became the policy of the

17 government.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I am aware of that, because it

19 became more active, as I said.

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But can I just make this point? Because

21 I think it is very important. If you study the detail

22 of that Act, the reason he comes out for regime change,

23 President Clinton, is because of the breach of the

24 United Nations Resolutions on WMD.

25 So there is a way you can get a sense -- and some of

1 this has come in the evidence. As it were, the
2 Americans are for regime change, we are for dealing with
3 WMD. It is more a different way of expressing the same
4 proposition. The Americans in a sense were saying, "We
5 are for regime change because we don't trust he is ever
6 going to give up his WMD ambitions". We were saying,
7 "We have to deal with his WMD ambitions. If that means
8 regime change, so be it".

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

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

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

20 So all those options were being explored, and, as
21 I say, following that meeting and before I went to see
22 President Bush, there was quite an intense interaction
23 on this whole issue that Sir Roderic was raising with me
24 about smart sanctions, because I needed to get a sense
25 whether this policy was a -- was really going to be

1 a runner or not.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But why was the Chief of Defence

3 Staff present at this meeting?

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because it was very obvious that the

5 American system certainly wasn't going to rule out

6 military action, and, you know, from a very early stage,

7 I could see coming down the track -- I mean straight

8 after September 11, frankly -- that there were going to

9 be some very difficult decisions about this in the

10 future.

11 So one of the things that I always tried to do,

12 particularly if we were -- if military action was even

13 a possibility and the paper had made it clear it was

14 a possibility, to get the Chief of the Defence Staff

15 right alongside the discussion and the planning and the

16 policy.

17 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What advice did he give you at that

18 meeting? Because I think you had asked the Foreign

19 Secretary and the Defence Secretary to produce papers.

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, the defence --

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: These papers were discussed, but

22 what advice did the Chief of the Defence Staff give you

23 at that meeting?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: He was laying out again various options

25 on the military side. He was expressing his views.

1 I think Mike Boyce told you about this in his evidence.

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

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

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

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

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Because we heard from Jack Straw
25 about the advice he gave you in advance of that meeting,

1 which is the one that has already been referred to, but
2 we have heard that, while there might have been some
3 private differences at the time between you and the
4 Foreign Secretary over the desired final objective,
5 where the regime change was the objective, you were
6 agreed on the tactics: namely, that it would be
7 essential to go through the United Nations, because,
8 without that, it would not be possible for the Cabinet
9 or anyone else to support military action. Is that
10 a correct --

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

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

25 Therefore, the United Nations route, it wasn't just

1 that it was important for all sorts of political
2 reasons, legal reasons and so on, it was -- I mean to do
3 with the internal politics of the UK -- it was also
4 important to me because I didn't want America to feel
5 that it had no option but to do it on its own.

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

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

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we then come to Crawford?
17 Because you had one-to-one discussions with
18 President Bush without any advisers present. Can you
19 tell us what was decided at these discussions?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was nothing actually decided, but
21 let me just make one thing clear about this: one thing
22 that is really important, I think, when you are dealing
23 with other leaders, is you establish -- and this is
24 particularly important, I think, for the Prime Minister
25 of the United Kingdom and the President of the

1 United States -- you establish a close and strong
2 relationship. You know, I had it with President Clinton
3 and I had it again with President Bush, and that's
4 important. So some of it you will do in a formal
5 meeting, but it is also important to be able to discuss
6 in a very frank way what the issues were.

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

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

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what you are suggesting is that
24 you were having general discussions in terms of getting
25 views across to each other, trying to understand and

1 establish a rapport and a relationship?

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

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: During the course of these

4 discussions, do you think you gave many commitments?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The only commitment I gave, and I gave

6 this very openly, at the meeting was a commitment to

7 deal with Saddam.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were at one that you had to

9 deal with --

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and that wasn't a private

11 commitment, that was a public one.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were agreed on the ends but

13 not on the means?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were agreed on both, actually, as it

15 came to finally, but we were agreed that we had to

16 confront this issue, that Saddam had to come back into

17 compliance with the international community, and, as

18 I think I said in the press conference with

19 President Bush, the method of doing that is open, and

20 indeed he made the same point.

21 I just want to make one other point about this.

22 This was about six months from September 11 and one

23 major part of what President Bush was saying to me was

24 just to express his fear, actually, that, if we weren't

25 prepared to act in a really strong way, then we ran the

1 risk of sending a disastrous signal out to the world.
2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But there is -- so many people
3 believed that you entered into a firm commitment because
4 some undertakings were given that you would be with him
5 no matter what, whatever the circumstances.

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

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

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

1 President Bush says:

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

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

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

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

21 So -- and I go on to describe the UN Resolutions.
22 So the position was not a covert position, it was an
23 open position, and, of course, what subsequently the
24 debate was about, in July and then in September at the
25 crucial meeting --

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Before we move on to that, that's
2 what you were saying, but what did President Bush
3 understand, do you think, you meant by that? Because we
4 heard from Alastair Campbell the tenor of your
5 correspondence with him, but what was his understanding?
6 What did he take it to mean?

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

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

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

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was the former. Look, this is an
25 alliance that we have with the United States of America.

1 It is not a contract. It is not, "We do this for you,
2 you do this for us". It is an alliance and it is an
3 alliance, I say to you very openly, I believe in
4 passionately. I had been through with
5 President Clinton, Kosovo, and just let me emphasise to
6 you, 85 per cent of the assets we used in Kosovo were
7 American assets. I had real difficulty persuading
8 President Clinton that it was right to go all the way on
9 Kosovo, and he was in a really difficult position and it
10 was an immensely courageous decision he took, because
11 the American people were saying to him, "Look, this
12 place is thousands of miles away from America. Let the
13 Europeans deal with it. It is on their doorstep". It
14 is important to understand this.

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

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

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

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He was talking about a wider period in
23 2002, not just about one meeting.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but the fact is, at that meeting --
25 and it is, I think, the other evidence that has been

1 given to you, particularly by David Manning, is very
2 clear about this -- we were setting out a position, and,
3 as I say, that position was not a private position, it
4 was a public position, but I was just explaining about
5 the American line, because it is important and it is
6 important in understanding my thinking on this.

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think what he took from that is

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

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

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

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That is what Jonathan Powell said.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't so much for tactical reasons.
2 What I believed was, if you wanted to make a real change
3 to this whole issue -- again, this is very important to
4 understanding certainly my strategic thinking, but
5 I think the strategic thinking of many people who looked
6 at this issue. I would probably have a far greater
7 understanding of it today, actually, than even back
8 then.

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

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

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

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said a moment or two ago that you had
25 agreed with President Bush, not only on the ends but

1 also on the means, but the Americans actually had
2 a different view of the means, in that they were already
3 planning military action, and they had an explicit
4 policy of seeking regime change.

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

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were of course pushing the UN route.

9 So the American view was regime change, as I say,
10 because they didn't believe Saddam would ever, in good
11 faith, give up his WMD ambitions or programmes.

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

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

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another thing --

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Incidentally, if I can just point this
25 out, at several occasions over the next few months,

1 President Bush made it clear to me that, if the UN route
2 worked, then it worked. We would have had to have taken
3 yes for an answer.

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

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

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

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

23 I think it is right to say -- indeed, Jack Straw
24 said it -- that you were relentless in trying to
25 persuade the Americans to make more and faster progress

1 on the Middle East peace process. Ultimately,
2 Jack Straw said it was a matter of huge -- in his
3 evidence the other day -- it was a matter of huge
4 frustration that we weren't able to achieve something
5 which you had been seeking so strongly.

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

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

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

25 Now, in mitigation of that, we did eventually,

1 although later than I wanted, get the road map adopted,
2 and the road map was extremely important. Secondly,
3 however -- and, again, I know more about this now
4 probably than I would have known then, because of the
5 work I do now -- I think, truthfully, with the Intifada
6 still raging in Palestine, it would have been pretty
7 difficult to have got this thing back together again.

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

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think, if I recall rightly, you were
20 arguing very strongly throughout 2002 to the White House
21 that making progress on this problem -- as you say, it
22 wasn't a question of a trade-off, it was because
23 achieving progress on this was going to make a huge
24 difference to opinion in the region, to reactions in the
25 region, to the reactions in the Muslim world if it came

1 to the point where you had to take military action
2 against Iraq.

3 So, as you have just said, these two things were
4 linked together, but the Americans were not able to see
5 the logic of this in the same way?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, it was a debate that continued,
7 and I think, you know, you have got a point actually,
8 Sir Roderic. I think that they never -- this is
9 something -- I think it is different with the American
10 system now, and I think it was different actually at the
11 end of President Bush's time, in fact. The reason he
12 launched the Annapolis peace process was because of
13 this.

14 But I think there was a tendency to see these things
15 separately, and I regarded them, as I say, as all part
16 of the one thing, and, you know, yes, I mean, I said
17 this at the time and I would say it now -- I mean,
18 I wished we would have made better and faster progress
19 on the Israel --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you didn't make it a pre-condition
21 with Bush?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, because it wouldn't be right to do
23 that either. You should only take the action in respect
24 of Iraq if you think it is intrinsically valid in its
25 own terms.

1 Having said that, my whole construct was to get as
2 broad a coalition as possible, and I thought that if we
3 managed to get the peace process really pushing forward,
4 we were more likely to get a broader and deeper
5 coalition.

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

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

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

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But was President Bush just then taking
25 it for granted? When you said, "This is vital", was he

1 just taking it for granted that we were going to support
2 him on Iraq anyway? We were beginning now to join them
3 in military planning, you said you were going to stand
4 shoulder to shoulder with him, and so we would be there
5 anyway, even if he didn't push hard and get the progress
6 that you were asking for on the Arab/Israel question?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: When you say we would have been there
8 anyway, I mean, we were wanting to go down the UN route,
9 and I think, if we hadn't gone down the UN route, it
10 would have been very difficult indeed.

11 However, in respect of the Israel/Palestine issue,
12 you know, it is there and in the record, as to how
13 important I thought it was. To be fair to him, he would
14 say that getting the Israelis to agree to the road
15 map -- admittedly, this didn't happen until, I think,
16 April 2003 -- was a major step forward, and it was
17 a major step forward. It is still the governing
18 document for the peace process today, and I can assure
19 you it was a big push to get that agreed, me with him,
20 and him with the Israelis.

21 But there was also -- as I say, the Intifada was
22 going on, the Intifada being the uprising on the
23 Palestinian side. So Israel was -- you know, it was
24 a difficult situation. Israel was losing a lot of
25 people in terrorist attacks, there were retaliations

1 against the Palestinians. There was a very bloody
2 situation.

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

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

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

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

25 Now, what they worried about was the consequences of

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you everyone. Let's resume and I'll
2 ask Baroness Prashar to open the questions.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

22 I think your Chief of Staff told us that the MoD had
23 advocated the largest package, the large land force
24 option, because they felt this was important to their
25 relations with the US military, and also because they

1 felt it would help army morale.

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

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

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

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

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: As I was just explaining, when I come to
21 take this decision, the very first thing I do is I ask
22 the military for their view, and their view in this
23 instance was that they were up for doing it and that
24 they preferred to be right at the centre of things.
25 That, actually -- I'm not hiding behind them, because

1 that was my view too. I thought, if it was right for us
2 to be in it, we should be in it there alongside our
3 principal ally, the United States, I thought that in
4 Afghanistan and I thought that in Iraq also.

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

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

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

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

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

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

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why did you choose -- you were
24 advised, but you were of that view. Why were you of
25 that view?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because, if you believe it is right and
2 you are going to do it, my view was that it is best for
3 Britain to be in there, right alongside, and I say that
4 because I regarded this whole issue as a threat to our
5 security, as well as a threat to the security of the
6 United States of America.

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

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

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

23 The reason was to say: here we have this situation,
24 in which we believe there is a threat, America believes
25 there is a threat, we are going to act jointly. We have

1 acted jointly before, we are going to act jointly again,
2 and it does in part derive from the importance that
3 certainly I attach, and I hope the country does, to the
4 American alliance, and also to the fact that our armed
5 forces -- and the thing that is extraordinary about them
6 and magnificent about them, they are prepared to do the
7 difficult things.

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

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

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

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

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Right. Thank you very much.

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

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Mr Blair, I would like to turn now to
22 the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

23 Once you decided, in 2002, that it was essential to
24 pursue the UN route, it was weapons of mass destruction
25 rather than human rights or any other issue that became

1 crucial in building the case and establishing a legal
2 base for military action.

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

8 Was that your understanding?

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

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

18 It was always relevant to me, because I think that
19 it gives -- it gives a different sense of the threat of
20 the nature of Saddam's regime. The fact that there
21 were, on some accounts, a million casualties in the
22 Iran/Iraq war, 100,000 Kurds that had been killed,
23 100,000 killed by political killing, we had had the
24 Kuwait situation where, again, tens of thousands died.
25 The actual use of chemical weapons against his own

1 people. So I think it is always important to remember
2 from my perspective the nature of the regime did make
3 a difference to the nature of the WMD threat.

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

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: You mean --

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

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

23 So, yes, you are absolutely right, that -- my
24 assessment of the security threat was intimately
25 connected with the nature of the regime.

1 I don't know whether the members of the Committee
2 understand this, but when you actually read the
3 descriptions of what happened when Saddam Hussein used
4 chemical weapons in the Halabja village, and by some
5 accounts as many as 5,000 people died through chemical
6 weapons, there are people in Iraq today still suffering
7 the consequence of that, to me that indicated a mindset
8 that was horrific.

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I would say very much that we did
23 give weight to that, and that's why, by the time you get
24 to September 2002, you have got a lot more information.
25 But it is one of the things that is most difficult

1 sometimes, because people look at this in the light of
2 what we know now. Saddam and weapons of mass
3 destruction was not a counter-intuitive notion. You
4 know, he had used them, he definitely had them. He was
5 in breach of, I think, ten United Nations Resolutions on
6 them, and so, in a sense, it would have required quite
7 strong evidence the other way to have been doubting the
8 fact that he had this programme.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Sir Lawrence Freedman will be asking
10 you in a moment about the September dossier, but I would
11 like to just move on for the moment to another aspect,
12 and that is -- you said on a number of occasions in
13 2002, and, indeed, in early 2003, that Iraq was a test
14 of the international community's ability to deal with
15 both WMD and terrorism. If I could just quote from your
16 monthly press conference on 18 February 2003:

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

21 Can you tell us how you saw those links, and, again,
22 what evidence you had that there were links? Because,
23 as you know, the Butler Committee has established that
24 there weren't direct links at that time between Saddam
25 and Al-Qaeda.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The link was, in my mind, at that time,
2 this: that there was a proliferation threat that was
3 potentially growing, because we had Iran, we had
4 North Korea, we had Libya, we had Iraq, obviously.
5 I would put a lot of emphasis on the AQ Khan activities.

6 My fear was -- and I would say I hold this fear
7 stronger today than I did back then as a result of what
8 Iran particularly today is doing. My fear is that
9 states that are highly repressive or failed, the danger
10 of a WMD link is that they become porous, they construct
11 all sorts of different alliances with people and, yes,
12 it is true we did not have evidence that Saddam was, for
13 example, behind the September 11 attacks, and part of
14 the difference between ourselves and the Americans was
15 we were always saying we don't accept that.

16 It is interesting -- and this is referred to in the
17 Butler Report, however, that actually Zarqawi did go
18 into Iraq, in fact, prior to the invasion.

19 Now, when I look -- because I spent a lot of time
20 obviously out in the region today. When I look at the
21 way that Iran today links up with terror groups -- and
22 this is a different topic for a different day, but
23 I would say that a large part of the destabilisation in
24 the Middle East at the present time comes from Iran.
25 The link between Iran, having nuclear weapons

1 capability, and those types of terrorist organisations,
2 it is the combination of that that makes them
3 particularly dangerous.

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

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

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

20 I think what's very interesting -- and we will come
21 on to this later, but when you actually look at what
22 happened in Iraq and what happens, indeed, in
23 Afghanistan today, what happens in Yemen today, Somalia,
24 many different countries round the region, there are
25 very strong links between terrorist organisations and

1 states that will support or sponsor them.

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

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

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

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?

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

21 I believe -- I think it's clearly in the documents
22 and elsewhere -- that in presentations of the problem of
23 WMD, certainly when you get to the nuclear issue, Iran,
24 Libya, North Korea, were put far ahead of Iraq. So
25 given what you are saying about the Iran issue now,

1 I wonder why Iraq was chosen rather than Iran?

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

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

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That had a long history before.

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

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

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: They had been rumbled on the AQ Khan
22 network, but it was interesting, when they finally gave
23 it up, and it was at the end of 2003, we then discovered
24 that they actually had a more extensive programme than
25 we had thought, and I think AQ Khan at some point within

1 the next couple of years was then put under house
2 arrest. North Korea went back into six party talks.

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

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

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had to deal with all of them, but you
23 are absolutely right, the reason why we focused on Iraq
24 was of the history of UN Resolutions being breached and
25 also -- and I think this is a pretty important point --

1 he had used them. Probably not merely his own people,
2 but thousands of people in the Iran/Iraq war.

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

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

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

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

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This leads us naturally to
24 the September dossier. We have heard a lot in these
25 hearings about the origins of the production of the

1 dossier, and I don't want to go into all of that now,
2 but two issues do stand out: the particular question of
3 the 45-minute claim; and the more general assertion that
4 the intelligence was beyond doubt.

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

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

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the Sun and the Express.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I have said on many occasions, not least
17 to the Butler Inquiry, it would have been better to have
18 corrected it in the light of the significance it later
19 took on, but can I just point one thing out,
20 Sir Lawrence: she did an analysis between the
21 publication of the dossier on 24 September 2002 and the
22 BBC broadcast at the end of May 2003, which alleged that
23 we, Downing Street, had inserted this into the dossier,
24 probably knowing it was wrong. Then, of course,
25 obviously that then kicked off a huge controversy that

1 goes on to this day.

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

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

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

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I appreciate --

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

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

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

22 Did you understand the difference between the
23 45 minutes relating to battlefield munitions and, say,
24 a long-range missile?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I didn't focus on it a great deal at the

1 time, because it was mentioned by me, and then, as
2 I say, it was never actually mentioned again by me.

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

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

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

22 So just to clarify from what you said, you seem to
23 be saying that you hadn't actually paid a lot of
24 attention to this, so that, when it appeared in the
25 foreword -- the phrase is well-known about the

1 45 minutes -- you weren't particularly aware yourself
2 that you were saying something that went beyond what the
3 intelligence would really allow?

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

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have already mentioned, not just
9 the Standard, but a number of newspaper reports the next
10 day headlined this. It wasn't just a question of it
11 appearing as one part of a long discussion.

12 Presumably, at this point, it must have struck you
13 that something had hit home. Were you at all concerned
14 that in a issue of such moment that intelligence --
15 intelligence of a certain nature was getting
16 an exaggerated sense of importance?

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

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, we have been told.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It really assumed a vastly greater
23 importance at a later time, precisely because of the
24 allegation, which was an extraordinarily serious one,
25 that we, Downing Street, had deliberately falsified the

1 intelligence, which of course we hadn't.

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

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

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

25 "'Why now?' people ask. I agree, I cannot say that

1 this month or next, even this year or next, Saddam will
2 use his weapons."

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

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

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

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

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is indeed an issue, but the
21 point -- just to keep focused on it at the moment -- is
22 that the actual quality of the intelligence that the
23 British had and the Americans had was more important
24 about whether this was a shared assumption, because we
25 were now proposing, or you were hoping, indeed, as the

1 dossier was published, the President had promised to
2 take this through the UN route. So the quality of the
3 information was important.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Beyond your doubt, but beyond
25 anybody's doubt?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: If you -- if I had taken, for example,
2 the words out of -- even the 9 March 2002 or
3 the March 2002 JIC assessment, it said, "It was clear
4 that ..."

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

22 It is hard to come to any other conclusion than that
23 this person has a continuing WMD programme, and I mean,
24 we will come at a later point in this to the issue of
25 what the truth was about Saddam, because the

1 Iraq Survey Group, which is, in my view, an extremely
2 important document, has actually resolved the conundrum
3 and the riddle of what Saddam was up to, and we
4 therefore can see what happened.

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

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

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

24 But let me say what was troubling me at the time
25 was -- supposing we put it the other way round and it

1 was correct and I wasn't going to act on it, that was
2 the thing that worried me, and when I talked earlier
3 about the calculus of risk changing after
4 September 11th, it is really, really important, I think,
5 to understand this, so far as understanding the decision
6 I took, and, frankly, would take again: if there was any
7 possibility that he could develop weapons of mass
8 destruction, we should stop him. That was my view.
9 That was my view then and it's my view now.

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

13 Just to conclude on this for the moment, because we
14 have other questions to get to, I just want to put to
15 you -- and this is a comment made to us by
16 Sir David Omand -- he observed that:
17 "SIS overpromised and underdelivered."

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

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The most difficult thing, when you are
21 faced with a situation like this, is that it all depends
22 what happens afterwards as to how people regard your
23 behaviour at the time, and I have also been in
24 situations where, for example, when we had the July 2005
25 bombings, where people were saying, "Well, look at this

1 little snatch of intelligence here", or the Americans
2 indeed, for September 11, they had entire Congressional
3 hearings into, "Look at this bit of intelligence here".

4 So your worry is not simply: is the intelligence
5 correct, so that I can act? Your worry is also: if it
6 is correct, what am I going to do about it? So I don't
7 disagree with you at all. I think these things
8 obviously now look quite different and, as I say, the
9 Iraq Survey Group has resolved some of these riddles,
10 frankly, as to what Saddam was up to.

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

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

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

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I certainly got a sense that they were.

24 I think John Scarlett, in his evidence to you, explained
25 about he was firming up the assessments he made. But

1 when we actually came to the November UN Resolution, in
2 fact nobody disputed the issue of Saddam's WMD. People
3 disputed what we should do about it, we can come on to
4 all of that. But it really wasn't something that people
5 disputed at the time, and, you know, it is just
6 interesting, I was looking back over the debates that we
7 had on the publication of the dossier and just
8 recognising that -- of course, everyone now has
9 a different perception of this, but at the time there
10 were people saying to me, "I don't want military action
11 under any set of circumstances". There were also people
12 saying, "You are wasting time. You are not acting fast
13 enough".

14 For example, in the statement on the dossier of
15 24 September 2002, William Hague says:

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

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Firstly, could you go more slowly
25 and, secondly, there is a difference between a statement

1 being made by a member of the opposition, and it is
2 clear that the opposition at the time did take the
3 threat very seriously.

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

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

16 The reason I simply was -- I won't -- I'll spare the
17 stenographer and not go back over reading out the
18 quotes. What I'm saying to you, however, is that there
19 were people, perfectly justifiably and sensibly, also
20 saying -- and this gives you some idea of the context of
21 the time, "Look, you can't sit around and wait for this.
22 You know, you have got to take action and to take action
23 clearly and definitively", and so one of the most
24 difficult aspects of all of this in Iraq is that people
25 often say to political leaders, quite understandably,

1 "Listen to the people", and what you find in
2 circumstances of great controversy is that actually
3 there are different views, and in the end you have to
4 decide, and I decided that this intelligence justified
5 our considering Saddam as a significant and continuing
6 WMD threat and that we had to act on it.

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

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

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

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

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

19 First of all, there were the September JIC
20 assessments that talked of continuing production of
21 chemical weapons. In other words, this was a continuing
22 process. But secondly -- and this did have an impact on
23 me at the time, although this particular piece of
24 intelligence turned out later to be wrong, but at the
25 time, obviously, we didn't know that -- on 12 September,

1 in other words, after the 9 September JIC assessment but
2 before we did the dossier, I was told and specifically
3 briefed about these mobile production facilities for
4 biological weapons. So this was an additional and new
5 factor and this was very much linked to whether and how
6 Saddam might conceal his activities.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In terms of his nuclear programme?

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

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

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

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

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

1 foreshorten that time if you buy in the material".

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There is a judgment you have to make,

1 and you are right in saying, "If this and if that", but
2 you see, for me, because of the change
3 after September 11, I wasn't prepared to run that risk.
4 I really wasn't prepared to take the risk --

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were.

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

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

23 I formed the judgment, and it is a judgment in the
24 end. It is a decision. I had to take the decision, and
25 I believed, and in the end so did the Cabinet, so did

1 Parliament incidentally, that we were right not to run
2 that risk, but you are completely right, in the end,
3 what this is all about are the risks.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

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

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

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Martin?

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

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

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the growing threat, this
24 was something which essentially rested upon the
25 information that was published in the dossier?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, and in particular the information
2 that came in shortly before the dossier was published.

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

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

20 My question is: would it not have been reasonable
21 for you, and indeed expedient, to have explained
22 publicly, much earlier than you did, that while the UK
23 hoped for a peaceful outcome in disarming
24 Saddam Hussein, we were also preparing for all
25 eventualities including military action?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is a perfectly fair point, I think,
2 Sir Martin. Let me just explain our problem, though.
3 We had not decided we would take military action at that
4 point. On the other hand, you couldn't say it wasn't
5 a possibility. You know, in the part you have just read
6 out, you will notice I choose the words quite carefully.
7 I say, "No, no decisions have been taken", and the
8 trouble was people kept writing, "They have decided.
9 They are off on a military campaign and nothing is going
10 to stop them".

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

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

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yet several military witnesses have
25 told us that the need for this secrecy was proving quite

1 an impediment to various aspects of preparation. Didn't
2 you have the skill to explain to Parliament what you
3 have just said to me, that we were still determined on
4 the UN route and a peaceful resolution?

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

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

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

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to now move on to diplomacy.

2 Now, we have had a lot of evidence on the
3 negotiation of Resolution 1441, clearly getting
4 President Bush to agree to go to the United Nations was
5 game changer in many ways because it meant that your
6 basic need in taking it forward in British politics had
7 been met. It had had to go through the United Nations.

8 We have heard a lot about the difficulties of the
9 negotiations, the work of Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and so
10 on, and we have been through the resolution itself in
11 what some might say is arcane detail. So we have done
12 all of that.

13 I would like, therefore, to fast forward, if I may,
14 to your meeting with President Bush in Washington on
15 31 January 2003. Was your main objective at that
16 meeting to convince the President that, just as you had
17 convinced him that it was important to go through the UN
18 to get the first resolution, that now it was necessary to
19 get a second resolution?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. The second resolution was
21 obviously going to make life a lot easier politically in
22 every respect. The difficulty was this: that 1441 had
23 been very clear -- and I know you have gone through this
24 in enormous detail with Peter Goldsmith, but just to
25 emphasise the point, it was a very strong resolution.

1 It declared Iraq was in material breach, it said that it
2 had fully and unconditionally and immediately to
3 cooperate and cooperate with the inspectors and so on.

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

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

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

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

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A further decision. Exactly.

1 We have also heard from Jack Straw that politically
2 at home it seemed to be important to get it because it
3 would make life easier for you and the Parliamentary
4 party and the Cabinet and so on.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, absolutely.

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

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

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A final opportunity.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- to comply, and he hadn't taken it.

14 Indeed, what we now know is that he was continuing to
15 act in breach of the UN Resolutions even after the
16 inspectors had gone back in there.

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

25 The problem, obviously, from our perspective, was

1 that we had gone down the UN route, we wanted to carry
2 on going down the UN route, but the Americans had taken
3 the view -- and in a sense we took the same view of the
4 Iraqi behaviour up to that period at the end
5 of January -- that they weren't complying.

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

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

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

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

23 My view very strongly was that, if he was in breach
24 of 1441, we should mean what we have said. It was
25 a final opportunity to comply, he wasn't complying --

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So your position at the time was
2 that, if couldn't get a second resolution, you would
3 agree with the Americans, go with the Americans, on
4 military action?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was then the legal question, which
6 was very important, because Peter had drawn my attention
7 to that. So there were all sorts of factors that were
8 going to be in play there. There was the political
9 question as to whether we would get the support for it.

10 But my own view, and I was under absolutely no doubt
11 about this, was that, if you backed away, when he was
12 playing around with the inspectors in precisely the way
13 he had done before, then you were going to send a very,
14 very bad signal out to the world.

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

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

1 go through the Blix reports --

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will.

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR: You can see Blix himself was clear in

4 each one of his reports there was not full and

5 unconditional compliance.

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

7 It has also been reported, and I don't think it's a big

8 secret, that you were informed that the proposed start

9 date for military action at that time was March 10th.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Hm-mm.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Is that your recollection?

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was at that meeting or around about

13 that time, certainly, yes.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the date eventually slipped back

15 just over a week.

16 Is it also fair to say that the President was

17 adamant that this military planning set the terms for

18 the diplomatic strategy rather than the other way round?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, this was a debate that continued,

20 frankly, and you see, what I tried to do, as you know,

21 before the military action, is I had one last attempt to

22 get a consensus in the Security Council around

23 a resolution I drafted, effectively with Hans Blix, to

24 lay down a series of tests that Saddam had to comply

25 with.

1 You see, the problem was this: there was no doubt he
2 was in breach because he wasn't complying fully and
3 unconditionally and immediately. On the other hand,
4 people were saying, "Well, but give the inspectors more
5 time", which is perfectly -- you know, understandable.
6 I was thinking, "How do we actually get to the point
7 where you force people to understand and, in a sense,
8 Saddam finally to decide, whether he is going to comply
9 or not?"

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are getting a bit forward,
11 although you raise issues that are obviously important.

12 I think it is fair to say, at that time, the
13 American view was that the military timetable, with
14 a little bit of give, had to be adhered to. My point is
15 simply this -- this is the question -- from the end
16 of January, you had perhaps six weeks, maybe more, maybe
17 seven, how did you think you could get a resolution
18 through in such a short period of time? Wasn't the
19 danger of this situation that, in a sense, not only were
20 you giving Saddam an ultimatum, but you were almost
21 giving yourself an ultimatum as well?

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

1 removing Saddam.

2 What actually happened was we had time enough to do
3 it. The problem was very simple: in the end, after
4 1441, in a sense France and Germany and Russia moved to
5 a different position and they formed their own power, in
6 a sense, essentially saying to America "We are not going
7 to be with you on this".

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

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

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

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

23 So you are always in a position where you have got
24 to be very careful then, and I think the -- many of the
25 witnesses have said this to your Inquiry. Not just the

1 Americans, I think our own military were concerned, if
2 you then had months with the troops down there, you
3 know, as inspections went on but nothing really was
4 being resolved, I think that would have been difficult
5 to have done. So in that sense you are right. Of
6 course, it is always -- you have got to -- you come to
7 a point of decision.

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

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

24 Indeed, when the head of IAEA said at the end,
25 "There is no evidence of a nuclear programme",

1 Vice-President Cheney said, "You are wrong". There is
2 still a problem here that, given the hypothesis and the
3 mindset as you describe, it would have actually been
4 quite difficult, given all his background, for
5 Saddam Hussein to have been convincing on this score.

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

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

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

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If you look at the report, one of
22 the problems that the Iraqis had got themselves into is
23 when they had dismantled a lot of this stuff, they had
24 not maintained proper documentation. So you are almost
25 in an audit trail problem here.

1 Indeed, Jack Straw raised this when he was talking
2 about why he thought there was stuff there, and it goes
3 back to the 1998 documents. Actually, it would have
4 been quite hard in the circumstances and beliefs of the
5 time for a convincing case to be made. I don't want to
6 belabour this point, but --

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

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

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

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

22 Now, the reason for that is very simple, and it
23 emerges from the Iraq Survey Group report. He retained
24 full intent to restart his programme, and, therefore, it
25 was very important for him that the interviews did not

1 take place, because the interviews with senior regime
2 members were precisely what would have indicated the
3 concealment and the intent.

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

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, sorry. Just -- it is really very
23 important to get this right. It is absolutely clear
24 from the Iraq Survey Group, and indeed the Butler Report
25 deals with this, that he was concealing material he

1 should have delivered up to the UN, that he retained the
2 intent, not merely in theory, but was taking action on,
3 for example, dual-use facilities that were specifically
4 in breach of the United Nations Resolutions.

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

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

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Dr Blix and his reports are obviously
16 the key documents here, and you will see from his
17 reports -- he goes through them, I think, on
18 19 December, then he has got one on 9 January, I think
19 again on 27 January, then --

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was the strategy, as you had
24 discussed it around the time of the White House meeting
25 at the end of January, dependent upon Dr Blix being

1 rather firm in his assertions of material breach, as he
2 had appeared to be, in terms, at least, of talking about
3 non-cooperation -- he didn't declare a material breach
4 but his discussion of non-cooperation is the January 27
5 report. So were you sort of hoping, expecting, that he
6 would reinforce your view by continuing to take that
7 position?

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

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is just worth noting, in terms of
17 what the inspectors could do, that he was able to report
18 that they were dealing with the Al Samoud missile,
19 which, actually, if you go back to the intelligence, was
20 the area where a step change in Iraqi capabilities had
21 correctly been reported by British intelligence and put
22 in the dossier, was the firmest bit of the threat, and
23 that was actually dealt with by the inspectors in March.
24 So it wasn't that this was necessarily a wholly passive
25 role that they were playing?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, that's true, and obviously, as the
2 prospect of military action and the troop build-up was
3 there, he started to give more cooperation.
4 But I would just draw your attention to something
5 that I think, as I say, is of fundamental importance and
6 that is that Resolution 1441 -- it decided in
7 paragraph 5, operational paragraph 5, not just that he
8 had to give unrestricted access to all sites and so on,
9 but it specifically focused on the issue to do with
10 interviews and gave --
11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this was always a very
12 controversial issue. Dr Blix was always very reluctant,
13 precisely because of the risks he knew there would be
14 in, to take them out. He was never himself that
15 enthusiastic about that.
16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly, Sir Lawrence, but let me tell
17 you -- this is a really important point here. He wasn't
18 enthusiastic. I used to have these conversations with
19 Hans Blix, where Hans would say to me, "I agree we
20 should interview these people, but you don't understand,
21 they may be killed, or their relatives may be killed",
22 and I would say to him, "Well, what does that tell us
23 about the nature of the person we are dealing with and
24 the nature of his compliance?"
25 Yes, he was -- he kept saying to me, "I feel deeply

1 personally responsible if I ask for these interviews to
2 be conducted outside of Iraq because I believe these
3 people may be killed", but that, to me, was not --
4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was an illustration of the
5 problems of dealing with Saddam Hussein.
6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct.
7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: On 14 February, when Dr Blix gave
8 a presentation to -- he gave a report, which was not
9 long after Colin Powell's very significant speech of
10 5 February, were you disappointed by the line he was
11 taking there, which seemed to row back somewhat from the
12 position he had taken on 27 January?
13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that I was disappointed.
14 I was getting confused as to what he was really trying
15 to tell us. Because what he kept doing is saying, "Yes,
16 there is a bit of cooperation here, but then there is
17 not cooperation there", and what particularly struck me
18 about the 14 February Blix report, and this then had
19 a huge significance in what I then tried then to
20 construct as a final way of avoiding the war, is, on
21 page 26 of his briefing, he deals with this issue of
22 interviews and he says that the Iraqi side of -- because
23 they are starting to move on interviews because he is
24 beginning to press on it -- they have made a commitment
25 that they will allow it, but then, when he actually

1 comes to the interviews themselves, people are very
2 reluctant to do it.

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

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

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we have got --

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

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

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: And the know-how.

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

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Blair, did you want to make more of that,
21 in fairness to you? I think we have taken the point.
22 It is not in contention.

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is just sometimes -- I will do this
24 very briefly, but sometimes what is important is not to
25 ask the March 2003 question, but to ask the 2010

1 question. Supposing we had backed off this military
2 action, supposing we had left Saddam and his sons, who
3 were going to follow him, in charge of Iraq, people who
4 used chemical weapons, caused the death of over
5 1 million people, what we now know is that he retained
6 absolutely the intent and the intellectual know-how to
7 restart a nuclear and a chemical weapons programme when
8 the inspectors were out and the sanctions changed, which
9 they were going to be.

10 I think it is at least arguable that he was a threat
11 and that, had we taken that decision to leave him there
12 with the intent, with an oil price, not of \$25, but of
13 \$100 a barrel, he would have had the intent, he would
14 have had the financial means and we would have lost our
15 nerve.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence?

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You had a phone call with Dr Blix on
18 20 February. He has written about this and he has
19 written about it again this morning. We have obviously
20 seen the record.

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

1 words to the effect:

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

4 What was your response to that?

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

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

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

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

1 on process. That's what he was saying.

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

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

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

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

23 So what I felt was that we had got to a situation
24 where he was very much, "On the one hand ... and on the
25 other", and here was the decision we had to take really

1 at this point: and I think, in the light of what the
2 Iraqi Survey Group have found, I actually think this
3 judgment was right, which is why personally I don't
4 believe, if Hans Blix had another six months, it would
5 have come out any differently.

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

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

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think the issue, though, that was
19 now developing in the Security Council was that Dr Blix
20 did indeed seem to think more weeks and months would be
21 helpful, and because nothing had been found so far in
22 the inspections process other than the Al Samoud
23 missiles which were being dealt with, that confirmed the
24 intelligence picture that had been presented over the
25 previous months, that people did feel there was a need

1 for more time. It wasn't time an unreasonable request.

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

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was more, actually, Sir Lawrence, the
7 other way round, that what we were trying to do was to
8 say: how do you resolve what, on any basis, is
9 a somewhat indistinct picture being painted by Dr Blix?
10 Because it is clear they are not cooperating fully, that
11 they are giving a little bit of cooperation, and I come
12 back to the fact that, of course, the only cooperation
13 that was being given was because of this huge military
14 force sitting on Saddam's doorstep.

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

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It seems to me that the issue -- and
25 indeed, this was a very serious effort, but you didn't

1 have the time, because, if you were going to do that,
2 maybe it would have taken until April, maybe until May,
3 but the sense within the Security Council was that this
4 was indeed a way it could go forward, but that the view
5 of the United States is that you couldn't have much more
6 time. Jonathan Powell told us that you asked for more
7 time and you weren't given it.

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

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

24 The problem was it became very clear that, whatever
25 their position had been in November 2002, the position,

1 particularly of France and Russia, really changed. They
2 had decided they weren't going to agree any new
3 resolution that had in it any authority for action if
4 Saddam didn't comply.

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

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

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

22 Despite the quality of our intelligence passed to
23 UNMOVIC, there hasn't been a smoking gun. There hasn't
24 been a real find of chemical or biological stocks,
25 perhaps for reasons that have nothing to do with whether

1 it is there or not, but it hasn't been found.

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

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

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

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

24 The second thing is, though, even if we had got more
25 time, Hans Blix would never have been able to conduct

1 the interviews with the key members of the regime and
2 they be honest with him.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But if he had been given the chance
4 and failed again, wouldn't you then have had more of
5 a chance of having the Security Council behind you,
6 which had been one of your objectives going back to
7 2002?

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

17 I do emphasise also the fact that he -- and there is
18 also evidence in the Iraq Survey Group, which is
19 actually quite important, about what Iraqi scientists
20 were being told by the Vice-President of Iraq. He
21 gathered them all together as the inspectors went in
22 and, as you know, the inspectors were supposed to be
23 given all the information, any materials they had. What
24 he was saying was, "If you have any materials in your
25 possession, you had better not have". Now --

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I understand -- you are right that
2 this is indeed what happened. The question is whether
3 or not it was -- it would be possible to create the
4 consensus that would have been so much help behind you
5 in the United Nations.

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

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

17 What President Bush actually said to me was, "If you
18 can get that, do it", but, you know, you have got to
19 understand from the American perspective, they had gone
20 down the 1441 route, he obviously wasn't cooperating.
21 We had been through the 8 December declaration. We then
22 went through the January report, the February report,
23 and they had their forces down there ready to take
24 action. It was difficult situation, but actually he
25 did, to be fair, say, "If you can put it together, put

1 it together".

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But he wanted to get on with it?

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think there was a judgment being

4 made -- and I honestly, in retrospect, can't disagree

5 with this judgment, that, you know, more time was not

6 going to solve this.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: It is clearly time to break for lunch. Can

8 I just say I would like to thank everyone in the room

9 who has sat through this morning, and, as you won't be

10 able to be in this room this afternoon, thank you for

11 your very attentive and, if I may say so, well-mannered

12 response to this session. I thank our witness and we

13 will resume again at 2 o'clock.

14 (12.40 pm)

15 (The short adjournment)

16 (2.00 pm)

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. This

18 afternoon, the Iraq Inquiry will be hearing again from

19 the Rt Hon Tony Blair, Prime Minister until June 2007.

20 We still have much to cover today.

21 The Committee hopes we can go about our business in

22 an orderly way and, in fairness to all, not be

23 distracted by any disruptions. As in all our hearings,

24 the right for our witness to respond must be respected,

25 and those here today, this morning and now yourselves

1 this afternoon, were selected through a free public
2 ballot overseen by an independent arbiter, and I remind
3 everyone of the behaviour expected to be observed.

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

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

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

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

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

25 The first one concerns the position of the

1 French Government, which you did refer to before lunch.
2 In your final speech before the conflict to the House of
3 Commons on 18 March, you told the Commons that -- and
4 I will quote here:

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

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

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

1 breach.

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

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

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

1 had taken, they weren't going to agree that force should
2 be used.

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

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

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

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the actual situation -- because
21 I had many conversations with other leaders at the time,
22 and most of those were with President Lagos of Chile,
23 whom I knew well and had a very good personal
24 relationship with. He was in a tough situation, as we
25 were all at that time, and what President Lagos was

1 effectively saying to me was, "Look, if you can get to
2 a stage where you can loosen the French opposition, then
3 it is a lot easier for us to come along with you".

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

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

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think it was more that -- I thought
15 there was -- it was worth having one last-ditch chance
16 to see if you could bring people back together on the
17 same page. So in a sense, what President Bush had to do
18 was agree to table a fresh resolution. What the French
19 had to agree was you couldn't have another resolution
20 and another breach and no action. So my idea was define
21 the circumstances of breach -- that was the tests that
22 we applied with Hans Blix -- get the Americans to agree
23 to the resolution, get the French to agree that you
24 couldn't just go back to the same words of 1441 again,
25 you had to take it a stage further.

1 Now, that was the idea I had. I thought it might be
2 possible to bring everyone back together again. It
3 wasn't possible to do that, and I was also very
4 conscious by that time as well of the need to bring the
5 UN back into the situation after a conflict, and so that
6 was a factor in my mind as well.

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

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

14 At this really critical moment, and obviously a very
15 difficult moment in your life, you had reached the stage
16 where you weren't going to get a second resolution,
17 military action was imminent. Now, you had been working
18 intensively for months, indeed for a year, to try to
19 create a supportive environment, and we have discussed
20 elements of that already, but you hadn't actually got
21 a clear and strong international consensus for this
22 action. Public opinion here in the UK was divided. No
23 really major progress had been made on the Middle East
24 peace plan, which you and I discussed earlier. We
25 hadn't got the second resolution, and you were also,

1 I think by this stage, starting to hear warnings from
2 people like Brigadier, as he was, I think, Tim Cross,
3 who came to see you in Downing Street and saw
4 Alastair Campbell, I think, that the post-conflict
5 preparations being made by the Americans didn't look at
6 all good.

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

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

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

1 lining up with America.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly, there was support, but I suppose

3 this was a long way short of what you would have hoped

4 to have had.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would have hoped to have had

6 a United Nations situation at which everywhere was on

7 the same page and agreed. Sometimes that doesn't

8 happen.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In Kosovo, one didn't have unanimity,

10 because the Russians threatened to veto, but you had

11 much stronger support. The first Gulf War, there was

12 pretty much universal support, Afghanistan and so on.

13 So this was a much more difficult situation for you.

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was a really tough situation, yes,

15 and in the end, as I say, what influenced me was that my

16 judgment ultimately was that Saddam was going to remain

17 a threat and that in this change in the perception of

18 risk after September 11 it was important that we were

19 prepared to act, our alliance with America was

20 important, and, to put this very clearly, we had been

21 down a UN path that I genuinely hoped would work.

22 I hoped that 1441 would avoid conflict happening.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although, I think you said this morning

24 you weren't terribly confident it was going to work.

25 You hoped it would work.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I did hope it would work. I wasn't
2 confident about Saddam, I think for perfectly good
3 reasons. He was someone who had been defying the UN for
4 ten years, and, as we know now, he hadn't really changed
5 his intent. So I could see a situation in which you
6 might be faced with this tough choice, but I was doing
7 absolutely everything I could to try and avoid having to
8 do it.

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

15 What was your view of his advice?

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

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

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: This was even back in October. I think,
25 if you look at the record back in October 2002, the

1 military were saying what their preferences were for the
2 three options.

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

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

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

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

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

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, reversing that, if we had not sent
25 the force in at this stage, for this variety of reasons,

1 we could then still have said, in a very respectable
2 way, that we are ready to come in and do the sort of
3 peace building, nation building stuff that we have got
4 a lot of experience in, in the aftermath.

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

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

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

21 Just to say this to you, one of the things that
22 I have done in every single piece of military action
23 I advocated as Prime Minister is the first thing, in
24 a sense, I do is get a sense from our armed forces as to
25 whether they are committed and keen to do it, and, of

1 course, they are, because that's the type of people they
2 are and they are fantastic. But it was very much
3 a conversation we had back in -- I think beginning
4 actually in July time, and then building up
5 through October, and then, by the time we came to March,
6 yes, it is true, we could have pulled back at that
7 stage, but I believe that that would have been wrong and
8 I think it would have not indicated the strength of support
9 that I felt was right for us to exhibit.

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

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

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

21 For that reason, we don't propose to try to go
22 through the issues point by point again, which would
23 take probably another ten hours. We really would now
24 like to focus on the questions that most directly
25 concerned you, as Prime Minister, and the Committee have

1 suggested that the easiest way of tackling this
2 extremely complex subject with all of this ten hours of
3 background behind us would be if I tried to summarise
4 first what we, as a Committee, have heard and read on
5 this subject, and if you will forgive me, it will allow
6 you to rest your voice for a minute or two.

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

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

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes.

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

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

22 Secondly, lawyers in the US administration favoured
23 what was called the revival argument and that meant that
24 the authorisation for the use of force during the first
25 Gulf War, embodied in Resolution 687, was capable of

1 being revived as it had been revived in 1993 and 1998.

2 However, the UK's lawyers did not consider that this
3 argument was applicable without a fresh determination by
4 the Security Council, and they felt that, not only
5 because of the passage of time since resolutions 678 and
6 687, but also because, in 1993 and 1998, the Security
7 Council had formed the view that there had been
8 a sufficiently serious violation of the ceasefire
9 conditions and also because the force that had been used
10 then had been limited to ensuring Iraqi compliance with
11 the ceasefire conditions. Even in 1998, the revival
12 argument had been controversial and not very widely
13 supported. So the British argument was that you needed
14 a fresh determination of the Security Council.

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

22 So what that led to was consistent and, I think,
23 united advice, by the FCO's legal advisers and, also,
24 insofar as it was at this stage sought or proffered by
25 the Attorney General up to November 2002, that a fresh

1 UN authorisation under chapter 7 would be required for
2 the military action contemplated against Iraq,
3 contemplated at that stage as a contingency, to be
4 lawful.

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

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

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

21 So up until early February of 2003, the
22 Attorney General, again, as Lord Goldsmith told us in
23 his evidence, was telling you that he remained of the
24 view that Resolution 1441 did not authorise the use of
25 force without a further determination by the Security

1 Council that it was his position that a Council
2 discussion -- the word "discussion" was used in the
3 resolution -- would not be sufficient and that a further
4 decision by the Council was required.

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

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

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

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

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

25 But at the same time he coupled this with a warning

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

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

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

24 So having given you that advice on 7 March, by
25 13 March, he had crucially decided -- and this is from

1 a minute recording a discussion between himself and his
2 senior adviser, David Brummell, who has also given
3 evidence to us and which is also on the public record --
4 he had decided that:

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

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

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

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

25 So it was on that basis that the Attorney was able

1 to give the green light for military action to you, to
2 the armed forces, to the Civil Service, to the Cabinet
3 and to Parliament.

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

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

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

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

1 inspectors was itself a further material breach.

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We got a paper, I think it was

1 an 8 March paper, which set out the legal position, and
2 that set it out in the terms that you have just
3 summarised. I was obviously not just very interested in
4 it for obvious reasons, but interested in it for this
5 reason as well: that we had taken action in 1998 and we
6 had taken action on the basis of the revival of
7 Resolution 678.

8 So it was very important to me because we had
9 already taken military action, and, indeed, as you
10 rightly point out, military action had been taken in
11 1993 as well, but we had that before us and one of the
12 things that was most important in us going down the UN
13 route was precisely the legal advice that we got.

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

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

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

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, it came from the Foreign Office,
25 actually.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It came from the Foreign Office.

2 Could you say why, given that this was pretty

3 serious territory you were beginning to get on to, you

4 didn't at that stage think it necessary to consult the

5 Attorney General?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I mean, we were, in my view, a long way

7 at that point from taking a decision. Had we come

8 closer to the point of taking a decision, of course we

9 would have needed to have taken the formal advice of the

10 Attorney General, as indeed we did.

11 At that stage, we had the advice of the

12 Foreign Office, and, actually, the Foreign Office advice

13 was pretty much in line with what Peter Goldsmith then

14 later advised me.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was 100 per cent in line, as we

16 understand from both of them. So at that point,

17 building the Attorney General into the process of

18 forming policy, having him at meetings, like, say, the

19 meeting at Chequers that you discussed, wasn't something

20 you felt a need to do?

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Not at that stage, because we were, as

22 I say, at a very preliminary point. But what I took

23 from the advice that we were given was that we needed

24 a fresh resolution.

25 I do point out that -- because this was why, at

1 a later stage, I became concerned as to what the legal
2 problem was, because, of course, we got a further
3 resolution.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just stick a little bit for
5 a couple of minutes with the Attorney General's role in
6 this because his evidence is very fresh in our minds?

7 In previous governments it was quite frequently the
8 practice for Attorneys General to attend Cabinet, and,
9 indeed, in some War Cabinets. You didn't have
10 a War Cabinet before the conflict began here, but you
11 had groups of advisers who met --

12 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, and ministers.

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

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

20 It was clear from his evidence, I think, that he was
21 rarely included in the other discussions you were having
22 around this subject and that he had relatively few
23 face-to-face meetings you in 2002 and the early part of
24 2003, particularly in 2002, to discuss this subject,
25 which, I think, raised the question in our minds as to

1 why you hadn't thought it right to include him more
2 closely.

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

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

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The issue is not how many times he comes
23 to the Cabinet, the issue is whether he is giving his
24 advice to the Prime Minister and the ministers, and
25 Peter was.

1 Just to say this about Peter Goldsmith. As you will
2 have seen from his evidence, Peter is absolutely
3 a lawyer's lawyer. He is somebody of extraordinary
4 integrity. He is somebody who actually, as a lawyer, is
5 in the very top rank of the legal profession, and Peter
6 made it quite clear from a very early stage of this that
7 if he felt he had advice to give, he would give it, and
8 in a sense he would give it whether people wanted it or
9 they didn't want it, but he was going to give it and he
10 did give it.

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

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It wasn't that it was not particularly
20 welcome, it was -- obviously, I was dealing with what
21 was already a difficult situation, and now I became
22 aware we had to take a whole new dimension into account.

23 Of course, we had at an earlier stage of this, but
24 once we got into discussions with the Americans, I was
25 well aware of the fact from -- really from March

1 onwards, that if we wanted to be legally secure on this,
2 we had to go down the UN route, and that was one major
3 part of why we decided to do this.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: He wanted to make it absolutely clear
23 that it wasn't merely -- I think his point was: it is
24 not merely going down the UN route, it is getting the
25 right resolution that will be important.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's turn to that resolution. Just
2 after it was adopted -- it was adopted on 8 November,
3 Resolution 1441 and on 11 November Lord Goldsmith talked
4 to your Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell. He was a bit
5 concerned that he was hearing second-hand views of his
6 own opinions and he wanted, I think, to get that
7 straight, and he made clear to Jonathan Powell that he
8 was not optimistic that Resolution 1441 would provide
9 a sound legal basis for the use of force if Iraq were
10 found in breach at a future stage but without a second
11 resolution.

12 He suggested that it was desirable for him to
13 provide advice at that point, but he wasn't encouraged
14 to do so. The response instead was that he should -- he
15 could have a meeting some time before Christmas at
16 Downing Street, and that meeting duly took place on
17 19 December with some of your officials.

18 At that meeting, he was again told that he wasn't
19 being called on to give advice at this stage, "this
20 stage" being a stage at which he felt that 1441 had
21 created an unclear situation. But what he was invited
22 to do was to put a paper to you in draft of his advice,
23 and he handed that, I think, personally, to you on
24 14 January.

25 Now, by then we are into a period in which the armed

1 forces had actually been instructed to prepare for
2 military action and in which you were moving along the
3 track towards an intended second Security Council
4 Resolution, though that wasn't tabled until
5 late February, I think about the 24th, from memory.

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

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

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

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But if you had known that he was going to

1 say that, it would have been helpful to have known that
2 as soon as possible, because it could have prevented you
3 from deploying a large force into the region and having
4 to bring it back. That's why I ask: wouldn't it have
5 been helpful to have known our options at this --

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

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

19 So in my view, there had to be at least a strong
20 prima facie case if you could show material breach, that
21 this justified the revival argument, since, otherwise,
22 you know, you couldn't have justified it in respect of
23 1998 --

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: At this stage, before the middle
25 of February, he is not offering you options, nor are the

1 Foreign Office legal advisers. They are saying, "We
2 have to have a further determination by the Security
3 Council". Later on, it turned out that he was able to
4 find an alternative option.

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

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

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

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Actually, it was two things, I think, to

1 be fair to him. I think it is very important that this
2 is seen in its proper context. It all revolved around
3 the interpretation of 1441 and the question was: what
4 did the Security Council mean?

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

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

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

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's where you ended up in March, but
22 until 12 February you were not being told by the
23 Attorney or the Foreign Office legal advisers that you
24 had the option of not getting a further decision out of
25 the Security Council. They were telling you, both of

1 them, that their reading of that resolution, which, as
2 you rightly say, was unclear, but the British reading of
3 that resolution, unlike the American resolution, was
4 that the determination had to to be made by the Security
5 Council.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 That was his evolution.

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is fair to say, because I think it is

3 important to say this --

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It's very important.

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- it was always a very, very difficult

6 balance to judgment, but the important thing was, in the

7 end, that Peter came to the view -- and I think anybody

8 who knows him knows that he would not express this view

9 unless he thought it and believed it -- he came to the

10 view that, on balance, the breach by Saddam Hussein of

11 Resolution 1441 was sufficient, provided it was a breach

12 of the obligations set out in op 4.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He asked you to say that it was

14 sufficient, but that's at the end of the game.

15 Can I just go to the point where he has given you

16 his formal advice of 7 March, but that didn't give the

17 yes or no clear answer that the Chief of the Defence

18 Staff and others wanted. That didn't come until

19 13 March, when he had had a period of further

20 reflection.

21 What discussions did you, or others under your

22 instruction, if any, have with Lord Goldsmith between

23 7 March, when you received his formal advice, and

24 13 March, when he decided that his position had evolved

25 further?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I can't recall any specific discussions
2 that I had. I don't know whether others would have had
3 with him before 13 March, but essentially what happened
4 was this: he gave legal advice, he gave an opinion
5 saying, "Look, there is this argument against it, there
6 is this argument for it. I think a reasonable case can
7 be made", and obviously we then had to have a definitive
8 decision, and that decision is: yes, it is lawful to do
9 this or not. So --

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

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

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

1 starts messing around again, as he started to do, then
2 that's it.

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

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

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

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But this is important, because people
19 sometimes say it was all kind of cast in stone from --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But wasn't Number 10 saying to the
21 White House in January and February, even into March,
22 that it was essential, from the British perspective,
23 because of our reading of the law, to have a second
24 resolution?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It was politically, we were saying --

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not merely preferable, but essential.

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But he had done it in disagreement with
25 the international lawyers, all of them, as we understand

1 from Sir Michael Wood, then in the government's employ.

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I seem to remember -- but I may be wrong

3 on this; if I am, forgive me -- but I think that he had

4 also sought the advice of Christopher Greenwood QC.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He had, and we discussed that, and it

6 didn't appear from our discussion that there were many

7 other people outside government arguing in the same

8 direction that Lord Goldsmith eventually argued.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously, other countries, of course,

10 were having the same issues as well and having to decide

11 this and it wasn't -- I don't think it is right to say

12 it was irrelevant that the American lawyers had come to

13 a different view.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly not irrelevant, because it had

15 a big impact on him, but, apart from America, were there

16 other countries in which -- we have heard recently what

17 a Dutch review has found on this, but were there other

18 countries in which people were arguing in favour of the

19 revival argument?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think all countries who took the

21 military action believed they had a sound legal basis

22 for doing so.

23 All I am pointing out is, actually, when you analyse

24 1441, it is less surprising as a conclusion to come to

25 than as sometimes is made out today, because the fact is

1 1441 was very deliberately constructed. It had, if you
2 like, a certain sort of integrity as a resolution to it.
3 It basically said, "Okay, one last chance. One last
4 chance, Saddam, to prove that you have had a change of
5 heart, that you are going to cooperate", and he didn't.

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

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

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, forgive me, Sir Roderic. All I'm
19 trying to say is, when you actually go back and read
20 1441, it is pretty obvious that you can make a decent
21 case for this.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, let me not pass judgment on that.
23 I'm asking questions and I do not have an opinion to
24 state on it. I would just like to ask one final
25 question to wrap up this legal chapter, and this is

1 really -- you were in the position, ultimately, where
2 you had to give this determination. You had to go
3 through with the action, Lord Goldsmith was preparing
4 with the assistance of Christopher Greenwood for the
5 possibility of legal challenge. He knew that he had
6 taken a decision that some others, many others, perhaps,
7 were arguing with and were going to argue with, and he
8 had put something to you that was described as
9 a reasonable case, but, nevertheless, not one that he
10 would have confidently put before a court.

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

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

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

25 Incidentally, I think he wasn't alone in

1 international law in coming to that conclusion, for very
2 obvious reasons, because, as I say, if you read the
3 words in 1441 it is pretty clear this was Saddam's last
4 chance.

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

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

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

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

25 "If the matter ever came before a court ..."

1 Well:

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

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

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

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

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

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

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, of course. Part of the purpose of
22 asking for papers that describe the different levels of
23 military commitment that you might give is precisely in
24 order to be able to learn what it is that you will be
25 required to do. But in these situations, you know, you

1 are very, very dependent, rightly, on the advice that
2 you are given from the Ministry of Defence and from the
3 military.

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

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

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

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

21 But David Manning had told us that you sought to
22 delay the decision as long as possible, and we have also
23 heard from Lord Boyce and, of course, from Mr Hoon about
24 the restrictions placed on the visible military
25 preparations in December 2002.

1 I mean, were you aware what the implications of that
2 would be, or had anybody made you aware of the
3 implications of the delay?

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

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

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

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

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the one thing about the military, in
25 my experience, is they tell you very bluntly, quite

1 rightly, what their situation is, what they want, what
2 they don't want, and what they think about things, and
3 Mike was very, very clear that they had the readiness.

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

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

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

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

1 protection clothing, ammunition.

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

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

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

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

22 My view, very, very strongly, is, when you are
23 asking your armed forces to go into these situations,
24 you put everything to one side other than making sure
25 that they have the equipment they need and they have the

1 finance there to back it up. As far as I am aware, and,
2 as I say, I think this was their evidence to you, they
3 got it ready and they got it ready in time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 is there really wasn't.

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

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

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

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

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: First of all, I think we have got to
23 divide it into two sections here. Actually, we did an
24 immense amount of pre-war planning. I think Mike Boyce
25 said to you in his evidence that they spent as much time

1 on Phase 4 as the other phases of the operation. We had
2 the officials meeting obviously. We had the ad hoc
3 meetings, we had Cabinet meetings, actually, that were
4 discussing these issues.

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

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

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

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but I think, if you analysed those
25 letters, they focused especially on the humanitarian

1 side. They focused on --

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: They do, but what she was
3 complaining about was the preparedness and the timing
4 when it was done, attention wasn't being paid to that.

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

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

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

23 This is not only the issues that you might face
24 directly linked to military action, but it is about
25 security, political and economic challenges that you

1 might face, because, in a way, the whole idea was to
2 kind of reconstruct Iraq. So had you planned adequately
3 for these eventualities?

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

17 In other words, that you would remove the top level
18 but you would have a functioning system underneath it,
19 and I think one of the major lessons of this is to
20 understand that, where you have these types of states
21 that are, in the case of Iraq, a sort of semi-fascist
22 state, if you like, which really operated by fear
23 amongst -- on the population from a small number of
24 people, that assumption is going to be wrong. You are
25 going to be dealing with the situation where you

1 probably have to rebuild the civil infrastructure of the
2 country from nothing, and that's what we found.

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

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

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

21 That's what I meant about the implications.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is correct that I think from about
23 early January onwards, we knew that we would be in
24 a position where we were going to have to handle the
25 situation in the south. That was actually, I think,

1 preferable to us, frankly, from the situation originally
2 contemplated, which is that you came in from the north.
3 That was part of the commitment that we were able to
4 make. We then knew they would be joined by the forces
5 of other nations.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you aware of that when you took
7 the decision to go --

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think from January onwards it was
9 clear that we were going to be in a position, where we
10 were going to be in charge of Basra, but the whole
11 assumption -- and you see this very clearly from the
12 documents -- is that you would come in, and for the
13 first stage obviously the army would be the main people
14 in charge. You would then bring your civilian people in
15 behind that. You would then, as swiftly as possible,
16 turn it over to the Iraqis themselves, and the idea was
17 to get an Iraqi interim administration up and running
18 very quickly.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that -- I mean that happened,
20 I think, after we got the Security Council Resolution
21 1483 and --

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that was also a very important part
23 of what we wanted to do. We wanted to bring the
24 United Nations back in.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why did we, unlike other coalition

1 members, accept the status of a joint occupying power?

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Because we were the key partner of the

3 US in this. We believed in it. We believed it was

4 right to be there, for the reasons that I have given,

5 and we were prepared to accept the responsibility of

6 then putting the country right.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did we actually weigh up all the

8 liability, the risks and the implications, the resources

9 required?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and one of the things that

11 we made very clear -- I think I made this clear on

12 a number of occasions, was that we could not walk away

13 from our commitment to people in Iraq afterwards, but

14 I believe, for all the reasons I have given, that this

15 was an important commitment for us to make. The whole

16 reason why we then had quite a detailed and difficult

17 discussion actually with the Americans about the

18 United Nations then coming back in for the aftermath was

19 precisely because we knew for ourselves -- and again

20 I think Peter Goldsmith was advising this -- that we

21 needed that cover, that military cover, and 1483

22 effectively endorsed the coalition presence.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But why is it that so many witnesses

24 have said to us that the aftermath planning was

25 deficient?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, first of all, a lot of the
2 criticisms have been directed at the American system.
3 Now, all I would say about that is I think, like you, if
4 you look at the Rand Report or the Inspector General's
5 report, I think done in 2009, in America, I think it
6 lays out very clearly the problems in pre-war planning
7 and the problems in post-war execution.

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

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

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

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

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, that's absolutely right, Baroness,
25 but in the end the Americans agreed that they should

1 have what we called a vital or central role.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Andrew Turnbull said we were

3 being fobbed off by President Bush when he said that.

4 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think if you actually look at what

5 then happened with the United Nations in Iraq, I think

6 Resolution 1483 is really a very important resolution.

7 I don't know whether you want to look at it now, I'm

8 perfectly content to do it, but --

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

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Rather than refer to it, let me just

11 make this very simple point: I saw Kofi Annan, I think

12 on -- I think it was around 16 April. In other words,

13 shortly after the military action had begun. I had

14 a good and close relationship with Kofi Annan, someone

15 I respect very much. He had been in a very difficult

16 position throughout the last few months. He made it

17 clear that the UN had to be independent of the

18 coalition, but he also made it clear he wasn't arguing

19 for the lead role. What he was arguing for --

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In the circumstances, not

21 surprising.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The fact that it had been

24 a coalition-led invasion and he did not want the

25 responsibility of reconstruction, that's not surprising.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Correct, but that is why -- when people
2 say that, as it were, the UN should have been given the
3 lead role, I'm simply pointing out the fact that he
4 didn't want that. What he did want was a vital role,
5 which is what we got the Americans to agree to, and if
6 you look at Resolution 1483, it sets out the areas in
7 which his special representative, which he agreed to
8 appoint, was going to have influence and say, and
9 actually, that special representative,
10 Sergio Vieira de Mello, was absolutely excellent, would
11 have made an enormous difference to Iraq and its future,
12 but the terrorists killed him, assassinated him
13 in August 2003.

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

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

1 the American system, as it were, has accepted that.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But I understand you personally

3 became involved in the aftermath arrangement

4 about February 2003. Was that not too late?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, I was personally involved in what

6 was going to happen before then. As we came to the

7 point of actually going in, it is true we had a meeting,

8 I think in February 2003 and then subsequent meetings

9 but the absolutely central point, since we are trying to

10 see what are the lessons that we can learn, is that,

11 unfortunately, what we thought was going to be the

12 problem didn't turn out to be the problem.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but I think I go back

14 to my earlier point. It is the adequacy of the planning

15 on a whole range of things, economic, political, because

16 in a way there was a danger, there was information that

17 Iraq could have fractured, given the insecurity of the

18 Kurds, what could have happened with the Shias and

19 Sunnis. I mean, there is a whole range of eventualities

20 which you planned for that wasn't done.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would say we most certainly did plan

22 for the problems in relation to the potential for

23 a Sunni/Shia/Kurd split, and what we tried to do was to

24 make sure that, as soon as possible, we brought the

25 Sunnis and the Kurds and the Shia together.

1 So what actually happened -- and this happened
2 in May, only just a few weeks after the invasion -- they
3 brought together -- I think it was called the Iraq
4 Governing Council or the Interim Governing Council.
5 That had a membership of 25. I think there were 13
6 or -- I think it was 13 Shia and 11 Sunni, and one --
7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But before that, I mean, the
8 decision was taken, for example, the ORHA was actually
9 replaced by CPA and, you know, changes were made without
10 any consultation with us.
11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think -- look, what actually
12 happened was it became very clear that ORHA was not
13 capable of doing that.
14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I know that, but my point is, in
15 terms of working together, if we were a joint occupying
16 power, were we being consulted, were we exerting the
17 kind of influence we needed to?
18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think we were being consulted on the
19 questions everyone thought would arise, but it is
20 true -- I mean, Tim Cross and others were coming back
21 and saying, "This system is not working in the way it
22 should", and we were then interacting very strongly with
23 the Americans.
24 The only thing I say is: had we had even more focus
25 on it, we would have still been focusing essentially on

1 the humanitarian side with an assumption that we would
2 inherit a functioning Civil Service infrastructure, and
3 it was that assumption that proved to be wrong.

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

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

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We did plan for those eventualities. We
22 did an analysis of what they might be, and we worked
23 them out. The trouble was we didn't plan for two
24 things: one was, as I say, the absence of this properly
25 functioning Civil Service infrastructure; and, of

1 course, the second thing, which is the single most
2 important element of this whole business of what
3 happened afterwards, people did not think that Al-Qaeda
4 and Iran would play the role that they did, and we could
5 have -- if what you had ended up having was essentially
6 an indigenous violence or insurgency, or the criminality
7 and the looting and so on, again there are issues to do
8 with the numbers of troops, the types of troops and --

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We will actually come to that later.
10 I will pass on to Sir Martin Gilbert.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I just want to --

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, do finish.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I just wanted to finish by saying all of
14 those are very important questions. We could have
15 handled the situation if that had been the problem. It
16 was the introduction of the external elements of AQ and
17 Iran that really caused this mission very nearly to
18 fail. Fortunately, in the end, it didn't, and the
19 reason why that is important is that that itself, in my
20 view, is a huge lesson, because those are the same
21 forces that we are now facing, Afghanistan right round
22 the region.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As I have said, that is an area we
24 are going to cover later.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we will take a break in a moment.

1 I just wanted, in hearing this set of exchanges, and
2 reading a great deal and hearing a good deal of
3 evidence, that there was, in terms of the planning for
4 the aftermath on the British side, leave aside the
5 Americans -- and we have seen the Rand Report and the
6 Hard Lessons report -- there was a single set of
7 assumptions which regrettably turned out to be very
8 over-optimistic about what we would find, but there
9 appears to have been no real risk analysis looking at
10 best case, middle case, worst case, and at the resource
11 and planning horizon implications of that.

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

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

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that's a very good question.

24 I think that actually we did, because the MoD did
25 a massive amount of work -- there is a whole planning

1 assumptions paper, as you know, and we did focus on
2 this, we really tried to drill down on it, and one of
3 the reasons why, in early 2003, I was having quite
4 difficult exchanges of correspondence with Clare Short
5 particularly was because, rightly, she was getting
6 worried that the humanitarian side was not going to be
7 adequately advanced.

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

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

1 threat?

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

4 Let's have a break for about a quarter of a hour.

5 Can I just remind the audience that people will need to
6 be back here -- I suggest within ten minutes to be
7 certain of getting in and back through the security, if
8 you go out, because we shall need to start dead on time
9 and if you are not here, I am afraid that's it.

10 Thank you.

11 (3.22 pm)

12 (Short break)

13 (3.40 pm)

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

16 Sir Martin?

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

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

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was advised that we could sustain it,

1 but it was going to be difficult, for sure. We
2 obviously had the ongoing campaign in Afghanistan. We
3 were bringing troops from other countries. I think we
4 had about 30 countries in the coalition. They brought
5 in roughly, I don't know, 15,000 to 20,000 additional
6 troops as well. I think we had the troops we needed in
7 the south, but, yes, it was -- all the way through, it
8 was going to be difficult.

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

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

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

22 What assumptions were made about the role of British
23 troops with regard to Iraq, once Saddam had been
24 removed? What did you see and plan for their tasks to
25 be?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the idea obviously was that we
2 would not require the same number of troops for the
3 conflict as we would in the aftermath. There was,
4 I think, a time in the middle of 2003, when we were
5 asked for more troops and gave more troops.

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

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

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

1 security for the local people.

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

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

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

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned that it was the military
24 who were, of course, advising in terms of the
25 priorities, but what was your input at this time? What

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

11 At that point, I think it is fair to say the issue
12 really was -- I think John Sawers described this to you
13 as the "Baghdad first" policy that, in the end, unless
14 you could secure Baghdad, you were going -- you were
15 always going to have difficulties.

16 But I would say -- it is interesting, this, when
17 I was getting frequent reports back, and then, I think,
18 as Sir Hilary Synnott told you, actually, I was always
19 very clear with our people out there, "If you have got
20 a real problem, pick up the phone, if necessary, and if
21 you start to get messed around with bureaucracy, come to
22 me directly".

23 I think, when I saw him at the end of February 2004,
24 when he left, he thought it was challenging, but, you
25 know, there was some progress being made and we had to

1 make sure the progress carried on.

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could go back to the military
3 funding issue and perhaps look at its wider aspect, we
4 have heard from several military witnesses how
5 effectively the urgent operational requirements for the
6 military were addressed, but we have also heard -- and
7 Geoff Hoon touched on this last week -- how, because of
8 the way the UOR procedure works, in years 2 and 3 of the
9 funding cycle, the continued use of UORs over the
10 sustained period led, in effect, to core MoD
11 requirements being diverted to the UORs. Was that
12 something that you were aware of, something that you
13 became involved in?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't think this was something I was
15 personally involved in, no. I was more involved at the
16 level, if you like, of say, for example,
17 in September 2003, they asked for additional forces and
18 I was keen to get them going. I don't think I really --
19 I don't think the issues to do with urgent operational
20 requirements really came to me.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Or the fact that the urgent operational
22 requirements were diverting funds away under the
23 strategic defence review system.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think if anybody had come to me and
25 said, "Look, there is an issue and a problem here", and

1 we were having ongoing discussions about the defence
2 budget and so on and so forth within government. If
3 somebody had come to me and said, "I think there is
4 a real problem. We have to deal with it", I would have
5 been straight in there trying to sort it out, but
6 I wasn't aware of that particular issue coming across my
7 desk.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of other departments, we have
9 also heard from Sir Suma Chakrabarti, among others, of
10 problems that, essentially, they felt that funding was
11 not being divided adequately, for example, that the
12 rehabilitation in Iraq, the DFID requirements really
13 required more significant resources. Is this something
14 that came to you?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it did, and one of the reasons why
16 we agreed a supplementary provision by the Treasury,
17 I think of £127 million, if I remember rightly, or round
18 about that, at the end of March, was precisely because
19 we were aware we had to ramp up pretty quickly.

20 Now, there was there was an additional problem,
21 which was getting the allocation -- the Americans had
22 made a huge allocation for the CPA, the provisional
23 authority up in Baghdad, and we were trying to get that
24 money transferred back down, and I even got involved at
25 one point -- I seem to remember that was a Siemens power

1 plant and I got involved in trying to sort out the money
2 being delivered for, but my basic view -- I think we
3 spent for DFID -- I think, 2003/2004, Iraq was the key
4 country. We spent over £260 million. It was a big
5 commitment that we were giving. Much of that was
6 humanitarian, but there was also money there for
7 reconstruction.

8 Had people come to me again and said, "Look, we need
9 to make an even greater commitment", I would have done
10 so, but I think, to be fair, during that period of time,
11 as people were then assessing a quite different
12 situation, what became clear in time was not a lack of
13 resource, but a lack of security.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That brings me to my final question
15 really, and you touched, I think, just before the break,
16 in part on your answer, and that is the question of
17 anticipating some of these problems in advance.

18 From what we have heard from the people on the
19 ground, the military, and also, of course, the DFID and
20 the whole question of the deteriorating security
21 situation, are these not things which, August,
22 September, October, 2002, should have been addressed?
23 After all, Iraq was not an unknown quantity.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely correct, and we focused very
25 much on what we would find and how we would deal with

1 it. Also, there was, of course -- I mean, I raised this
2 issue myself several times, you know, how would the
3 Sunni/Shia relationship work out? That was going to be
4 a major part of the problem. You had basically three
5 groups. You had the Kurds up in the north, you had the
6 Sunni, and then down in the south there was
7 predominantly Shia.

8 For that very reason -- that was another reason why
9 I wanted the UN closely involved, because I thought they
10 had a better chance of bringing those groups together.
11 It was also a reason why, very early on, we put a lot of
12 effort into getting a sense amongst the different Iraqi
13 groups that they could come together, because one of the
14 things that had happened in Iraq, obviously, was that
15 the Sunni, who were, what, 20 per cent of the population
16 had effectively ruled the country, and so the majority
17 Shia population had been excluded. So this was going to
18 be a huge thing now. They were for the first time going
19 to come positions of power.

20 But we put a lot of focus and work in that, and by
21 and large -- you know, one of the extraordinary things
22 about this, from 2003 onwards, is this political
23 process, despite everything continued, and, actually, it
24 was in 2006, as the result of what was an absolutely
25 wicked and deliberate act of bombing the Samarra mosque,

1 that was what started to tip this into a Shia/Sunni
2 issue.

3 Fortunately, in the end, we got back out of it
4 again, but in 2004, down in the south, there were all
5 sorts of issues but we were managing them.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was it then a weakness in the
7 pre-March 2003 discussions that somehow voices weren't
8 raised, and experts and knowledge weren't put on the
9 table that there could be this massive deterioration?

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was very much discussion of the
11 Shia/Sunni issue, and we were very well aware of that.

12 What there wasn't -- and this, again, is of vital
13 importance and this certainly is a lesson in any situation
14 similar to this -- people did not believe that you would
15 have Al-Qaeda coming in from outside and people did not
16 believe that you would end up in a situation where Iran,
17 once, as it were, the threat of Saddam was removed from
18 them, would then try to deliberately destabilise the
19 country, but that's what they did, and there are some
20 very important lessons in that, because what is
21 important also to understand throughout this process,
22 the Iraqi people, as a people, were not in favour of the
23 violence, they were not in favour of sectarianism. As
24 a people, they supported and have supported throughout
25 the political process. Indeed today in Iraq you have

1 now got, for the elections that are coming up, groups
2 who are overtly non-sectarian standing for election,
3 which is a huge thing for the whole of the Middle East
4 and a great thing incidentally.

5 So I think what I think in future you have to be
6 aware of is that if you are dealing with a country where
7 you are likely to get this -- as I say, this perversion
8 of the proper faith of Islam as a major element in the
9 equation, you are going to have to prepare for that very
10 carefully. Your troop configuration has got to be
11 prepared for it and you are going to have to be prepared
12 for quite a fight over it.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned I think twice in your
14 speeches before the war, your meeting with Iraqis and
15 how affected you were by that, but they weren't giving
16 this sort of warning sign?

17 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, they weren't. Look, it was
18 a statement of the obvious. I mean, Britain in a sense,
19 as Iraqis remember, back in the 1920s, were intimately
20 involved with all this. So everybody understood the
21 history of how Iraq had come about, and obviously you
22 had the Kurds, you had the Sunni, and you had the Shia.
23 But the consensus view was you had to watch for the
24 Sunni/Shia violence. That was precisely why you had to
25 construct an inclusive political process.

1 Right from the outset, we tried to deal with that,
2 and I did something else, and I think Jack Straw
3 mentioned this to you in his evidence. I also sent Jack
4 to talk to the Iranians. A very big lesson from this
5 for me was that we tried with the Iranians, tried very
6 hard to reach out, to in a sense make an agreement with
7 them, to give them a strong indication that it wasn't --
8 the American forces were not there, having done Iraq, to
9 move through to Iran or any of the rest of it and one of
10 the most disappointing, but also, I think, most telling
11 aspects of this is that the Iranians, whatever they
12 said, from the beginning, were a major destabilising
13 factor in this situation and quite deliberately.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: I think, Roderic, you have got a question.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just briefly follow through on that
17 point and then raise one other?

18 Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and with all the
19 wisdom of hindsight, I suppose it seems pretty obvious
20 now that Al-Qaeda would seek to exploit conflict in Iraq
21 and, indeed, that the Iranians would as well. As you
22 have just said, they had a destabilising effect and they
23 must have enjoyed putting pressure on us and the
24 Americans at a time when we were trying to put them
25 under pressure to deal with their nuclear programme.

1 Now, that's all hindsight. But if there had been
2 a really rigorous risk assessment made before we went
3 in, would it really not have shown that these risks
4 existed? You have repeatedly referred to how these
5 external factors destabilised and how this wasn't
6 something that would be predicted. Could it and should
7 it have been predicted?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That is a very, very good question. Let
9 me try and answer it. We did ask for an assessment on
10 Iran particularly. Indeed, you will see through the
11 intelligence assessments in 2002, I'm constantly going
12 back and forward -- you know, is Iran -- I think I asked
13 this again in February 2003: what's the attitude of Iran
14 going to be?

15 The conventional wisdom, if you like, at the time,
16 was that you might get elements of the revolutionary
17 guard playing about, but basically the evidence was that
18 Iran would more or less have a watching brief to see how
19 it would play out but it had no interest in
20 destabilising.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Despite the fact that Iraq had fought
22 a long war with it, they weren't exactly best pals.

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, exactly. That was the point.

24 Because Saddam had been their enemy in the Iran/Iraq
25 war, and, as I say, there were a million casualties in

1 that war, it was the most terrible situation. Precisely
2 because they would be pleased to get rid of Saddam, we
3 thought they would be more amenable.

4 I had actually spoken myself to the President of
5 Iran prior to September 11 when we were trying to get
6 the new resolution on sanctions. I had actually had
7 a telephone conversation with President Khatami at the
8 time. I had gone out of my way to say, "Let's have
9 a new relationship", and so on. So in respect of Iran
10 that was the advice, but we did go into this in some
11 detail.

12 In respect of Al-Qaeda, I think, in retrospect, this
13 was difficult. At the time -- and you know, we know so
14 much more about these groups and how they operate now,
15 but, at the time, the single thing people were most
16 determined to prove was, in a sense, they were two
17 separate problems, because the Americans had raised this
18 question of a link between Saddam and Al-Qaeda, and,
19 really, our system in Britain was determined to say,
20 "No, come on, keep the two things separate. We are not
21 saying Saddam had anything to do with September 11", and
22 that was very much how Al-Qaeda were seen.

23 Now, I think -- and this is a very interesting point
24 because it is absolutely goes to the 2010 point that
25 I raised earlier. My view is, if we had left Saddam

1 there, and he had carried on, as we said, with the
2 intent to develop these weapons and the know-how and the
3 concealment programme, and the sanctions had gone,
4 I have little doubt myself -- but it is a judgment and
5 other people may take a different judgment -- that today
6 we would be facing a situation where Iraq was competing
7 with Iran, competing both on nuclear weapons capability
8 and competing more importantly, perhaps, than anything
9 else -- competing, as well as the nuclear issue, in
10 respect of support of terrorist groups.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think it would be very useful, if we
12 have time at the end, to come back to this 2010 point,
13 because you have raised something that other witnesses
14 have not so far raised with us, at least not in that
15 way. But you have raised it as a sort of binary
16 question, whereas there are alternative scenarios under
17 which Saddam might very well still be in a box.

18 It wasn't a question of whether he got right out of
19 it or not, but I think it is best if we don't go down
20 that track at this moment.

21 I just wanted to put one other question about the
22 post-conflict period to you, which is simply this: you
23 said you went to Baghdad in May and you met Bremer. Of
24 course, when Bremer arrived, he arrived setting up the
25 CPA in place of ORHA which everybody had described as

1 a shambles, with two extremely important edicts which he
2 promulgated in his first week, which had been
3 pre-packaged in Washington, on de-Ba'athification and on
4 the disbandment of the Iraqi armed forces.

5 It wasn't, as other witnesses have told us, that we
6 disagreed with the principle of these edicts. It was
7 really the extent. They were far too sweeping, and that
8 damage had to be undone. So A lot of damage, it turned
9 out, was done by these edicts, again based on what we
10 have heard in evidence.

11 My question is this, simply: had we been consulted
12 before this happened by Washington on these very
13 important decisions? We were their co-occupying power,
14 and if they hadn't consulted us, should they have done?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Certainly the moment -- I mean, I don't
16 know whether there had been any official contact on this
17 at all. I know I hadn't had the discussion with the
18 White House on it. I would, however, say, the moment we
19 were aware of this -- John Sawers was, of course, in
20 Baghdad then, and he was on to the case.

21 I think one of the things, you know, that obviously
22 you will do is to look at this de-Ba'athification and
23 disbandment of the army and assess how big a factor it
24 was.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have done to an extent already.

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I would say it is quite interesting,
2 this. I'm not sure in my own mind about this even now.
3 I think in respect of de-Ba'athification -- and I think
4 John Sawers said this to you -- it was going to be
5 really difficult to prevent a certain level of
6 de-Ba'athification. The question is: should it have
7 gone down to the level it did?

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, that's exactly the point.

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: All I would say about that is the
10 pressure -- because it is almost impossible for us,
11 I think, to understand how oppressed and repressed the
12 population of Iraq felt. Suddenly they had this
13 freedom. They detested these Ba'athist people.
14 I remember meeting groups of Iraqis before the invasion
15 and they would tell you of the torture chambers and all
16 the rest of it. I know we had the same problem with the
17 Nazi party in Germany after the war. It is a very, very
18 difficult situation, this, and even now -- because I got
19 on to President Bush pretty much straight away on this.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was kind of too late by then. So
21 effectively, we hadn't been consulted in advance. As
22 soon as we heard about it, you and John Sawers got on to
23 it.

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think John was actually there at the
25 time of the decision.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: My other question was: do you feel we
2 should have been consulted about it before --

3 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I feel it is a decision of such moment
4 that it would have been sensible if there had been
5 a major discussion about it.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the answer is "yes"?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: But I would say, to be fair to the
8 Americans, the moment that it happened we raised these
9 issues with them and actually they reacted to it.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But they didn't withdraw the decisions.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: They amended the decisions very
12 substantially, and this is where I think again I would
13 consult quite carefully with the people who took these
14 decisions on the American side, because I have spoken to
15 people subsequent to this. I think probably it is true
16 it would have been better not to have done the
17 de-Ba'athification and disbanding of the army in that
18 way, but all I say to you is that's a very live debate
19 amongst the people that were there at the time, and --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- just to say this: as a result of the
22 conversation I had with George Bush, literally days
23 after this, they were then scaling back. They scaled
24 back further, and in respect of the army, they were
25 always intending to re-recruit and then they corrected

1 this pension problem that they had with the army pretty
2 quickly. So all I would say is I think it is something
3 that you need to take a range of views on.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence?

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. We are now firmly into
7 the post-war period. We discussed before lunch some
8 hours ago, the ISG report and I really don't want to go
9 back over that. I think we can agree it indicated that
10 Saddam had never lost his interest in WMD programmes.

11 But the headline for most people was that the actual
12 stocks of WMD, the reconstituted facilities, as
13 discussed in the dossier, for example, had not been
14 found. What was your -- when did you realise that that
15 was likely to be the case?

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, obviously, as time went on through
17 the course of 2003, you know, at the very beginning --
18 you know, others have taken some evidence of our genuine
19 belief about this. At the very beginning, we were
20 constantly, almost daily, getting reports that there was
21 this site or that site and we were trying to direct the
22 armed forces there, but it was a major part of our
23 operation, actually, after 19 March. But obviously,
24 during the course of 2004, it became very difficult to
25 sustain this.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, General Fry has told us
2 that, even as those troops were on that mission, as you
3 describe, they became somewhat disillusioned, because
4 the basis they were supposed to be there, it wasn't
5 there. So even during the course of 2003.

6 Now, that's the fact that you now found, we have
7 gone into this campaign on one assumption. Maybe, as
8 things developed in the future, it still could have
9 turned out as badly as you thought it already was, but
10 it meant that, in effect, the quality of post-Saddam,
11 Iraq was now going to be the major test of what we were
12 doing.

13 I just want to briefly go back before the war. Were
14 you aware of the pre-war assessment that the American
15 army -- the chief of the American army,
16 General Shinseki, made that 500,000 troops were going to
17 be needed to secure Iraq. It wasn't just him that was
18 saying this. He was slapped down by Paul Wolfowitz for
19 the comment. Were you aware of that?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I was aware there was a debate within
21 the American system. Did you use the -- I think it was
22 the doctrine of overwhelming force or did you have
23 a smaller group of people a smaller force? I think the
24 issue is really for the post-war period. I think you
25 can argue for the actual conflict itself there were

1 sufficient troops. The question is: should you then
2 have changed and had more or different troops later?
3 I think, again, that is a difficult question to answer
4 and there are people who take both sides of that.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, but part of the debate
6 within the United States was the determination of
7 Donald Rumsfeld to demonstrate that it was possible to
8 wage a campaign of this sort with comparatively few
9 forces meant that he underprovided for the security
10 situation that was going to arise after the war, which
11 was General Shinseki's point.

12 So in some senses the difficulties that were going
13 to be faced were pre-determined. It was always going to
14 be difficult after the war. There just weren't enough
15 troops around.

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the key thing is this -- and,
17 again, this is a major, major part of how any such
18 operation would be done in the future. The force to
19 remove a regime and change the government, if that's
20 what happens, that's the only way you can secure your
21 objectives, and this is the decision we had come to, the
22 only way we could prevent Saddam being a threat was
23 actually to remove him from office -- the force that you
24 require to do that is one function and there is one set
25 of arguments that go along that, and you are probably

1 much more expert on this than me.

2 However, what we now know and in any of these
3 situations should know from now on, is that you will be
4 nation building after that and that may require a quite
5 different type of force and it may require more, it may
6 require simply different forces, but it is a different
7 task.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed, there are different
9 requirements. We have had evidence about the skill of
10 British forces in being able to move quite quickly from
11 a war-fighting role to this nation-building role, but it
12 is fair to say -- and I don't think Americans, certainly
13 now, would disagree with this -- that was not the way
14 that they looked at it. That, from Rumsfeld's point of
15 view, it was the war-fighting role he was interested in,
16 and they made very little provision, both in training,
17 doctrine and numbers for the follow-on forces that would
18 provide for the security.

19 So in the context also of the disbandment of the
20 Iraqi army, the risk of a vacuum in the security
21 situation is very high indeed.

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think in respect of the
23 disbanding of the army, I think again -- I think --
24 I think it was Mr Slocombe who was dealing with this on
25 behalf of the Americans, and I think his view was that,

1 in a sense, the army melted away and then they tried to
2 re-recruit.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It was the pensions point you
4 mentioned earlier, that it was true that it didn't exist
5 as an organised force, but there was a basis to get them
6 back together quickly again which was lost.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think a huge question here -- because
8 security is what went wrong. Sometimes people say, "If
9 you had done the reconstruction quicker or got more
10 underway or something, it would have been a different
11 situation".

12 My view of this is that the very purpose of the
13 people we ended up fighting was to stop the
14 reconstruction. So every time we would repair
15 electricity, they would bomb it, every time we got the
16 oil production going, they would try and sabotage it.
17 Every time we tried to provide better facilities, they
18 would try and wreck it. So the issue is a security
19 issue.

20 Now, I think we had moved beyond what was a debate
21 at the time, which really went something like this --
22 and you probably recall this from 2003 and the early
23 part of 2004, and that was a debate which said, "Look,
24 the Americans are good at war fighting, but they do not
25 do peacekeeping. The British can do both". I think, if

1 we are looking at our own capabilities now, and what we
2 will do in the future, I think it is not as simple as
3 that, actually, and if you look at what General Petraeus
4 did in the end with the surge, it is correct that he had
5 his political dimension, reaching out to the Sunnis and
6 so on, but as the surge began, the American forces
7 suffered even heavier casualties.

8 I mean, they were doing fighting and one of the
9 things that I think -- I am afraid we have to learn from
10 this situation, because we face exactly the same
11 situation in Afghanistan -- is that, in these
12 circumstances, it is not going to be easy. You do not
13 move to peacekeeping because actually you are facing
14 a situation where your enemy is trying to kill you.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It partly depends upon your ability
16 to assert order and authority early on, and I don't want
17 to go into all the details, but that's clearly where
18 things went badly wrong, and we can remember the looting
19 and so on and comments that were made at the time.

20 Let me fast forward to what seems to me
21 a particularly significant month, which is April 2004.

22 A lot of things happened in that month. I won't --
23 one of them was Spain left the coalition, but we will
24 leave that to one side. Fallujah. You have --
25 relations with the Sunni community had deteriorated,

1 they felt they were potentially being disenfranchised.
2 This was coming to a head in Fallujah, where US Marines
3 were planning to enter the city with force to take out
4 some 2000, I think, insurgents. How did you view that
5 situation, because it was potentially extremely
6 dangerous?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It certainly was, yes, and I was
8 involved in discussions with the Americans, with the
9 President and also with Allawi as well, who was taking
10 on the interim administration in Iraq.

11 I mean, I think at the time I was worried the
12 Americans were going in too hard and too heavy, and they
13 made certain changes as a result of the conversations
14 that we were having. If I look back on it now, I'm not
15 sure I was right about it, though. You see, I think the
16 truth is we were reaching out to the Sunni. Indeed, one
17 of the reasons why I could see us having a more
18 challenging situation in the south through into 2005,
19 and it was something we were discussing in the
20 government, was that it would become at some point very
21 clear that the purpose of what we were doing was not to
22 replace a Sunni dictatorship, a minority dictatorship
23 with a Shia majority dictatorship. We actually wanted
24 a genuinely inclusive government. So I have always
25 thought at some point we must be able to persuade the

1 Sunni that we were actually their best chance of
2 participating in the political process.

3 The reality is there were people who were quite
4 determined not to allow that reconciliation to happen.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, this illustrates the dilemma
6 you now faced, the coalition faced, because, on the one
7 hand, you had people who clearly had no interest in any
8 accommodation with the coalition, starting to cause
9 serious casualties, developing their numbers and their
10 skills, and not just external forces, these were
11 indigenous. But if you came down too hard on them, the
12 risk was of alienating further. The scenes that would
13 be out on Al Jazeera would be horrific. You were
14 concerned, I suspect, about the impact of what
15 Mr Brahimi could do, who was Sergio de Mello's -- not
16 quite in the same role -- replacement.

17 I'm interested in the dilemmas we found ourselves in
18 in Iraq. Either way, it was going to be very tough.

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, it was going to be very tough, and
20 one of the central questions -- I mean, my view is that
21 the way these terrorists are trying to stop us doing
22 what is right and right by the people of Iraq shouldn't
23 deter us. We should carry on, and, having beaten one
24 tyranny -- as one Iraqi put it to me: having beaten the
25 tyranny of Saddam, we should now beat the tyranny of the

1 terrorists.

2 I was certainly of the view that we had to carry on
3 in that endeavour, but you are absolutely right, that
4 was a huge problem, and the interesting thing to me, if
5 you look round the world, it is a problem for all
6 nations in this situation dealing with this new type of
7 terrorism.

8 If you take -- because I spend a lot of time out
9 there now, obviously, in the Middle East, with the
10 Israel/Palestine question, it is a constant problem for
11 Israel. They get attacked, they then use great force in
12 retaliating. Before you have gone two weeks, they are
13 the people who have started it all.

14 If you look at the difficulties that India has, or
15 Russia and Chechnya, or --

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is undoubtedly true that the
17 nature of the response to this sort of insurgency makes
18 a difference to it, and we can talk about these other
19 cases. The problem that you were in at the time is that
20 the forces available to the coalition were insufficient
21 to get a grip on it, and that the methods that they
22 therefore would have to use in order to impose
23 themselves militarily, would be much more likely to
24 cause civilian casualties than they would have done if
25 you had had far more forces properly trained to start

1 with.

2 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Obviously this wasn't the issue down
3 south, but --

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's the other issue
5 for April 2004.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but -- I think you have got to look
7 at this question very carefully, because I think I would
8 put it in a different way, and I think, if you look at
9 how the surge actually worked in the end, it worked
10 because you had a -- in fact, it really worked for four
11 reasons, the surge.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think -- the surge worked in very
13 different political circumstances than those obtaining
14 in 2003/2004.

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's my point, in a sense; that if you
16 analyse why it worked then, 2007, and in 2004 it wasn't
17 working, then that's the question: what is the --

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, but it worked because you had
19 forces that were trained for the job, you had a doctrine
20 that was appropriate, and the political conditions,
21 including -- you have indicated this aspiration of the
22 Iraqis with the violence helped, but in 2003/2004, it
23 was different.

24 Let me just explain April 2004. You have also got
25 the Sadrist uprising. You have got -- we had considered

1 the Shia areas more likely to be settled, and you have
2 given some indication of this as well. So now we are
3 starting to find, even there, violence is taking root.
4 This, again, must have been a really serious concern to
5 you, because this is where the British forces were.

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely, and what was very clear is,
7 as I say, this influence of Iran on the situation was
8 growing. We debated a lot what to do with Moqtadr Sadr.
9 Did we try and reach out to him? I think we tried to
10 make certain approaches there. Did we try to arrest
11 him? There was an issue there. Would that provoke more
12 violence? This is why these things become really,
13 really difficult.

14 Sorry, I didn't mean to take you out of your time
15 zone when looking at the surge, but the reason I think
16 it is so important, because there is a real lesson out
17 of this, is that -- you see, you are bound to take
18 a certain amount of time to win this battle, because,
19 essentially, what happened in Iraq, and I have tried to
20 explain this to people before, is you had one conflict,
21 which was the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and
22 that was over pretty quickly. You had the aftermath,
23 which was very difficult. But then what started to
24 happen in 2004/2005, and then with full on in 2006, the
25 first half of 2007, is you had a metamorphosis into

1 a different type of conflict, where you were fighting,
2 yes, a certain amount of indigenous insurgency, but with
3 these external factors coming in.

4 In the end, what did we need? We needed four things
5 to defeat this, and two of them take time. One is we
6 needed the political buy-in. The second is we needed to
7 build up Iraqi capability. The third is we needed, as
8 you rightly say, Sir Lawrence, the right troop
9 configuration, and the fourth thing is we needed to be
10 prepared to stick at it and to indicate clearly that we
11 were going to stick at it until it was done.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have taken us again three, four
13 years further on and indicated what happened in those
14 three years.

15 The final aspects of this month, April 2004, which
16 was the revelation of what happened at Abu Ghraib. What
17 was your reaction when you saw the photographs of the
18 conditions inside the prison?

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I was shocked and angry, as anyone
20 would be. Shocked because it was wrong, and angry
21 because of the damage I knew it would do.

22 You know, you mentioned earlier the media part of
23 this and Al Jazeera. The truth is we were fighting
24 a constant battle against people utterly misrepresenting
25 us, our motives, what we were trying to do, and

1 obviously these pictures and the abuse of prisoners was
2 going to be vital propaganda for our enemies.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Had you been given any advance
4 warning by the Americans that these revelations were
5 coming?

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think everybody was taken by surprise,
7 including in the White House.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there was knowledge from January
9 that something awful had been going on there.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I had actually appointed Ann Clwyd as
11 human rights adviser, and we made a real effort, in
12 fact, to try and say, "Look, things are going to happen
13 differently". So there are no excuses for it. It is
14 completely wrong. The most important thing was that it
15 did damage to our cause.

16 On the other hand, and it is right to say this, and
17 I said this at the time, the activities of a few within
18 the American forces, and, indeed, the British forces,
19 should not take away from the fact that the majority of
20 American and British forces were doing a magnificent job
21 in incredibly difficult circumstances and were doing
22 that job for the Iraqi people and protecting them and
23 helping them.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Well, let's consider how much they
25 were. We have covered some of this. So let me just

1 summarise where we seem to be. The year after the
2 invasion, at the moment the coalition is unable to
3 provide security for the Iraqi people and you have
4 indicated, without security, life can't get better.
5 Infrastructure is blown up, the life of people
6 deteriorates, services aren't any good. You can't
7 develop the economy and that feeds into an awful
8 situation.

9 Now, for the Iraqi people at this time things are
10 not getting better. Is that fair to say? If you look
11 at the promises that had been made to them, they might
12 have some grounds for disillusionment with the
13 coalition.

14 I just want to give you some figures, because I find
15 them tragic. We are in January 2010 now. These are
16 just January monthly figures, the documented civilian
17 deaths from violence in Iraq. 570 in January 2004,
18 10,000 -- sorry, 1,042 in January 2005, 1,433
19 in January 2006. 2,807 in January 2007. These are
20 monthly figures. These are the documented deaths. They
21 are not the -- goodness knows how many undocumented.
22 They are not the deaths from the deterioration in
23 services, poverty, poor health and so on.

24 The striking thing is they are getting worse each
25 year. What did you feel at the time that you could do

1 about this? Did you -- what could you say to the Iraqi
2 people that could explain what they must have felt,
3 a sense of letdown at what the coalition had been able
4 to do for them?

5 RT HON TONY BLAIR: What we did with the Iraqi people was to
6 say, "First of all, we are going to carry on with the
7 political process, because for the first time you have
8 actually been able to elect your government and your
9 officials. You are drawing up a constitution in
10 a proper and decent way".

11 The second thing was to say, "We are going to be
12 with you and we are going to help you defeat this", and
13 the third thing to say -- and this is immensely
14 important to this whole argument -- when people say,
15 "There were people dying in Iraq", and, you know, the
16 figures, I think the most reliable figures out of the
17 Iraq body count or the Brookings Institute may be
18 100,000 over this whole period -- the coalition forces
19 weren't the ones doing the killing. The ones doing the
20 killing were the terrorists, the sectarians, and they
21 were doing it quite deliberately to stop us making the
22 progress we wanted to make.

23 So my attitude -- and I took this line very, very
24 strongly with people -- when we say, "Isn't it terrible
25 that the death toll went to 2007, that high?" yes, it is

1 terrible, but the first question to ask is, "Who was
2 killing them?" and this turned out to be precisely the
3 same people that we were trying to fight everywhere and
4 our responsibility was to stick in there and see it
5 through, which eventually happened with the surge, with
6 the Charge of the Knights down in Basra, and today, of
7 course, the situation in Iraq is very, very different
8 and the people are better off and have a decent chance
9 of a proper future.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let us hope so.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that's the evidence that was
12 given --

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Certainly better off than they were
14 in 2007.

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Or in 2003, or 2002, or 2001.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Having just had some conversations
17 with Iraqis, I think that's something that has to be
18 shown. But I don't want to get into that. We can agree
19 and hope that the position for ordinary Iraqis only
20 improves.

21 Can I just go back to this question of
22 responsibility? There is no doubt that this was not
23 British troops killing Iraqi civilians. This was
24 violence on a major scale, but isn't it, to some extent,
25 to a considerable extent, our responsibility, if we have

1 gone into a country, initially as an occupying power,
2 and then unable to provide the basics of security?

3 Let me just -- this is evidence that we got from
4 General Shirreff describing the situation as he found it
5 in May 2006:

6 "A single battalion commander responsible for a city
7 of 1.3 million people told me that he can put no more
8 than 13 half platoons or multiples on the ground, less
9 than 200 soldiers on the ground. You compare that with
10 what I recall as a young platoon commander in
11 West Belfast in the late 1970s, when there was a brigade
12 on the ground. The result of all of that was what
13 I call a cycle of insecurity."

14 He goes on to make the points that we have made
15 before. So that was May 2006, and the basic description
16 was that the militias had filled the gap that we had
17 left.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: By May 2009, that is a different
19 situation, and why? Because we then built up the
20 capacity of the Iraqi forces themselves. Actually, in
21 the end, the British, I think, were particularly with
22 the Iraqi 10 Division. In the end, we managed -- and if
23 it hadn't been for the British forces down in Basra
24 making sure that we were acting and helping keep this at
25 bay the entire time, the Charge of the Knights would

1 never have worked, but it did in the end, and if you
2 talk to people about Basra today, there are real
3 improvements there now and it is a completely different
4 situation in security. Likewise, in the rest of Iraq.

5 In the end, we did stick with them, and I agree with
6 you it is our responsibility, but here is the point that
7 I think we have got to get ourselves into in the western
8 world, if I can put it like this, or when we are doing
9 these types of operations: yes, it is our
10 responsibility, but let's be quite clear why we face the
11 difficulty. We face the difficulty because these people
12 were prepared to go and kill any number of completely
13 innocent people in suicide bombings, because, as you
14 know, in the first half of 2004, I think we had 30, in
15 the first half of 2005 that then went up to 200. We
16 should be prepared to take these people on, and the fact
17 that they are prepared to act like this should not be
18 a reason for our not being there or fighting them.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to conclude because there are
20 other questions that need to be posed to you. I suppose
21 the final question is: this was a very heavy price to
22 pay, was it not, for the lack of preparation? Perhaps
23 a cavalier attitude to planning taken, perhaps more in
24 the United States than the United Kingdom in 2003.

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We certainly didn't take a cavalier

1 attitude to planning in the UK. What we planned for was
2 what we thought was going to happen. But -- and you
3 will consider this, but I just give you my view of this,
4 because, otherwise, I think we will make a mistake in
5 the future in such situations.

6 However much you plan, and whatever forces you have,
7 if you have these elements, AQ on the one side, Iran on
8 the other, who are prepared to destabilise, you are
9 going to be in a tough, long-drawnout, difficult
10 situation, but my point is very simple: the fact that
11 these people, in breach of not just the rules of
12 international law, but humanity, are prepared to do
13 these terrible things in order to frustrate the will of
14 the Iraqi people should not mean we back away from
15 confronting them. We should be there with the Iraqi
16 people, alongside them, as we did and were in the end,
17 in order to make sure that, having been released from
18 Saddam, they were then released from the reign of
19 terror.

20 I do speak to Iraqis, and I spoke to one just a few
21 days back who said to me, "We have changed the certainty
22 of repression for the uncertainty of democratic
23 politics". He said, "It is difficult and challenging,
24 but the progress is extraordinary", and nobody would
25 want to go back to the days when they had no freedom and

1 no opportunity and no hope.

2 So I understand what you are saying, but -- and we
3 do have to take our responsibilities seriously in these
4 situations, but we are in exactly the same situation now
5 in Afghanistan, and heaven knows where we will be in the
6 same situation again in the future, and the lesson out
7 of it, in my view, is you have got to be prepared for
8 the long haul and you have got to be prepared to stick
9 it through to the end.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The long haul started in 2003?

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It did start in 2003, but I posed the
12 2010 question earlier and I will pose it again.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. At that point, I think I had
14 better pass over to the Chairman.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we had better ask one or two
16 questions about Afghanistan and its influence, as it
17 were, from the side, on the Iraq situation, not to look
18 at Afghanistan in its own right. Sir Roderic?

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just one really. You have just mentioned
20 it.

21 In 2004, Geoff Hoon told us that he was against the
22 idea of deploying into -- more troops into Afghanistan
23 until we had reduced our commitments in Iraq. In the
24 following year, we decided to take responsibility for
25 Helmand province in Afghanistan and to deploy a much

1 larger troop contingent there, and the effect of that
2 was that, by the end of 2006, at its peak, we had over
3 7,000 troops still in Iraq and over 6,000 by then in
4 Afghanistan.

5 Weren't you concerned that this was stretching the
6 resources, both the human and the equipment resources,
7 of the army absolutely to their limits?

8 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I was certainly concerned that we
9 were then fighting in two different theatres of
10 operation, but, again, I think the decision actually to
11 go down into Helmand was taken, or began to be taken in
12 2005. We were told that we were able to do this, and it
13 was right that we did it, and what was actually
14 happening in Iraq was that, unlike the rest of -- it all
15 happening in Basra, as I would say it, in the south as
16 opposed to the rest the country, is that the problem in
17 a way was that people were worried that most of the
18 attacks were actually happening on us, on the coalition
19 forces. So our concern was that, over time, we should
20 be building up the Iraqi capability and then that would
21 allow us to draw down.

22 But we were capable of doing the Helmand mission,
23 and, indeed, we wouldn't have done it if weren't.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it was a stretch, and you were warned
25 that it would be stretch presumably?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Actually, the suggestion that we did it
2 came from the MoD. Of course, they said it is going to
3 be tough for us, but they said we can do it and we
4 should do it. So in a sense, right at the moment it was
5 difficult in Iraq, we were prepared to make the
6 additional commitment to Afghanistan.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: We would like, Mr Blair, to ask a few
9 questions about the strategic direction of government
10 and how one does that in a Cabinet system in situations
11 like Iraq. I think Baroness Prashar would like a start.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

13 Some questions, Mr Blair. Just taking your meeting
14 on 3 July 2002, which you chaired and at which the Chief
15 of Defence Staff put forward some military options, and
16 according to Alastair Campbell you said that you did not
17 want any discussions with other departments at this
18 stage and did not want any of this swimming around the
19 system.

20 Why was the participation restricted to two Cabinet
21 ministers and not, for example, to the Secretary of
22 State for International Development Secretary?

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were discussing then what was likely
24 to happen in relation to the politics and the diplomacy,
25 particularly in relation to the military.

1 Now, at a later time, as you know, there were --
2 officials from DFID were involved in the planning
3 meetings. I think --

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My understanding is that came at
5 a very late stage and after a lot of pressure from --

6 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the officials were together. It
7 is true that it was at a later time that Clare Short
8 herself joined the Committee.

9 However, having said that, we were in pretty regular
10 correspondence and, as I say, in the end, DFID acquitted
11 itself perfectly well. The problem we had was not
12 a problem that was capable of being cured by DFID.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but, I mean, at an
14 early stage, for effective planning to go ahead, you
15 know, you need full departmental engagement, probably
16 Cabinet involvement. Why wasn't the Treasury and DFID
17 involved in the early stages?

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We were also discussing this at
19 a Cabinet level too, and obviously we were in close
20 touch with the Treasury and so on. Right at that
21 moment, the single most important areas were diplomacy
22 and were the issues to do with military planning.

23 Look, I know that much has been made of: well, these
24 were ad hoc committee meetings with a small "a" and
25 a small "h", rather than with a large "A" and a large

1 "H". The key thing was to get the key players together
2 so you could have a proper, frank discussion and take
3 the decisions necessary. That's really what we did,
4 both before the invasion and afterwards.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's true, but Lord Turnbull said:

6 "I think you should include people who have a locus,
7 even if they are going to be difficult."

8 Because in a way, if you are going to look at the
9 aftermath reconstruction, DFID and the Treasury had
10 a locus.

11 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sure, and I think I said in response to
12 the Butler Inquiry that, you know, in future, there is
13 a case for having a specially constituted committee.

14 All I would say to you is that we did have the key
15 players and there was a constant interaction with
16 government on the key issues. Insofar as we were
17 predicting what we would find, we made provision for it
18 and the relationship between myself and Jack Straw,
19 Geoff Hoon, the politicians, but also the Chief of
20 Defence Staff, were close. I mean, we were in close
21 interaction the entire time, and the main bulk of this
22 was going to be done in the first instance by the
23 military.

24 Now, it is correct that, as we got into late 2002,
25 early 2003, DFID became a bigger part of the picture.

1 Clare said she wanted to come to the meetings. That was
2 fair enough. That then happened. The issue, however,
3 that DFID was focused on was the humanitarian side, and,
4 to be fair to them, they did a very good job of it.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As you have mentioned the
6 Butler Report, I think the Chairman has a question on
7 that.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: I sat on the Butler Committee and I don't
9 want to go over old ground, but just to be clear, the
10 Cabinet met frequently in the period 2002/2003, and it
11 is not that they were not consulted, but, rather, that
12 papers in general were not circulated.

13 The Butler Committee found none and we haven't found
14 any, which has given rise to the question: was there
15 sufficient information, analysis, both of the issues and
16 about the background, to enable your Cabinet colleagues,
17 who would take full collective responsibility for the
18 big decisions, to understand, and, if necessary,
19 challenge within Cabinet discussion?

20 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We had, I think -- I think it is 20 --
21 I think there was --

22 THE CHAIRMAN: At least 25.

23 RT HON TONY BLAIR: -- 25 pre-invasion Cabinet discussions
24 of Iraq, and then there were ad hoc ministerial
25 discussions, I think 28 of those meetings. There was

1 a constant interaction and people would describe -- it
2 wasn't just a sort of formal Cabinet discussion,
3 Jack Straw would take people through the information
4 that we had. There was an immense amount going on
5 inside the MoD, inside the Foreign Office, actually
6 inside DFID as well, and I really don't think any of the
7 members of the Cabinet at the time felt they weren't
8 involved or felt they couldn't challenge.

9 Indeed, Robin Cook did, and Robin and I disagreed
10 about it in the end. So obviously, there are these
11 issues to do with the nature of the meetings that were
12 held, but I was in an almost constant interaction for
13 2002 and 2003 with members of the Cabinet.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: You do have, both from two very different
15 witnesses that we have taken testimony from,
16 Alastair Campbell and Lord Turnbull, the same thought,
17 that you need to accommodate difference of view and
18 respond to it within a collective, within, in this case,
19 the Cabinet or some smaller grouping, the ad hoc
20 committee, for example.

21 With hindsight, do you think that there was
22 sufficient space and opportunity for those differences
23 to be accommodated and fed into final judgments?

24 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I really do, actually, yes. Nobody in
25 the Cabinet was unaware of the -- what the whole issue

1 was about. It was the thing running throughout the
2 whole of the political mainstream at the time. There
3 were members of the Cabinet who would challenge and
4 disagree, but most of them agreed. It was the same with
5 Parliament. I was subject to constant numbers of people
6 telling me, "You shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do
7 that, you should do it differently", and so on, and in
8 relation to the planning afterwards, I mean, whatever
9 else -- whatever differences Clare Short and I may have
10 had from time to time, the one thing I would never
11 accuse her of being is backward in coming forward.

12 So there was a huge -- all the time, interaction, as
13 I say, between people on the very issues.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we would like to explore
15 just one other aspect of this, and that's the
16 interaction between major strategic policy-making at
17 Cabinet level, at Prime Ministerial level indeed, and
18 the folding into that of key legal advice.

19 We are not going to go over the ground we have
20 already covered earlier today, but there is a set of
21 questions we would just like to pursue, starting with
22 you, Usha.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairman.

24 We discussed with Lord Goldsmith, you know, the
25 process through which he was involved in this

1 decision-making process and what became very clear is
2 that, during the time, particularly before July 2002,
3 ministers were making public statements. I think he had
4 to write to Mr Hoon and he saw a memo of the comments
5 that Mr Straw had made to Colin Powell, and he was
6 having to constantly write and tell them, you know, they
7 should be seeking his legal advice.

8 The fact that he had to respond to people making
9 statements without being clear about what the legal
10 situation was, do you think that could have been avoided
11 if the Attorney had been able to discuss issues in the
12 Cabinet and that would have actually ensured that the
13 formal advice of the Attorney would have been
14 pre-empted?

15 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think the very first paper we got on
16 this back in March, or the clutch of papers we got
17 in March 2002, which were seen obviously by Jack --
18 I mean, the legal paper was provided by Jack Straw's
19 department and by Geoff Hoon as well, who is, I think,
20 fully aware of all this. I mean, people had the basic
21 legal framework.

22 Now, I think it is perfectly good for
23 Peter Goldsmith, as the Attorney General, on his own
24 volition, if he thought somebody was saying something
25 that couldn't be justified or was unwise in legal terms,

1 if he got on the phone and said, "Don't do it", or wrote
2 them a note saying, "Come back into line on this", which
3 I think they did.

4 I don't think it would have made a great deal of
5 difference to have had him there at Cabinet. What
6 he needed to be able to do was be in a position feeling
7 sufficiently confident, which he did, to be able to
8 intervene and say, "I don't agree".

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the expression we got was he was
10 constantly having to ask, and wanted to write his
11 opinion, and provide his opinion, and he said it wasn't
12 always welcome.

13 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think he said that about the
14 particular opinion he gave at the end of July, and it
15 wasn't so much, as I said earlier, that it wasn't
16 welcome, it was, you know, I was dealing with an already
17 difficult situation. Now I had another issue to take
18 account of. I had to take account of it, rightly, and,
19 incidentally, he was completely right to do it, because
20 it made a big difference to the way we approached 1441
21 and the resolution there, but I don't think it would
22 have made -- look, I'm very happy to talk about how, for
23 example, you know, you might do some of these things
24 differently now, but I honestly don't think having Peter
25 at the Cabinet meeting would have made a difference.

1 What did make a difference was his having the
2 confidence to be able to say, as he should, as an
3 independent attorney for the government, to pick up the
4 phone and -- even to the Prime Minister, which he did,
5 saying, "This is what you can say and this is what you
6 can't".

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that doesn't allow for
8 a collective decision-making where there is a proper
9 consideration of different options and so on.

10 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think in respect of the legal
11 opinion, Baroness, I think that the key thing really was
12 this: the Cabinet weren't interested in becoming part of
13 the legal debate, they just wanted to know, "Is the
14 Attorney General saying it is lawful or it is not?"

15 I think in respect of these other issues, there were
16 actual debates about this. There was a debate, for
17 example, in January 2003, if I recollect it, that was
18 not just about the diplomatic issues, but specifically
19 on the humanitarian and aftermath questions in Cabinet.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But going back to the legal advice,
21 I mean, when the Cabinet met on 17 March, I think
22 Lord Goldsmith presented the draft Parliamentary
23 question answer, but there was no discussion on this
24 legal advice, and we have seen the report of
25 a discussion that he had with Mr Straw on 13 March in

1 which he was persuaded not to present a finely balanced
2 paper of the arguments, but actually to present this
3 paper which was going to be his Parliamentary question,
4 and I think Clare Short made it clear that she wanted to
5 discuss it and know whether the Attorney General had
6 changed his mind, but no such discussion took place.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think Andrew Turnbull explained this
8 to you. The whole purpose of having the Attorney there
9 at the Cabinet was so that he could answer anybody's
10 questions about it.

11 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the Attorney General did say
12 that, you know, the legal basis is essential but not
13 sufficient. So in that sense the broader implications
14 of invasion -- I mean, should that not have been
15 discussed?

16 RT HON TONY BLAIR: The broader implications in terms of
17 whether it was right or wrong to do it?

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

19 RT HON TONY BLAIR: That was, in a sense, the purpose of the
20 Cabinet discussion, I think, and it is perfectly -- the
21 legal issues were one aspect of this. But I think, once
22 the members of the Cabinet -- I mean, the members of the
23 Cabinet were really focused on the politics, and indeed
24 even Robin Cook, his attitude was, if you get
25 a second resolution, then I'm with you, but if you

1 can't, then, politically, I think this is too difficult.
2 So, you know, we were very focused on those political as
3 well as legal questions.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But would it not have allowed them
5 to weigh up the risks for themselves, for the civil
6 servants and so on, you know?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think they were weighing the risks up
8 for the country, but I don't think, in respect of the
9 law, as it were -- I don't think members of the Cabinet
10 wanted to have a debate with -- I mean, Peter was there
11 and could have answered any questions they had, but
12 their basic question to him was: is there a proper legal
13 basis for this or not and his answer was, "Yes."

14 Now, we had actually said -- and this was the reason
15 why we had Peter there and I think in any future
16 situation it is sensible to have the Attorney there.
17 But in a sense we offered him up; he was the lawyer
18 there to talk about it.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Blair, do you think there is a contrast of
20 approach between what frequently happens in government
21 at all levels, including to the top, that, in forming
22 policy, you engage with legal advice because it may need
23 expression in statute, or comply with existing bodies of
24 law, you fold in the legal advice through the
25 policy-making process -- that's one approach. The other

1 is to set very clearly what your policy objectives
2 are -- and they may be, as in the Iraq case, iron
3 strategic objectives -- and then, as it were, work
4 around or through and with the constraints and
5 opportunities that legal advice then gives? Do you see
6 a difference of approach there?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think that there could be but I would
8 say in this situation, since in a way March 2002 was the
9 time when you set the first framework for this, the
10 legal advice was one of the key things we asked for, and
11 we got it, and that legal advice -- and it is
12 interesting to go back and look at it -- it was legal
13 advice that was saying you needed a fresh resolution,
14 and one of the reasons why we went down the path was to
15 give a fresh resolution.

16 One of the things -- and this was part of the debate
17 that happened later -- was that I felt we got the fresh
18 resolution, so why is there still a legal problem, but
19 then I was told what the problem was.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: It still seems, from all we have heard, both
21 today and on from previous witnesses, that there was
22 a very clear strategic policy objective set for Iraq,
23 which was to bring about compliance with the
24 United Nations Resolutions, disarmament, clearing of
25 WMDs, and if that meant regime change by military means,

1 that was the last resort but not ruled out.

2 But there were moments very, very late
3 in January, February and March 2003, when that policy
4 objective could have been blocked by a failure because
5 of a legal constraint. Is that unavoidable in
6 situations like this?

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, I think it is unavoidable in
8 a situation where it is that controversial and divisive
9 and it is that -- you know, that open to challenge. You
10 see, there actually could have been a major debate about
11 Kosovo and legality; there could have been. There
12 wasn't because in the end most people went along with
13 the action; they agreed with what we were doing.

14 The truth is that the law and the politics follow
15 each other quite closely, and I think, necessarily in
16 this situation, where we were setting our strategic
17 objectives. You know, we had this strong belief and, as
18 I say, this is my belief now too, that this threat had
19 to be dealt with with a certain amount of urgency. We
20 had our alliance with the United States of America and
21 so on and all the issues to do with Saddam, and then
22 obviously, at the same time, as you are proceeding and
23 strategy is evolving, diplomacy is evolving, you are
24 looking at the issues to do with legality.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we would just like to ask one or two

1 more questions before we come to the close. So, Usha?

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My final question, Mr Blair, is
3 really about the effective government? Because there
4 would be a long command chain. Because, if you are
5 looking at the top decision-makers in London, working
6 with soldiers and civilians who had to deliver locally
7 in Iraq -- so it is quite a complex operation and many
8 of these issues were cross-departmental, and therefore
9 quite -- a new operation had kind of come together.

10 How did you hold your Secretary of State to account
11 for delivery, because delivery was your mantra at that
12 stage? How did you make sure that what was to be
13 delivered was being delivered effectively on the ground?

14 RT HON TONY BLAIR: In the pre-war part we had the Ad Hoc
15 Group on Iraq of officials, which met from September
16 onwards, and that included all the relevant departments.
17 I was chairing the ad hoc ministerial discussions, and
18 as I say, I think we had 28 of those meetings. And then
19 afterwards we had the War Cabinet and then the DOP
20 meetings, and then Jack Straw became the effective
21 Chairman of the ministers and the officials driving
22 forward policy from that front.

23 There wasn't an issue really at any stage of this
24 with people not feeling they were part of this, apart
25 from the one issue to do with Clare and the ad hoc

1 committee, which, as I say, was resolved in, I think,
2 early 2003.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But Tim Cross said to us that there
4 was no minister Cabinet rank reporting back and driving
5 this day-to-day, because, you know, what we were hearing
6 from the ground. This was Tim Cross's comment to us.

7 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, I think one of the questions -- and
8 I think this has been raised in some evidence to you --
9 is, again, if we knew then what we know now, would you
10 want perhaps to put a specific Cabinet minister in
11 charge of this? All these things are worth looking at.
12 The only thing I would say to you is that we were,
13 partly through my own personal involvement but also
14 because you had Mike Boyce and the Chiefs of Staff
15 Committee, you had the officials meeting, you had
16 David Manning very closely involved in this -- I can't
17 really think -- and I think Andrew Turnbull said this to
18 you in his evidence -- that there was a machinery of
19 government problem, in the sense that if we had had
20 a different machinery, we would have acted differently.
21 I don't think, but that's a judgment.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: One thing I want to put to you --
23 because Sir David Omand, whom we saw last week, he
24 emphasised the importance of structuring decision-making
25 so that you are simply not swept along with the pace of

1 events, particularly like military preparations. Do you
2 think we had the ability and the will to pause and look
3 at our strategy? For example, in early 2003, UNMOVIC
4 inspectors had returned to Iraq and were expecting
5 either Saddam would grossly obstruct them or he would
6 quickly find evidence of WMD. In the event this didn't
7 happen. Did we actually think -- did we stop and
8 re-evaluate our strategy at that stage?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: We would have entirely re-evaluated our
10 strategy had, as I say -- and I'm just using this as
11 a shorthand -- Saddam Hussein done a Gaddafi, had he
12 said, "I'm finished with all this, I want to join the
13 international community on proper terms." But he
14 didn't, and what he did -- and this is where, as I say,
15 the Iraq Survey Group -- unfortunately, people have only
16 looked at one part of their findings and not the other
17 part of their findings. He never had any intention of
18 complying because he had the intention, once he got
19 sanctions out of the way, of restarting it again.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Even later, it became clear that our
21 post-war efforts were becoming a strategic failure. Did
22 we think at that stage -- because the impression one
23 gets is we are responding to events on the ground. Were
24 we doing any re-thinking?

25 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Absolutely. The reason why we were in

1 a constant iteration very quickly after the conflict was
2 because of what we were finding, and then, as I say,
3 there was this metamorphosis of the whole struggle,
4 really, and battle, when the AQ and Iran elements became
5 uppermost, and then it really did change into
6 a different type of fight, and one of the interesting
7 things, for example -- I mean, Kimberly Kagan does this
8 on her book on the surge and it is important because in
9 the end that is what worked.

10 What nobody foresaw was that Iran would actually end
11 up supporting AQ. The conventional wisdom was these two
12 are completely different types of people because Iran is
13 Shia, the Al-Qaeda people are Sunni and therefore, you
14 know, the two would never mix. What happened in the end
15 was that they did because they both had a common
16 interest in destabilising the country, and for Iran
17 I think the reason they were interested in destabilising
18 Iraq was because they worried about having a functioning
19 majority Shia country with a democracy on their
20 doorstep, and for Al-Qaeda they knew perfectly well
21 their whole mission was to try and say the West was
22 oppressing Islam. It is hard to do that if you replace
23 tyrannical governments with functioning democracies.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So from your point of view you think
25 the machinery of government worked?

1 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I don't doubt you could have had
2 different machineries, but we did have a machinery of
3 government that worked, and worked effectively, in order
4 to analyse the problems we were likely to face and how
5 we would deal with them. And as I say, I think no doubt
6 there are other ways that it can be done but we had --

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But on reflection there is nothing
8 you would do differently?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think, when you look back now -- and
10 I have just said to you earlier. For example, if you
11 want to look at maybe putting a specific Cabinet
12 minister in charge of this, there are all sorts
13 of things that, if you knew then what you know now, you
14 would do differently; I have been through the whole
15 reconstruction piece. But, in terms of what we knew at
16 that time, we had a machinery of government that was
17 perfectly adequate. There were 25 separate Cabinet
18 meetings, 28 ad hoc committee meetings, regular weekly
19 meetings of the officials.

20 Now, you could put them with a capital "A" and
21 a capital "H", rather than a small "a" and a small "h",
22 but I don't think it would have made a difference to the
23 essential decision-making.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: We are coming to to the end and I have got
25 a couple of questions I would like to raise. I think

1 the first is to look at the perspective of the whole
2 enterprise from the standpoint of the people of Iraq.
3 The coalition went in as liberators. Rather soon they
4 began to be resented by parts of the population and then
5 attacked as occupiers by some. By the time, for
6 example, British forces withdrew from Basra City to the
7 airport, 90 per cent of the attacks there were against
8 them, as against -- between mix of the Shia factions.

9 So do you think, looking back from 2010, that the
10 people of Iraq thought that the enterprise was
11 worthwhile. Just as one piece, not of evidence but as
12 a bit of anecdote: a very senior constitutional, if
13 I can put it that way, Iraqi, said, clearly it was good
14 that Saddam has gone but the inept nature of the some of
15 the things that the coalition did -- the coalition, not
16 the British specifically -- has caused great suffering,
17 so the price was high.

18 RT HON TONY BLAIR: It is too early to say right now whether
19 the Iraqi democracy will take root and will function
20 effectively, although, as I think John Jenkins and
21 Frank Baker said to you, there are really hopeful signs.
22 And just to say some of the things that I think are
23 taking place in Iraq today, if you look, for example, at
24 the electricity, you look at income per head, which is
25 several times what it was under Saddam, you look at now

1 the money that is being spent on infrastructure,
2 I think, yes, it was a very, very difficult fight
3 indeed, it was always going to be difficult once these
4 external factors came into play of AQ and Iran, but,
5 sure, when you go into a nation-building situation in
6 the future, I think we will be far better prepared and
7 better educated than we were then.

8 I would just give one -- if we are talking about was
9 it worth it in terms of the Iraqis themselves, if you
10 look at the latest information from the Brookings
11 Institute and the polls that they are doing about the
12 right direction, wrong direction for their country, they
13 are actually upbeat about the future. You know, if you
14 look at whether they believe that security and services
15 are getting better, a majority of them think they are,
16 despite all the trouble, despite the fact these
17 terrorists carry on.

18 Let me just give you one example of where I think
19 you can see both the nature, since we are talking about
20 how is it for Iraqis -- because the Iraqis were
21 themselves less worried about the issues to do with
22 United Nations and so on; they were worried about their
23 country and the oppression. Just focus for a moment on
24 what the Saddam Hussein regime was like.

25 In 2000 and 2001 and 2002 they had a child mortality

1 rate of 130 per 1,000 children under the age of five,
2 worse than the Congo. That was despite the fact that
3 Saddam had as much money as he wanted for immunisation
4 programmes and medicines for those children. That
5 equates to roughly about 90,000 deaths under the age of
6 five a year. The figure today is not 130, it is 40.
7 That equates to about 50,000 young people, children,
8 who, as a result of a different regime that cares about
9 its people -- that's the result that getting rid of
10 Saddam makes. And you can talk to Iraqis, of course,
11 who will say to you, some of them, particularly those
12 from the Sunni side still worried about whether they
13 will be able to come into the politics -- and some of
14 them may say, "Well, I don't believe it was worth it."

15 But I think if you ask the majority of Iraqis today,
16 "Would you really prefer, with all the challenges that
17 lie ahead, to be back under Saddam?" I think you would
18 get a pretty overwhelming answer to that question.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: The other perspective clearly -- and you will
20 appreciate this better than anyone can, probably. Our
21 participation in the Iraq conflict has been very
22 divisive here and abroad, has caused deep anguish to
23 those who lost people they loved, some of whom are in
24 this room. There is gratitude, great gratitude, to our
25 armed forces for the sacrifices they made and the

1 bravery they showed and great sorrow at their losses.
2 But we, like you, have also experienced at first hand
3 the anger which is still felt by many people in this
4 country and we have been asking, therefore, the question
5 why. And so, as we conclude today, can I ask what broad
6 lessons you have drawn -- you have drawn some already in
7 the course of your testimony -- and to say whether you
8 have regrets about key aspects of the Iraq conflict?

9 RT HON TONY BLAIR: I mean, I have said some of the things
10 that I think are lessons that can be learned about
11 nation-building. I think you have got to look very
12 carefully at what type of forces you require because
13 there will be a security situation that you face,
14 a challenging security situation. I also think you have
15 really got to look at the issue to do with the nature of
16 this threat from Al-Qaeda on the one hand, Iran on the
17 other, and the impact that that will have, not just on
18 Iraq but potentially in different arenas right round the
19 Middle East region and beyond.

20 I feel -- of course, I had to take this decision as
21 Prime Minister and it was a huge responsibility then,
22 and there is not a single day that passes by that
23 I don't reflect and think about that responsibility, and
24 so I should. But I genuinely believe that if we had
25 left Saddam in power, even with what we know now, we

1 would still have had to have dealt with him, possibly in
2 circumstances where the threat was worse and possibly in
3 circumstances where it was hard to mobilise any support
4 for dealing with that threat.

5 I think we live in a completely new security
6 environment today. I thought that then, I think that
7 now. It is why -- I have said this to you a number of
8 times today -- I take a very hard, tough line on Iran
9 today, and many of the same arguments apply.

10 In the end it was divisive, and I'm sorry about that
11 and I tried my level best to bring people back together
12 again, but if I'm asked whether I believe we are safer,
13 more secure, that Iraq is better, our own security is
14 better with Saddam and his two sons out of power and out
15 of office than in office, I indeed believe that we are,
16 and I think in time to come, if Iraq becomes, as I hope
17 and believe that it will, the country that its people
18 want to see, then we can look back, and particularly our
19 armed forces can look back, with an immense sense of
20 pride and achievement in what they did.

21 THE CHAIRMAN: And no regrets?

22 RT HON TONY BLAIR: Responsibility but not a regret for
23 removing Saddam Hussein. I think that he was a monster,
24 I believe he threatened, not just the region but the
25 world, and in the circumstances that we faced then, but

1 I think even if you look back now, it was better to deal
2 with this threat, to deal with it, to remove him from
3 office, and I do genuinely believe that the world is
4 safer as a result.

5 I know sometimes, because this happens out in the
6 region, sometimes people will say to me, "Well, Saddam
7 was a brake on Iran". Let's be clear, there is another
8 view of foreign policy in this instance, which is the
9 way, if we had left Saddam in place, he would have
10 controlled Iran better. I really think it is time we
11 learned, as a matter of sensible foreign policy, that
12 the way to deal with one dictatorial threat is not to
13 back another, that actually the best answer to what is
14 happening in Iran is to allow the Iraqi people the
15 freedom and democratic choice that we enjoy in countries
16 like ours.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. This brings us, I think, to the
18 end of today's hearings. Is there any final comment,
19 beyond those you have already made, that you wish to add
20 before we close?

21 RT HON TONY BLAIR: No.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: In that case can I say two things? The first
23 is that there clearly are considerable limits to what we
24 can cover in one day. The Inquiry still has much work
25 to do. Among other things, our witness today, Mr Blair,

1 has drawn attention to a number of dimensions arising
2 out of Iran and its behaviour which I think we shall
3 want to pursue.

4 Can I, with that, thank our witness for a long day
5 of testimony, a long, hard day, I think, and thank very
6 much those of you who have been here as witnesses to
7 this session, as to those who were present in the
8 morning session. Thank you all very much indeed.

9 Now, with that, we will resume hearings next week on
10 Monday at 11 o'clock in the morning, and later on, in
11 late February or early March, we will be taking
12 testimony from the Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Brown, and
13 other senior ministers perhaps.

14 So, with that, we close this session. Thank you all
15 again.

16 (5.10 pm)

17 (The Inquiry adjourned until 11.00 am on Monday
18 1 February 2010)

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21 RT HON TONY BLAIR1
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