

SECTION 3.2

DEVELOPMENT OF UK STRATEGY AND OPTIONS, JANUARY TO APRIL 2002 – “AXIS OF EVIL” TO CRAWFORD

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Introduction and key findings

1. Following the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, Mr Blair became increasingly concerned about the risk that international terrorists might acquire and use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the threat that posed to the UK and its wider interests. He was convinced that:

- those risks had to be dealt with;
- Iraq was only one element of that wider problem, but the risk changed the way the threat posed by Iraq should be viewed; and
- Iraq had to be dealt with as a priority.

2. This Section of the report sets out the evidence relating to events leading up to Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush at Crawford, the meeting itself, and the subsequent statements in public and to Cabinet.

3. The UK’s assessments of Iraq’s chemical, biological, nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, its intent to preserve and enhance those capabilities, and the likelihood of proliferation from Iraq, are addressed in Section 4.1. That Section also addresses the initial preparation of a document for publication on WMD programmes of concern.

Key findings

- The UK continued to pursue implementation of the “smarter” economic sanctions regime in the first months of 2002, but continuing divisions between Permanent Members of the Security Council meant there was no agreement on the way forward.
- In public statements at the end of February and in the first week of March 2002, Mr Blair and Mr Straw set out the view that Iraq was a threat which had to be dealt with.
- At Cabinet on 7 March, Mr Blair and Mr Straw emphasised that no decisions had been taken and Cabinet was not being asked to take decisions. Cabinet endorsed the conclusion that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes posed a threat to peace and endorsed a strategy of engaging closely with the US Government in order to shape policy and its presentation.
- At Crawford, Mr Blair offered President Bush a partnership in dealing urgently with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. He proposed that the UK and the US should pursue a strategy based on an ultimatum calling on Iraq to permit the return of weapons inspectors or face the consequences.
- Following his meeting with President Bush, Mr Blair stated that Saddam Hussein had to be confronted and brought back into compliance with the UN.
- The acceptance of the possibility that the UK might participate in a military invasion of Iraq was a profound change in UK thinking. Although no decisions had been taken, that became the basis for contingency planning in the months ahead.

President Bush's "axis of evil" speech and the UK response

4. Addressing the potential threat from terrorists with weapons of mass destruction, President Bush described Iraq in his State of the Union speech on 29 January as part of an "axis of evil".

5. The speech prompted a major public debate on both sides of the Atlantic about policy towards Iraq.

6. In his annual State of the Union speech on 29 January 2002 President Bush described the regimes in North Korea and Iran as "sponsors of terrorism".¹ He added that Iraq had continued to:

"... flaunt its hostility towards America and to support terror ... The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens ... This is a regime that agreed to international inspections – then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilised world."

7. President Bush stated:

"States like these [North Korea, Iran and Iraq], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.

"America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security ... We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand idly by, as perils draw closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.

"Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch – yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch."

8. In his memoir President Bush wrote that the media had taken:

"... the line to mean that the three countries had formed an alliance. That missed the point. The axis ... was the link between Governments that pursued WMD and the terrorists who could use those weapons. There was a larger point in the speech that no one could miss. I was serious about dealing with Iraq."²

¹ The White House, 29 January 2002, *The President's State of the Union Address*.

² Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

9. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, President Bush’s National Security Advisor, wrote in 2011 that President Bush’s phrase, an “axis of evil”, was “overdramatized”. She and the President were “stunned” when the media focused almost exclusively on it:

“Since many people believed that we’d already decided to go to war against Iraq, sinister interpretations suggested that we were preparing to use military force against all three states. We had, for all intents and purposes, some believed, declared war on North Korea, Iraq and Iran.”³

10. Dr Rice added that, in a speech the following day, and in media interviews, she had sought to clarify what the President had meant:

“The President wouldn’t take any options off the table, but he’d said we’d work with our friends to deal with the problem; diplomacy was the first line of defense. But, admittedly, the harsh language suggested that negotiation was impossible. How could you negotiate with members of an ‘axis of evil’?”

11. From early 2002, there were increasing indications that key figures in the US Administration were considering military action to achieve regime change in Iraq and there was an emphasis on the potential nexus for the fusion of WMD proliferation and terrorism.

12. Mr Blair stated that regime change would be desirable. If Saddam Hussein wanted to avoid war, he would need to agree to the return of inspectors.

13. Mr Blair told President Bush on 6 February that he agreed on the importance of sending a strong signal to the countries identified as an “axis of evil” that their behaviour needed to change.

14. At a meeting of the Overseas Sub-Committee of the Official Committee on Domestic and International Terrorism (TIDO(O)) on 1 February 2002, chaired by Mr Stephen Wright, FCO Deputy Under-Secretary Defence and Intelligence, the FCO reported that US thinking about Phase 2 of the “War on Terrorism”, as reflected in President Bush’s State of the Union address, was already under way and crystallising around two concepts: the proliferation of WMD and counter-terrorism.⁴

15. Mr Wright stated that the US appeared to be most concerned about the proliferation of WMD to terrorist groups, and that lay at the heart of concerns about a number of states including Iraq. The US saw Iraq increasingly as a WMD rather than a counter-terrorism problem. UK officials thought that the interagency process would probably result in a balanced approach. Military action was seen as a last resort. Action against Iraq was not seen as imminent.

³ Rice C. *No Higher Honour*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

⁴ Minutes, 1 February 2002, Overseas Sub-Committee of the Official Committee on Domestic and International Terrorism meeting.

16. Sir David Manning, Mr Blair’s Foreign Policy Adviser and the Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat (OD Sec), advised Mr Blair that a number of senior Americans, both Republican and Democrat, were convinced that President Bush was determined on war with Iraq; the doves in the US system were totally marginalised; it was impossible to stand out against the jingoistic mood – people wanted war; taking on the Iraqs of the international system was the best way of making sure that America would not be surprised again.⁵ To avoid that, some Americans had urged that Europeans should pursue a policy of tightening sanctions against Iraq, and getting an UNMOVIC (UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission) and with teeth back on the ground in Iraq. A former US military officer had suggested that the US would invade Iraq within four or five months. Another American expressed doubt about whether Turkey would support military action because of the risk of refugees flooding across its borders.

17. Sir David Manning wrote that the “rhetoric has so far been running ahead of the reality” in the US:

“The US military have probably been told to make contingency plans ... But unless we have been pretty comprehensively deceived ... no decisions have yet been taken on how or when to bring it [regime change] about.”

18. Mr Blair responded:

“... Yes it’s desirable but how? If we can sort out “how”, do it and this is the reason Iraq is making overtures to Iran. To avoid war, Iraq [wd] need to let the inspectors back in.”⁶

19. Lord Williams of Baglan, Special Adviser to Mr Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, from 2001 to 2005, told the Inquiry that he recalled that:

“By the opening months of 2002 it was becoming clearer that the Bush Administration appeared intent on a more muscular approach on Iraq that did not rule out military action. At the Davos meeting in January 2002 a US Senator had told the NATO Secretary General George Robertson that President Bush was determined on a war with Iraq and that it was ‘a cast iron certainty within the year’. In reported remarks at the Munich security conference, in February the former NATO commander General Wesley Clarke told interlocutors that he believed war was inevitable.”⁷

20. During a telephone call with President Bush on a range of issues on 6 February 2002, Mr Blair said that “whatever President Bush may have read in the media, he

⁵ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 5 February 2002, ‘US Policy Towards Iraq’.

⁶ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 5 February 2002, ‘US Policy Towards Iraq’.

⁷ Statement, 9 January 2011, page 4.

agreed on the importance of sending a strong signal” to the countries identified as part of an “axis of evil” that their behaviour needed to change.⁸

21. FCO officials advised Mr Straw that, while the immediate US focus was on getting a revised Goods Review List agreed by the deadline of 30 May, the signs were that the US would pursue regime change. Pressing for implementation of a tougher inspections regime could offer a potential alternative to military action. If Saddam Hussein failed to co-operate there would be a stronger justification for military action.

22. Reporting on talks the previous week with the US, including progress in US talks with Russia, Mr William Patey, Head of the FCO Middle East Department, advised Mr Straw that:

“In the absence of any decisions on wider Iraq policy and the post-11 September situation, the immediate US focus is on getting the Goods Review List (GRL) agreed by 30 May deadline.”⁹

23. Mr Patey also described clarification of resolution 1284 (1999) as “anathema to the US”. It feared that would represent “a slippery slope towards a weaker inspections regime”. Mr Patey added:

“As for the wider policy all the signs point to the US going for a regime change option. But there does not appear to be a viable plan as yet and the time frame remains uncertain. Cheney [Vice President Dick Cheney] is due to tour the Middle East in mid-March and we would be surprised if any decisions were taken before then. We have asked Washington for a further read-out of US thinking beyond State Department.”

24. Reporting on talks with a senior French official, Mr Patey wrote that his reading of US intentions was “the same as ours”. That appeared “to have produced a change in French attitudes towards [resolution] 1284 and the prospects of clarification”. Security Council “agreement on a tough inspections regime with unconditional access” was seen “as the only realistic alternative to US military action”. The talks with French officials are addressed in more detail later in this Section.

25. Mr Patey concluded:

“If we can get agreement on a tough regime, this would represent a no-lose situation. If the Iraqis continue to resist a tough inspections regime or let the inspectors in then renege, the justification for any military action would be much stronger. If, against all expectations, UNMOVIC were allowed to do their job this would offer the best prospect of dealing with Saddam’s WMD.”

⁸ Letter [Private Secretary No.10] to McDonald, 6 February 2002, ‘Telephone conversation with US President’.

⁹ [Minute Patey to Goulty and PS \[FCS\], 12 February 2002, ‘Iraq: Next Steps’.](#)

26. Mr Alan Goulty, FCO Director Middle East and North Africa, commented to Mr Straw's Private Secretary:

"So far so good. But much will depend on how the US decide to pursue the regime change option. It would be helpful if I and Mr Patey could be kept up to speed on discussions with the US: hard to write contingency planning papers in ignorance of the contingencies we are planning for."¹⁰

27. In a letter to Mr Peter Westmacott, British Ambassador to Turkey, the following day, Mr Goulty wrote:

"The reality is that there is deep scepticism in the US that any UN process can deal seriously with Iraq's WMD ... The Iraqis have shown little interest in 1284/ suspension, believing it to be a way of extending sanctions indefinitely. But if we are to offer an alternative to military action, both we and the French are convinced that this will need to involve a tough inspections regime based on strict implementation of existing resolutions. Events since 11 September have increased the chances of reuniting the Security Council around such a proposition. Faced with a regime threatening alternative, and Security Council unity, there is a slight chance Iraq would allow unconditional inspections. This would make it difficult for the hawks in Washington to go ahead with military action. If the Iraqis persist in their refusal then the moral and legal basis for action would be improved. Either way we are in a better position."¹¹

28. Mr Goulty concluded:

"We certainly need a clearer assessment of what the Americans are up to. But it is obvious that there are some in Washington who would not accept yes for an answer. Disillusionment with containment is widespread and the status quo is no longer an option."

29. Sir Christopher Meyer, British Ambassador to the US, saw President Bush's speech as a warning to regimes he saw as "especially dangerous", which had increased expectations of military action against Iraq. The hawks in Washington felt that they had won the argument about the need for military action. The US might want to issue an ultimatum on inspections but set the bar so high that Iraq would never comply.

30. The US might seek UK endorsement for its vision by early March.

31. Sir David Manning was assured by Dr Rice that no decisions would be taken before the planned meeting between Mr Blair and President Bush at Crawford in early April.

¹⁰ [Manuscript comment Goulty to PS \[FCS\], 12 February 2002, on Minute Patey to Goulty and PS \[FCS\], 12 February 2002, 'Iraq: Next Steps'.](#)

¹¹ [Letter Goulty to Westmacott, 15 February 2002, 'Iraq'.](#)

32. On 11 February, Sir Christopher Meyer advised that President Bush’s reference to an “axis of evil” was:

“... a warning to regimes which Bush sees as especially dangerous. It is not simplistic; it increases expectations of military action against Iraq; and it has added to transatlantic strains.”¹²

33. Sir Christopher reported that it was “the latest version of the Bush doctrine” which rotated “on an axis which links terrorist networks, states which harbour them, and rogue states with WMD”. President Bush had set out the first version of the doctrine, which comprised the elements in his speech to Congress on 20 September 2001. Rogue states had been added because “intelligence and the anthrax scare have generated the view that WMD in the hands of rogue states is the clear and present danger”.

34. President Bush had been “criticised for enunciating the doctrine without thinking through the policy implications”. In Sir Christopher’s view, that missed the point. The purpose in naming three countries was “to intimidate them, to put them on notice that they were marked regimes; to ‘change the terms of the debate’”. There was a “serious analysis” behind the phrase:

“It cannot be emphasised too strongly that 11 September was a shattering blow, creating a sense of threat and vulnerability never before experienced by Americans.”

35. The consequences were:

- “an outpouring of American gratitude to Britain, which more than others appeared instantly to grasp the enormity of what had happened”;
- “incomprehension and anger at those who seemed more concerned for the rights of the Guantanamo detainees than for the need to extract information which could forestall a further atrocity”; and
- “a single-minded determination to do what it takes to defeat the nexus of terrorism and rogue WMD, if necessary by pre-emptive action, with or without allies”, which President Bush saw “as his life’s mission”.

36. Sir Christopher did not believe that the speech presaged military action against Iran or North Korea, but the phrase had “raised expectations about action against Iraq”. That did “not involve any new policy considerations”. The UK had “known for a long time” that President Bush was “looking for a way to get rid of Saddam”.

37. Sir Christopher concluded:

“It has been tough sometimes working with the Americans since 11 September. It will be tougher still in 2002 ...

¹² [Telegram 196 Washington to FCO London, 11 February 2002, ‘US Foreign Policy: The Axis of Evil’.](#)

“The backdrop is growing US/European mutual disenchantment. This puts the UK in an awkward spot ... The Europeans are seen as burying their heads in the sand, refusing to face up to an international threat which only the US, and maybe the UK, have the guts and capability to tackle ...

“Looking at this solely as an issue of unilateralism v. multilateralism does not capture the complexity of American attitudes ... For all their brave talk, the Americans know perfectly well that they are better off with capable allies than not ...

“War-fighting considerations are an insufficient guide to handling the next phase in combating terrorism ... The task for the next few months is to demonstrate to the Americans that it is possible and desirable to reconcile the pursuit of the mission with the concerns of the main coalition partners. This may call for some very plain speaking in private. But we are just about the only foreigners to whom the Administration consistently listens.

“So the visit to London next month of the Vice President and that of the Prime Minister to the US in April assume even greater importance than usual.”

38. Assessing the climate in Washington on 13 February, Sir Christopher Meyer reported that President Bush’s speech had “quickened the drumbeat on Iraq” and commentators were “drawing the conclusion that military action is now inevitable”.¹³

39. Drawing together the views the Embassy and senior visitors had heard over the last couple of weeks, Sir Christopher wrote:

“The line that no decision has been taken ... may still formally be correct. But there are few parts of the Administration that see any alternative to US action – the real questions now are what, when, and (from our point of view) how much international legitimacy the US will seek to build ...

“As ever, the hawks’ agenda is easiest to discern. They feel they have won the argument over whether US action is needed ...

“The military, meanwhile, continue to look at their plans in expectation that they will be asked to take on a major operation in Iraq this year (this is ... what lies behind CENTCOM’s [US Central Command] reluctance to provide back-up to an expanded ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] in Afghanistan) ... But they remain very worried about the ideas being pushed by DoD [Department of Defense] civilian hawks, above all the perception that this would be easy to do quickly ...

“The perception that key regional states are now essentially on board ... now appears to have spread across the Administration ... officials and pundits alike speculate that Cheney’s visit will be aimed at nailing the necessary support.

¹³ [Telegram 197 Washington to FCO London, 13 February 2002, ‘US/IRAQ: The Momentum Builds’.](#)

“What remains unclear is how the US will handle the UN track, above all the inspection regime. The Administration’s repeated high-profile demands for inspections suggest that the US will want to issue some sort of ultimatum, but set the bar so high that Iraq will never comply in practice (Armitage [Richard Armitage, US Deputy Secretary of State] as much as stated this to PUS [the FCO Permanent Under Secretary] in January). Our objective remains to persuade the US ... that they must show that they are serious about implementing the resolutions – even if only to prepare the ground properly in the international community for action if Saddam fails to comply.

“There is a clear tension between the argument for preparing international opinion (which leaves open the possibility of coercing Iraq into some real disarmament measures under the threat of US military action), and the arguments for striking swiftly and with maximum surprise ... So although the goal of US policy may be ever firmer, the way to get there is not.”

40. Sir Christopher concluded that Vice President Cheney’s visit in early March “may or may not be the main vehicle for consulting the UK. But it would be wise to assume that by then, the US will have a reasonably clear vision, for which they will want our endorsement.”

41. Summarising the issues, the telegram predicted:

“The Administration appears to be gearing up for a decision on removing Saddam, but are not quite there yet. The ‘how’ is still difficult. The debate looks likely to come to a head this month. The likeliest outcome is some combination of an ultimatum on weapons inspectors, backing of opposition forces, and US military intervention. Cheney’s visit to the region in mid-March is likely to be on the critical path of US diplomacy leading to action. We need to encourage the US to build international legitimacy for action, but there may be a tension between this and operational considerations.”

42. Mr William Ehrman, FCO Director International Security, reported that a meeting with Sir David Manning “and some others”, had discussed Sir Christopher Meyer’s telegram “and the question of legal considerations related to military action against WMD proliferation”.¹⁴

43. Mr Ehrman said he had outlined the legal difficulty in trying to argue that WMD development posed an “‘imminent’ threat”. Sir David Manning had asked whether another justification for action could be the “flouting of UN SCRs [Security Council resolutions]”. Mr Ehrman had advised that his understanding was that “a further SCR would be required to authorise military action”; and that: “It seemed highly unlikely that the US would be willing to seek such a resolution or, even if they did, that they would get it.”

¹⁴ Minute Ehrman to Goulty, 13 February 2002, ‘US/Iraq’.

44. Sir David Manning had asked Mr John Scarlett, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), for “an analysis of the state of opinion in Iraq” and whether there were “really segments of the population who might be willing to rise against Saddam ... David was sceptical. He also mentioned work ... on the ... INC [Iraqi National Congress].”¹⁵

45. Mr Wright informed the meeting of the JIC on 13 February that US policy towards Iraq was “going to be the dominant one for relationships with US and Europe over the next few weeks”.¹⁶ The Embassy in Washington had produced a “paper drawing together all available information” which was circulated to JIC members.

46. In the discussion the following points were made:

- Policy discussions between US Principals were expected in the next 10-14 days but there was no evidence that anything sudden or unexpected would happen.
- US air supremacy “could be quick to secure, but the assembly of a large enough force to bind measures together would take much longer”.
- “In the meantime Saddam had a number of options open to him to queer the US pitch.”

47. JIC members were invited to “share quickly” any useful analysis or information they received.

48. The date and context of the JIC discussion suggests that Mr Wright was referring to Sir Christopher Meyer’s telegram of 13 February, received in London that morning.¹⁷

49. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that:

“... Dr Rice had confirmed ... that the Administration was indeed looking at options, but said that there was absolutely no plan at this stage. It was an effort to redefine policy.”¹⁸

50. Mr Jonathan Powell, Mr Blair’s Chief of Staff, told the Inquiry that “it was February and March that they [the US] started to get into more concrete plans ... for considering how they would actually deal with Iraq”.¹⁹ Sir David Manning had spoken to Dr Rice on 14 February to make sure:

“... the Americans would not plunge into any plans before the Prime Minister met the President at Crawford and received an assurance that they wouldn’t.”

51. The record of the discussion confirms that Sir David Manning told Dr Rice that US policy on Iraq “continued to be a source of intense speculation in the British media, as

¹⁵ Minute Ehrman to Goulty, 13 February 2002, ‘US/Iraq’.

¹⁶ Minutes, 13 February 2002, JIC meeting.

¹⁷ [Telegram 197 Washington to FCO London, 13 February 2002, ‘US/IRAQ: The Momentum Builds’.](#)

¹⁸ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 10-11.

¹⁹ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 17-18.

it had been since the President’s State of the Union Address”.²⁰ Iraq was something that the US and UK “needed to think through very carefully together”.

52. Sir David reported that there was no expectation that anything would be decided before Mr Blair’s planned visit to the US in early April, which “would therefore provide an excellent opportunity to review the issue”.

No.10’s response, mid-February 2002

53. In a meeting to discuss Phase 2 of the war against terrorism on 19 February, Mr Blair agreed work on possible SIS operations to support Iraqi opposition groups should be taken forward.

54. No.10 also commissioned a number of papers to inform preparations for Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush.

55. Discussions between Sir Richard Dearlove, Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), No.10 and the US about possible action in Iraq in late 2001 and January 2002 are addressed in Section 3.1.

56. In response to a request from Sir David Manning for an update before Mr Blair’s meeting with Vice President Cheney on 11 March, Sir Richard Dearlove wrote on 12 February setting out a possible SIS contribution to policy on Iraq.²¹

57. Sir Richard wrote that the option of support to opposition groups was still being considered, but there were doubts about the chances of success. He advised that Mr Blair should express support for the principle of a plan to support opposition groups, including air support, “rather than a solely military solution”.

58. Sir Richard Wilson, the Cabinet Secretary, was informed on 19 February that Sir Richard Dearlove had briefed Mr Blair on possible SIS operations in Iraq that day, and Mr Blair agreed that work should be taken forward.²²

59. Mr Straw and Sir Michael Jay, FCO Permanent Under Secretary (PUS), were also shown a copy of the letter.

60. The papers seen by the Inquiry suggest that was the first time Mr Straw was informed of SIS discussions with the US.

61. The funding arrangements for SIS operations in Iraq were set out in a letter from Sir Richard Wilson to Mr Andrew Smith, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, on 26 February.²³

²⁰ Letter Manning to McDonald, 14 February 2002, ‘Conversation with Condi Rice: Iraq’.

²¹ Letter C to Manning, 12 February 2002, ‘Iraq Policy’ attaching Paper ‘Iraq Policy – SIS Contribution’.

²² Letter Private Secretary to C to Allberry, 19 February 2002, ‘SIS Funding of Operations [...] in Iraq’.

²³ Letter Wilson to Smith, 26 February 2002, ‘Iraq: Requirement for funding for [...] Operations by SIS’.

62. Mr Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair’s Director of Communications and Strategy, described a meeting in No.10 on 19 February as a “Phase 2’ war meeting” for Mr Blair with Sir David Manning, Sir Richard Dearlove, Mr Peter Ricketts, FCO Political Director, Mr Tom McKane, Deputy Head of OD Sec, Mr Powell and himself.²⁴

63. Mr Campbell wrote that Mr Blair was:

“... not sure if the Americans had taken all the decisions. He wanted to be in a position to influence their strategy, which we would project as being about fighting poverty and taking aid, but which they [the US] would see as fighting for their values. He also wanted to commission papers on Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and the European trade in WMD. He wanted work done on how to rejuvenate the MEPP [Middle East Peace Process]. He assumed that by the time of our visit to the States in April, there was chance the Americans would be casting around wider, and he wanted all the facts at his fingertips. He felt that the political situation would be different and internationally a lot harder for the Americans than things were post September 11, if they were thinking of going for any of the other countries.”

64. There is no No.10 record of the meeting.

65. Mr McKane told the Inquiry that, following the meeting on 19 February, “a large number of papers” had been commissioned for the meeting between President Bush and Mr Blair, at Crawford, Texas, in early April 2002.²⁵

66. The papers included:

- “**Iraq** A paper analysing the options, the state of play on the UN resolutions, the legal base and the internal dimension – the state of the opposition groups etc.”
- “**WMD** A paper for public consumption setting out the facts on WMD ...”²⁶

67. An article appeared in *The Observer* on 24 February reporting that the Government was planning to publish detailed evidence of Iraq’s nuclear capabilities.²⁷ A “senior No.10 official” was reported to have said that the meeting between Mr Blair and President Bush in April would “finalise Phase 2 of the war against terrorism” and: “Action against Iraq” would be “at the top of the agenda”. As with Usama Bin Laden and the war in Afghanistan, it would be necessary to maintain public and international support for military action against Saddam Hussein. That was a “public persuasion” issue which would be tackled “in the same way” as the unprecedented “indictment” against Usama Bin Laden published in October 2001.²⁸

²⁴ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

²⁵ Public hearing, 19 January 2011, page 34.

²⁶ Minute McKane to Manning, 19 February 2002, ‘Papers for the Prime Minister’.

²⁷ *The Observer*, 24 February 2002, *Blair and Bush to plot war on Iraq*.

²⁸ Paper No.10, 4 October 2001, ‘Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States, 11 September 2001’.

68. *The Observer* article also suggested that Iraq’s nuclear capabilities included investigating a way to launch “dirty” nuclear bombs – unsophisticated devices which would nevertheless wreak havoc if used.

69. The Cabinet Office ‘Iraq: Options Paper’, produced on 8 March, is addressed later in this Section.

70. A first draft of the paper for public consumption on WMD, which addressed Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Libya, was sent to No.10 on 6 March. The content of the paper and its eventual focus only on Iraq is addressed in Section 4.1.

France’s position, mid-February 2002

71. Sir John Holmes, British Ambassador to France, reported French concerns about possible US actions and a desire to work with the UK on a policy of engagement to keep the US within the international system.

72. France was not necessarily opposed to military action to remove Saddam, but it had identified a number of conditions which had yet to be met.

73. France was also concerned that action against states such as Afghanistan and Iraq would not solve the underlying problems of WMD proliferation and terrorism, and might result in recruiting more terrorists.

74. On 11 February, the British Embassy Paris reported talks between Mr Gouly, Mr Patey and Mr Felix Paganon, UN Director in the Quai d’Orsay.²⁹

75. Mr Paganon was reported to have said France was convinced the US would take military action against Iraq before the end of the year. The US considered that it did not need additional authority for action, and:

“When it came to decision time, the US would proceed according to their own criteria, not on the basis of consultation with allies.”

76. France wanted to do whatever was achievable to prevent military action, “not out of concern for Saddam’s survival but through fear of the consequences of military action”, which could include:

- chaos in Iraq, where the vacuum might be filled by another Ba’ath general;
- division of Iraq; and
- increased instability in the region.

77. France believed the unconditional return of weapons inspectors was the only way to prevent military action. France was no longer pressing for an early discussion of the Goods Review List but there was scepticism about the prospects for toughening

²⁹ [Telegram 100 Paris to FCO London, 11 February 2002, ‘Iraq: UK/French Talks’.](#)

enforcement of existing resolutions, “particularly the Syrian pipeline”. Tightening the sanctions regime would be “difficult to achieve and did little to prevent confrontation”, which was now the “basic aim”.

78. Mr Paganon and Mr Goulty agreed on the need “to maintain P5 [the five Permanent Members of the Security Council] unity”.

79. Mr Patey said that if the:

“... consensus were broken, military action would be more likely. The US would be prepared to act on their own if necessary, but would be inhibited if there were a viable UN track in train.”

80. Mr Paganon agreed that it was vital the P5 and Arab states sent the same tough message to Saddam Hussein.

81. Mr Goulty stated:

“... in the meantime we should all send the same message to the Americans, that we should continue to go down the UN route, and that if this did not work, we would then have a better pretext for dealing with WMD through military action.”

82. Sir John Holmes advised on 19 February that France was “particularly concerned” about what President Bush’s “axis of evil” implied for US policy.³⁰ It was ready to recognise that “differences with the Americans” were “more about means than ends”; but they would want to work with the UK “to keep American action within the international system”.

83. France had “worried since the end of the Cold War that American power was becoming disproportionate”. The main French concerns following President Bush’s “axis of evil” speech were that the US:

- would be “increasingly tempted towards unilateral action without consulting allies or the UN”;
- saw “military action as more or less the sole response to terrorism and proliferation”; and
- was confusing the two problems of terrorism and proliferation.

84. The French view was that:

“... as well as clamping down hard (but in accordance with international law) on unacceptable actions, we also need to address their political economic, cultural and military causes ... [A]scribing them simply to a national or individual propensity for wrongdoing is inadequate. There are reasons beyond mere wickedness why bad regimes come to power and survive: simply keeping the lid on the ambitions of

³⁰ [Telegram 123 Paris to FCO London, 19 February 2002, ‘US Foreign Policy: France and the Axis of Evil’.](#)

dangerous regimes by military repression, or removing them by military force, may in the long run even make things worse.

“So on most cases the French favour a policy of engagement ...”

85. Sir John identified Iraq as “the real problem”. France had “long been at odds” with the US and UK over “the basic analysis: arguing that a policy of punitive sanctions and containment of Saddam is in the long term likely to create even greater incentives for the regime to proliferate and more antagonism in the population, and so store up new dangers, particularly in the absence of real MEPP progress”.

86. Before 11 September, France had felt US policy was moving in its direction:

“Now, although work continues on the Goods Review List (a French idea), they suspect the gap will widen again ... They are not necessarily totally opposed to an American operation to remove Saddam, which they increasingly see as inevitable, provided that it is supported in the UN and in the region; is carefully thought through in military terms; and forms part of a realistic project for creating a better and more stable future for the country and the region. So far they do not think these conditions have been met. The lack of American willingness so far to follow through on nation building in Afghanistan has not encouraged them. Nor does the present parlous state of the MEPP ...”³¹

87. In addition, France was “not convinced that the approach of naming key states of concern, and dealing with them by military means or diplomatic isolation” would “solve the underlying problems of WMD proliferation or terrorism”. Those threats were developing through “shadowy non-state networks” which would “not go away” even if examples were made of Afghanistan and Iraq; “and may well gain more recruits over time”.

88. Sir John concluded the French “instinct remains to back the Americans in upholding international stability when push comes to shove”. What France wanted “above all” was “to be consulted and involved, and to have some input into analysis and policy before they are faced with the choice of following US decisions or not”. The UK was “likely to be in the front line of any split” and had “a particular incentive to act, and to do so quickly. If we wait until the Americans have a fully worked out plan, attitudes may well have hardened too far on both sides.”

89. Sir John suggested the UK needed to persuade:

- The US “using the influence we have earned” to explain their thinking and “to share intelligence as much as they can to illustrate the real, present WMD dangers of the Iraqi regime; to explain why they believe they can remove the regime without setting the region on fire; and, once they have a plan, to explain

³¹ [Telegram 123 Paris to FCO London, 19 February 2002, ‘US Foreign Policy: France and the Axis of Evil’.](#)

why they think it can work”. The US instinct would be to share only with the UK but that would put “us in a particularly difficult position, increasing the appearance of poodlism if we follow without being able to explain adequately ourselves. We saw in the early stages of the Afghan crisis how bad the Americans could be at appearing to have a coherent plan, and at keeping allies in the loop. Doubts were stilled by good PR work by us, and above all by quick success. But we and they should learn the lessons.”

- France and others to “eschew megaphone diplomacy” and to engage the US.

90. Sir John added:

“... our chances of success with the Americans would be much greater if we could persuade other Europeans to ... be serious about defence capabilities. Our chances with the Europeans would be much greater if we could persuade the Americans to put their full weight behind breaking the current disastrous MEPP cycle, and look as if they were doing so.”

The UK diplomatic perspective

91. FCO officials identified the need to pursue “the UN route” demanding access for weapons inspectors as a possible way to avoid military action while establishing stronger arguments for such action if necessary.

92. The way in which the minute was written indicates that the FCO officials did not, at that stage, envisage military action would comprise a full-scale, US-led invasion.

93. The minute prompted a wider debate in the Diplomatic Service which identified a number of key issues.

94. Although those contributions did not lead to the establishment of an agreed FCO position, on the implications for the UK of military action in Iraq and the advantages and disadvantages of different courses of action.

95. On 20 February, Mr Goulty produced “a note on contingency planning in the event of military action against Iraq”, which advised:

“Planning for any military action against Iraq will need to take into account the need to prepare the ground for, and minimise, the adverse humanitarian, diplomatic and PR consequences of, what will be a widely unpopular move. Much will depend on the duration of the action ... and whether or not it succeeds in removing Saddam. The worst possible scenario ... would be a prolonged campaign which left Saddam in power and allowed him to make maximum propaganda gains ... In the current

Middle East climate, we would probably be faced with the collapse of sanctions and the effective end of our containment policy.”³²

96. Addressing the “Legal position/UN route”, Mr Goulty wrote:

“Whether we participated or not, we would wish to see a convincing legal justification for military action ...”

97. Addressing the chances of obtaining fresh UN authority, Mr Goulty advised that it seemed:

“... highly unlikely that, in the absence of a new attack on Kuwait or the Kurds or of clear and publicly usable evidence that Iraq has reconstituted its WMD, the Security Council would agree a further resolution that could justify military action. This would include a new ... resolution specifically demanding access for the weapons inspectors, although we should still push for one ... We should continue to put pressure on Iraq to readmit inspectors – this makes sense whether or not military action is contemplated. If the Iraqi regime continues to refuse (and signs are ... it has no intention of doing otherwise) we would at least be in a stronger position to defend military action. In the unlikely event that the inspectors are admitted, history would suggest that it would not be long before they were blocked, which again would strengthen the arguments for military action. We should also continue pushing for tougher action ... against those states ... breaking sanctions (especially Syria). Again this makes sense whether or not military action is contemplated: it would put real pressure on Saddam either to submit to meaningful inspections or to lash out.”

98. Mr Goulty suggested:

“Our message to those who oppose military action should be to get serious about the UN route: encouraging Iraq to believe that it can escape sanctions without complying with SCRs, seeking to water down those ... obligations, and blocking initiatives in the UN to crack down on smuggling serves only to make military action more likely.”

99. Mr Goulty’s view was that: “In the current climate, and in the absence of progress on the MEPP – highly unlikely in this timescale – Arab States would have the greatest difficulties in supporting an operation which is bound to be seen as serving Israeli interests.” Nevertheless there were signs that some countries would support the US. The UK would have “a better picture of regional attitudes after Vice President Cheney’s March tour”.

100. Addressing the attitudes of others, Mr Goulty wrote:

“We would expect the Iranians, hitherto (privately) in favour of action to remove Saddam Hussein, to be much less helpful in the light of President Bush’s ‘axis

³² [Minute Goulty to Fry, 20 February 2002, ‘Military action against Iraq: Issues’.](#)

of evil' speech. France and Germany ... could probably be kept on side. The French position is not greatly different from our own. Their policy remains to keep up pressure on Baghdad over inspectors and maintain P5 unity. But they accept that US military action to remove Saddam is now very much on the cards. In this event, they would want the US to fully think through the consequences and take adequate steps to build legitimacy in the UN. Recent German statements reveal a preoccupation with maintaining the rule of law, concern over the unilateralist trend in US policy, but a reluctance to criticise the US overtly ... We would expect other EU members to be more overtly critical in the absence of Security Council endorsement of military action."

101. Addressing public and media reaction, Mr Goulty wrote:

"The public and media reaction to any military action would be mixed ...

"The Arab and Muslim media and 'street' would be deeply hostile ...

"In the build up to any action, we would need to mount an aggressive PR [public relations] campaign emphasising Iraq's record of non-compliance with UNSCRs and evidence of WMD reconstitution and other crimes (making maximum use of intelligence). Our basic message, around which further, more detailed messages could be built, might be: 'Iraq poses a unique threat to the security and stability of the region as well as the rest of the world.'

"Ideally targets selected would be purely military and steps taken to avoid non-combatant civilian casualties ..."

"Ultimately the success of any campaign would depend on the success and swiftness of the military action (and removal of Saddam Hussein)."

102. Mr Goulty concluded that planning would:

"... need to take into account the need to prepare the ground for, and minimise the adverse humanitarian, diplomatic and PR consequences of, what will be a widely unpopular move ... The worst possible scenario from our point of view would be a prolonged campaign which left Saddam in power and allowed him to make maximum propaganda gains from Iraqi casualties, whether or not caused by the coalition."

103. Mr Goulty's minute was circulated widely within the FCO, to Ambassadors in the region and to staff in Washington, Paris, Moscow and to the UK Mission in New York.

104. Mr John Sawers, British Ambassador to Egypt, who had been closely associated with the development of the UK's policy on Iraq as Mr Blair's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs (see Section 1.2), responded to Mr Goulty's minute with a teletype

to Sir Michael Jay and senior colleagues offering his views on the direction of policy on Iraq.³³

105. Mr Sawers began:

“I have hesitated to offer my own [views], in the knowledge that contacts between London and Washington will already be intensive and rightly held close. But I sense a danger of us becoming too predictable. I do not advocate a US march on Baghdad. But I do think we need to box more cleverly, not least to retain leverage in Washington.”

106. Mr Sawers stated containment had worked for 10 years but the price had been high. Iraq’s WMD activities were “still without doubt going ahead” and Saddam Hussein’s regime would “remain an obstacle to every single Western objective in the Middle East”. In his view the UK needed to say:

“... clearly and consistently that our goal is Regime Change – for the sake of stability in the Middle East, for the Iraqi people, and for the goal of controlling the spread of WMD.”

107. Setting out a list of other countries where regime change had been and remained a goal of UK policy, Mr Sawers wrote:

“Whether or not we actually express it is purely a matter of tactics. So the lawyers and peaceniks should not prevent us from saying what we really want in Iraq. And by associating ourselves with Bush’s heartfelt objective of seeing Saddam removed, we will be given more houseroom in Washington to ask the awkward questions about how.

“And there are many such questions. What is the plan? How long would it take for a direct confrontation to succeed? How do we retain the support of our regional friends ... If we were to build up the Kurds and Shia as proxies, what assurances would we have to give them that we would not let them down yet again? How would we keep the Iranians from meddling? How do we preserve Iraq’s territorial integrity ... How would we provide for stability after Saddam and his cronies were killed?

“All these are much more important questions than legality, the Arab street and other hardy Foreign Office perennials. On a tactical point, I recall Colin Powell [the US Secretary of State, who had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1988 to 1993] ... in 1993 saying that one of the blessings of retirement was that he would never have to listen to another British legal opinion. Presenting Washington with one now will both irritate and weaken him. We can look for the legal basis once we have decided what to do, as we did in Kosovo.”

³³ [Teleletter Sawers to Jay, 21 February 2002, 'Iraq: Policy'](#).

108. Addressing “what should we be doing while Washington plans and we try to influence them”, Mr Sawers wrote:

“Conventional advice will be to plough on in New York, get the Goods Review List agreed, and work to implement the SCRs by sending back the inspectors.

“We should think long and hard on the last point. There is not a shred of evidence that Saddam is willing to open up his WMD plants to the UN. We would be sending people ... on a fool’s errand and offering them as hostages. We could be precipitating the very crisis we would rather avoid, on terms favourable to Saddam ... and we would offer an opportunity on a plate to the hawks in Washington. And if it is the UK in the lead, as we usually are, we will suffer a heavier backlash ... We need to have an agreed strategy with Washington before we head down a road which might look sensible, legal, UN-friendly etc, but only leads us into the jam we are trying to avoid.”

109. Mr Sawers concluded:

“Visiting Americans say privately that there is still a debate to be had in Washington. Powell is not as lonely a voice as he might seem. We know that Bush, at the end of the day, will be both intelligent and responsible. If we can help the Americans come up with a persuasive plan to oust the world’s worst tyrant, then we should do so. And if the best military and intelligence brains in London and Washington fail to produce a convincing plan, then we stick to containment.”³⁴

110. Mr Sawers’ letter and its distribution caused some consternation in No.10.

111. Sir David Manning told Mr Powell that he had:

“... asked the FCO to turn him off. Not helpful to have this winging its way around the world ... If John/other HOMs [Heads of Mission] want to offer views, they should be in personal letters to Michael Jay.”³⁵

112. Mr Powell agreed:

“I was gob smacked by this. John deserves a slapping down.”³⁶

113. As a result, the FCO sent a personal response to Mr Sawers and other Heads of Mission who had been sent copies of his teleletter stating:

“Your teleletter of 21 February ... raises a number of highly sensitive issues. I can assure you that thought is being given to them, necessarily on a highly restricted basis. You will understand that correspondence, widely copied, on these issues

³⁴ [Teleletter Sawers to Jay, 21 February 2002, ‘Iraq: Policy’.](#)

³⁵ [Manuscript comment Manning to Powell, 22 February 2002, on Teleletter Sawers to Jay, 21 February 2002, ‘Iraq: Policy’.](#)

³⁶ [Manuscript comment Powell to Manning on Teleletter Sawers to Jay, 21 February 2002, ‘Iraq: Policy’.](#)

is to be avoided. If any addressees were intending to comment, grateful if this could be in the form of personal letters to the PUS only.

“We will of course give guidance for Posts on Iraq issues as and when we can.”³⁷

MR BLAIR’S MEETING WITH MR ANNAN, 25 FEBRUARY 2002

114. In preparation for a meeting with Mr Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, in London on 25 February, the FCO advised Mr Blair that Mr Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League, had conveyed an “offer” from President Saddam Hussein to Mr Annan “to re-open dialogue, without pre-conditions, on co-operation with the UN”.³⁸ The FCO added that it was “not clear whether Saddam would under any circumstances allow the return of the inspectors” or whether it was “simply a propaganda exercise”. History “would suggest the latter”.

115. Mr Annan had responded that:

- He was always willing to talk to any [UN] Member State about complying with UN resolutions.
- Any renewed dialogue should be more focused and substantive than before, and set in the context of implementing the relevant resolutions, including getting the inspectors back in.

116. Mr Blair was advised to make a number of points to Mr Annan, including:

- Congratulating Mr Annan on his response to Saddam Hussein’s offer.
- The Iraqi regime’s support for terrorism and development of WMD was “of the utmost concern” to the international community. Saddam’s “WMD ambitions” would not be allowed to “go unchecked”.
- The UK believed getting inspectors back into Iraq was the “best way to eliminate WMD”.
- Getting them in on Saddam Hussein’s terms was “not an option”: the UK was looking for “an effective inspections regime as specified in ... resolutions 687 and 1284, not false assurances”.
- The Iraqi regime had to be “brought to realise that if it continues to reject its UN obligations to disarm then military action to deal with the threat it poses becomes more likely. We collectively share responsibility for ensuring this message gets across.”

117. In their meeting, Mr Blair told Mr Annan that WMD were “the key” for the next phase of the response to terrorism, “particularly acquisition by states that were not

³⁷ [Telegram 32 FCO London to Cairo, 22 February 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

³⁸ Letter McDonald to Tatham, 21 February 2002, ‘Kofi Annan’s Call on the Prime Minister, Monday 25 February’.

democratic, stable or progressive”, and “no final decisions had been taken on Iraq”: “He had been hoping there would be a new UN resolution and inspectors back in.”³⁹

118. In response to comments about the evidence of Iraqi activity, Mr Blair said the UK was “giving thought to how to produce the necessary evidence”. Nothing would “happen precipitately” and there might be “other ways to deal with Iraq, for instance if Saddam allowed inspectors back in”.

119. In his memoir, Mr Annan wrote that in late February he had been told by a senior British diplomat that the US “was determined to have the resolutions obeyed, or ‘to have the regime out’”.⁴⁰ When Mr Annan had “responded that Saddam Hussein had a habit of miscalculating”, he had been told “either they [the US] will get rid of the capability or they will get rid of him [Saddam Hussein]”.

120. Mr Annan added:

“But what was also clear, even to the most ardent of opponents of military action was that the current strategy wasn’t working: the sanctions could never be made ‘smart’ enough to spare the Iraqi people from continued suffering; nor were they robust enough to ensure with certainty that Baghdad wasn’t finding ways to rearm in contravention of its obligations ...”

121. A report of discussions between Mr Blair and other European leaders at the Progressive Governance Summit in Stockholm stated that “there was a general sense ... that it would be counter-productive to confront the US. The wiser course was to get the US to widen their agenda and encourage them to approach the issue from a coalition perspective.”⁴¹ Mr Blair’s overall sense from those discussions was that it “would be a challenging task, but possible” to bring France and Germany “onside”.

122. The FCO advised No.10 on 26 February that the immediate US focus was on getting the Goods Review List agreed. After that, the UK wanted Security Council discussions on the arrangements for inspections, but US support was uncertain. If “against all expectations” UNMOVIC was allowed to do its job that would “offer the best prospect of dealing with Iraq’s WMD”.

123. The FCO advice did not address the wider issues arising from the uncertainty about US policy and the possibility of military action, or what the UK’s response should be to that.

³⁹ Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 25 February 2002, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with UN Secretary General, 25 February’.

⁴⁰ Annan K. *Interventions: A Life In War And Peace*. Allen Lane, 2012.

⁴¹ Letter Tatham to McDonald, 24 February 2002, ‘Stockholm Progressive Governance Summit: Iraq’.

124. Mr Straw’s Private Office advised Sir David Manning on 26 February that:

“In the absence of any decisions on wider Iraq policy and the post-11 September situation, the immediate US focus is on getting the Goods Review List (GRL) agreed by the 30 May deadline.”⁴²

125. Once the GRL was implemented, there was:

“... an expectation, if UN credibility is to be maintained, that the Security Council would begin discussions on clarification of SCR 1284 ... The US are reluctant to go down this route, fearing that it represents a slippery slope towards a weaker inspection regime. But it remains our view that, properly handled, clarification would work to our advantage ... If the Iraqis continued to resist a tough inspection regime or let the inspectors in then reneged, the justification for any military action would be much stronger. If, against all expectations UNMOVIC were allowed to do their job, this would offer the best prospect of dealing with Iraq’s WMD.”

126. The FCO wrote that the US was talking to the Russians. If the French could be persuaded to help, that could offer the prospect of P5 agreement on clarification.

127. Sir Derek Plumbly warned on 27 February about the danger of turning regime change into an objective, rather than an aspiration.

128. Sir Derek also identified progress on Palestine as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for moving forward on regime change in Iraq.

129. Sir Derek Plumbly, British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia wrote to Sir Michael Jay on 27 February, warning:

“... we have always said we want to see regime change. There is no harm in saying it now more insistently perhaps, given that the Bush Administration have raised the issue to the top of the international agenda. But to date we have presented regime change as an aspiration, not an objective which we believe we (or the US can deliver). If we cross that bridge definitively, it will be difficult to pull back later.”⁴³

130. Sir Derek argued that the UK did need to take account of the Arab Street:

“Post 11 September I really do not see how we can disregard the depth of anger in our Middle Eastern back yard ... regimes may not fall in this part of the world, but instability can manifest itself in different ways.”

⁴² Letter Sedwill to Manning, 26 February 2002, ‘Iraq’.

⁴³ [Letter Plumbly to Jay, 27 February 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

131. Sir Derek took “issue too with John [Sawers]’s caricature of ‘conventional advice’ in FCO”. He recognised:

“... the need to frame our arguments within the US universe of facts. But we should not kid ourselves. UNSCOM [UN Special Commission] ground to a halt because the Security Council was terminally divided ... Having UNMOVIC inspectors on the ground would be less risky than a US/UK regime change campaign ... Saddam knows his limitations these days.

“... I do not think we should sign up to a proactive regime change policy until we have satisfactory answers to questions such as those John is posing. We should not give the Americans a blank cheque ... [T]he Americans need us on Iraq, and when they look more closely into the abyss they may pause. In any event ... from talking to American colleagues ... the need for a UN process is recognised In Washington. We should allow that to play through ... And we should promote the thought that a more balanced and determined US approach on Palestine would be a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for moving forward on regime change. Containment has worked for 11 years. We should not abandon it lightly.”

132. Sir Derek’s letter was copied only to Mr Ricketts and Mr Graham Fry, Deputy Under Secretary Wider World, within the FCO.

133. The letter was sent to Sir David Manning by Sir Michael Jay’s Private Office and was also seen by Mr Powell.⁴⁴

Development of the rationale for dealing with the threat from Iraq

134. Sir Richard Dearlove advised on 26 February that the US was drawing up plans for a military campaign and considering an ultimatum for the return of inspectors with which Saddam Hussein would be unable to comply.

135. On 26 February, Sir Richard Dearlove wrote again to Sir David Manning about developments in US thinking and timescales.⁴⁵

136. Sir Richard advised that the US had concluded that containment would not work and that disarming Iraq would be more difficult with each passing year. The US military were drawing up plans for a military campaign later in the year and the Administration was considering the possibility of presenting Saddam Hussein with an ultimatum for the return of inspectors. But, Sir Richard wrote, the bar would be set “so high that Saddam would not be able to comply”.

137. Sir Richard reported that his team had told the US that the UK legal position would need to be clarified before the UK could become engaged.

⁴⁴ Manuscript comments on Letter Plumbly to Jay, 27 February 2002, ‘Iraq’.

⁴⁵ Letter C to Manning, 26 February 2002, ‘US Policy on Iraq’.

138. Sir David Manning sent the letter to Mr Blair, commenting:

“Interesting account of the latest US thinking. Much as expected: [...]”⁴⁶

139. Mr Blair replied:

“I still don’t see how the military option will work, but I guess there will be an answer.”⁴⁷

140. Sir Richard Dearlove’s letter was also shown to Mr Straw and Sir Richard Wilson.

141. Sir Richard Dearlove briefed Mr Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 4 March. The discussion included the possibility of the US taking “serious military action” in the autumn.⁴⁸

142. In his memoir, published in 2007, Mr George Tenet, the Director of Central Intelligence, described how the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had concluded that American “boots on the ground” would be needed to remove Saddam Hussein.⁴⁹

143. Mr Tenet recorded that a new Head of the Iraq Operations Group inside the CIA Directorate of Operations had been appointed in August 2001 who had:

“... conducted a review of the lessons learned from our long and not-too-happy history of running operations against Iraq since ... 1991. The principal message ... from the review was that Saddam was not going to be removed via covert action alone. As much as some would wish for ... some quick, easy, and cheap solution to regime change in Iraq – it was not going to happen.”

144. Mr Tenet added that the CIA’s “analysis concluded that Saddam was too deeply entrenched and had too many layers of security around him for there to be an easy way to remove him”; and the Iraqi reaction was “always” that: “If you are serious about this, we want to see American boots on the ground.”

145. Mr Tenet wrote that his own “aversion to a CIA go-it-alone strategy was based on our estimate of the chance of success (slim to none)” and his belief that the CIA “plate was already overflowing with missions in the war on terrorism”.

146. Mr Tenet observed that even if such action “managed to take Saddam out, the beneficiary was likely to have been another Sunni general no better than the man he replaced”. That “would not have been consistent with the Administration’s intent that a new Iraq might serve as a beacon of democracy in the Middle East”.

⁴⁶ Manuscript comment Manning to Prime Minister, 27 February 2002, on Letter C to Manning, 26 February 2002, ‘US Policy on Iraq’.

⁴⁷ Manuscript comment Blair to Manning on Letter C to Manning, 26 February 2002, ‘US Policy on Iraq’.

⁴⁸ SIS record, 6 March 2003.

⁴⁹ Tenet G & Harlow B. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*. HarperPress, 2007.

JIC Assessment, 27 February 2002: 'Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight'

147. The JIC Assessment of 27 February concluded that Saddam Hussein saw the Goods Review List as making sanctions sustainable indefinitely.

148. Saddam Hussein would permit the return of weapons inspectors if large scale military action was believed to be imminent, but he would seek to frustrate their efforts.

149. Iraq continued to pursue its WMD programmes; design work for missiles with ranges greater than the UN limit of 150km was under way and it could produce chemical warfare agents “within weeks”. The JIC also introduced a new judgement that, “If it has not already done so, Iraq could produce significant quantities of biological warfare agents within days”.

150. Without direct intervention on the ground, the opposition would be unable to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s regime.

151. If he was unable to deter a US attack, Saddam Hussein would “go down fighting and could adopt high risk options”.

152. At the request of the JIC, an Assessment, ‘Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight’, was produced on 27 February.⁵⁰ It addressed “Saddam’s threat perceptions and internal position: whether he is secure, what opposition he faces, and what he is doing to try and avoid the internal and international threats he faces”.

153. In its discussion of the draft, the JIC concluded that the Assessment should “put ... to one side” the issue of Iraq’s interpretation of US policy as the latter was “itself developing, and would probably become much clearer to everyone ... within the next few weeks”.⁵¹

154. The JIC also decided that the final Assessment:

“... needed to say a bit more about Iraq’s aspirations and potential in terms of Weapons of Mass Destruction, not least because this was, and would remain, an important area for policy discussions with the US. The Pentagon’s views on how soon Iraq might develop a nuclear capability did not quite match the UK’s, and it would be useful for Ministers to know the JIC’s mind.”⁵²

⁵⁰ [JIC Assessment, 27 February 2002, 'Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight'](#).

⁵¹ Minutes, 27 February 2002, JIC meeting.

⁵² Minutes, 27 February 2002, JIC meeting.

155. In the first of its Key Judgements, the JIC stated:

“Saddam fears a US military attack which would threaten his regime by bringing about the disintegration of his military and security apparatus. A force on the scale of Desert Storm (1991) would constitute such a threat.”⁵³

156. The JIC also judged that Saddam did not believe such an attack was inevitable.

157. In addition, the JIC’s Key Judgements were:

- Saddam Hussein continued to “resist the enforcement” of Security Council resolutions “on disarmament while encouraging sanctions erosion”. His strategy was “threatened by US/UK efforts to introduce the Goods Review List (GRL) and make Iraq accept weapons inspectors”. Iraq saw the GRL as “making sanctions indefinitely sustainable”. But “the greatest risk seen by Saddam” was “that non-compliance with the UN may be used to justify a full-scale US attack”.
- Saddam had: “In response ... begun a nominal re-engagement with the UN and a diplomatic charm offensive.” So far he had offered “nothing new”. The JIC judged that if the threat of large-scale military action was believed to be imminent, Saddam would permit the return of weapons inspectors. If they did return Saddam would “frustrate their efforts” and he would “continue to play for time”.
- Iraq continued “to pursue its WMD programmes. Design work for missiles with ranges greater than the UN limit of 150km is under way. If it has not already done so, Iraq could produce significant quantities of biological warfare agent within days and chemical warfare agents within weeks of a decision to do so.”
- The Special Republican Guard (SRG) remained “closely tied to Saddam’s regime” and was “likely to resist any attempt to overthrow him”. The Republican Guard was also “favoured” and was “relatively well equipped and trained; it would be relatively resilient under attack, but its loyalty in dire straits is more open to question than the SRG”. “Other elements of the Iraqi military” were “more liable to crack if subjected to strong attack”.
- Kurdish and Shia groups formed “the most significant opposition to Baghdad”. The “opposition” was “militarily weak and riven by factional differences”. They would “not act without visible and sustained US military support on the ground”. A “coup or military revolt” was “only a remote possibility”.

158. The JIC stated that the US reaction, to the attacks on 11 September, had “been a jolt” to Saddam Hussein’s position. President Bush’s speech labelling Iraq as part of an “axis of evil” would have “reinforced” Saddam Hussein’s concern.

⁵³ [JIC Assessment, 27 February 2002, ‘Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight’.](#)

159. In respect of developments at the UN, the Assessment stated:

“In conjunction with pressure from the US, developments at the UN since November 2001 threaten to de-rail Saddam’s long-term strategy of refusing to comply with UNSCRs on weapons inspectors while working to circumvent sanctions and encourage their erosion. UK and US proposals to introduce the Goods Review List (GRL) in June 2002 ... undermine Iraq’s propaganda over sanctions by offering Iraq unrestricted access to most goods. Iraq therefore sees the GRL as making sanctions politically sustainable indefinitely. Russia’s acceptance of UNSCR 1382 while accepting only ill-defined assurances on steps to clarify UNSCR 1284 ... was also a defeat for Iraq.”

160. In response, there were signs that Iraq had “embarked on a **nominal policy of re-engagement with the UN and a diplomatic charm offensive**”. Mr Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister, had visited Moscow and Beijing in early 2002 “to solicit support against sanctions and the US threat [...]”.

161. The Assessment added:

“But **this tactical diplomacy has failed to improve Iraq’s position**. [...] The UN Secretary-General has been wary of accepting Saddam’s suggestion of a renewed dialogue and accurately perceives Iraq’s wish to prevaricate ...”

162. In relation to Iraq’s WMD programme, the Assessment stated:

“... Iraq continues to pursue the development of weapons of mass destruction. Though we lack precise data, Iraq has probably reconstituted many of the elements struck during Operation Desert Fox in December 1998. Iraq’s ballistic missile programme has extensively tested missiles under the 150km UN limit and intelligence indicates that design work for systems with ranges over 1,000km is underway. Iraq is assessed to have hidden 10-20 Al Hussein missiles (range 650km) capable of hitting Israel. Iraq also continues with its chemical and biological warfare (CBW) programmes and, if it has not already done so, could produce significant quantities of BW agent within days and CW agents within weeks of a decision to do so ... These can be delivered by a variety of means. Methods of ensuring survivability of CBW production facilities from attack are a high priority.

“Procurement activity suggests that Iraq is continuing with a nuclear weapons programme, although its current status is unclear. Before the Gulf War intervened, Iraqi plans were well advanced and we judge they were only three years away from possessing a nuclear weapon. Were sanctions lifted now, we judge it would take Iraq at least five years to produce a nuclear weapon and a further two to produce a warhead. The acquisition of fissile material or significant technical assistance from abroad could significantly shorten this timescale. Iraq still has some low grade radioactive material which it could utilise in a radiological dispersal device, but there is no recent intelligence indicating that Iraq is pursuing such a course.”

163. The Assessment stated that Saddam Hussein recognised the “greatest risk” was:

“... that the Iraqi WMD programme and non-compliance with UNSCRs may be used to justify a US attack to overthrow him. He would probably see a force on the scale of Desert Storm (1991) as overwhelming. We judge that [if the threat of large-scale military action was believed to be imminent, Saddam would permit the return of weapons inspectors] ...”

164. The JIC judged that, as “an interim fall-back position”:

“... Iraq could try to resurrect Russian proposals to link the entry of inspectors to a pre-determined timetable of sanctions-lift. But this would be no more than a tactical move to buy time, not an admission of defeat ... **even if inspectors were allowed to return, Iraq would embark on a renewed policy of frustration**, involving denial, deception, obstruction and delay. Iraq would be able to conceal from inspectors much of its CBW work and research on longer range missiles, though probably not its missile production facilities.”

165. The Assessment reviewed Iraqi opposition groups and elaborated the final Key Judgement:

“Overall we judge that, **unaided, the Iraqi opposition is incapable of overthrowing the Iraqi regime; in the present circumstances a coup or military revolt remains only a remote possibility**. With outside help short of direct intervention on the ground, the opposition would still be unable to succeed. Spontaneous mass uprisings might be more important if the regime’s control wavered, but this is not in prospect; however, it might hasten the regime’s downfall in conjunction with a massive US attack.”

166. The Assessment added:

“The resilience of the Iraq military is uncertain; much would depend on the particular nature and scale of the attack it faced and how it perceived that threat. Though the Iraqi military is relatively large, well-trained and well-equipped by regional standards ... it also has serious weaknesses ... [I]ts training and equipment is inadequate to face Western forces on equal terms and it is especially vulnerable to air power.

“The Republican Guard (RG) and Special Republican Guard (SRG) are the elite ... they are better equipped and trained than the regular army. For these reasons, we would expect them to be relatively resilient under attack ... It [the SRG] would defend any attempt to topple Saddam. In dire straits, the RG’s loyalty would be more open to question. The regular army would be most liable to waver in its support of the regime, or disintegrate, if subject to a strong US attack.”

167. Looking to the future, the JIC judged that Saddam Hussein was “not yet convinced” that a US:

“... move to overthrow him is inevitable. While the Coalition campaign continues in Afghanistan, he probably believes the US is militarily preoccupied; in any event, US rhetoric has not so far been backed up by overt preparations to attack. He still hopes that his efforts to counter progress at the UN will undermine support for sanctions and for US military action ...”

168. The Kurds and Shia “would not show their hand until US resolve to overthrow Saddam” was “absolutely clear”. There was “no obvious leader” among those groups who was “capable of unifying the opposition” and had “credibility and popular appeal inside Iraq”. No likely replacement for Saddam from within the regime had been identified, but the JIC stated that, in the event of internal change, it was “likely that any successor would be autocratic and drawn from the Sunni military elite”.

169. The JIC concluded:

“In the event of a US attack, Saddam would probably shift to a well-tested defensive strategy in the hope that Iraqi resistance to a US ground campaign would strain US resolve ... Alternatively, if Saddam believed he was unable to deter a US attack to oust his regime, we judge he would go down fighting and could adopt high risk options, such as seizing northern Iraq, to disrupt US planning. Faced with defeat, Saddam could resort to even riskier options such as conducting terrorist attacks or using weapons of mass destruction against US forces or Israel.

“Iraq could fracture under attack. But all Iraq’s neighbours agree that ... is deeply undesirable. Each will try to influence events as they develop; it is likely that Iran ... would try to maintain and build its influence ... But we judge it would try to avoid becoming directly involved in fighting on either side.”

MOD advice to Mr Hoon, 27 February 2002

170. The MOD advised Mr Hoon that the UK should not rule out military action against Iraq; but there was a need to think through the options in more depth. That would also improve the “prospects of influencing the US towards a successful outcome”.

171. Mr Simon Webb, the MOD Policy Director, sent Mr Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary, advice on 27 February on how the UK might approach the three countries referred to by President Bush as an “axis of evil”.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ [Minute Webb to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 27 February 2002, ‘Axis of Evil’.](#)

172. Mr Webb recommended that the UK should acknowledge that the countries posed “increasing” risks to international stability; and that the US should be persuaded to explain why. The UK should:

“Encourage a broad-based approach ranging from diplomacy to challenge inspections and levers on suppliers.

“Not rule out UK participation in military action against Iraq [...] if that is the only way to stem the tide of WMD proliferation and a worthwhile and legal option exists at the time.”

173. Mr Webb also stated that it was important to distinguish between two strands; the “direct risks from proliferation” and the “potential association with international terrorism”.

174. Mr Webb’s detailed advice on the risks posed by Iraq is addressed in Section 4.1.

175. In the context of the response from European partners, Mr Webb advised:

“... it would be wiser for the UK to take a more complex position supporting the underlying concerns but advocating a greater mix of possible approaches. No.10 have started to take this line over the last week but we need to think through the options in more depth. In this way we have better prospects of influencing the US towards a successful outcome. Above all we should encourage the US to explain the issues more effectively ...”

176. Mr Webb asked Mr Hoon for approval for the overall approach he had set out on which he would “be working with the Cabinet Office” before Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush in early April.

177. Mr Ehrman, who had been shown a draft of Mr Webb’s advice, raised a number of questions and asked for a briefing for himself and Mr Patey on what the MOD considered to be the “valid options for military operations in some specific scenarios against Iraq”.⁵⁵

178. Mr Ehrman underlined the potential legal difficulties, including differences between the UK and the US on the question of whether a determination that Iraq was flouting UNSCRs could be made without collective Security Council authorisation.

179. Mr Blair agreed to a discussion of Iraq in Cabinet, which took place on 7 March.

180. Mr Blair told Cabinet on 28 February that he would be talking to President Bush about the next phase in the war against terrorism. The main decisions, including on Iraq, needed to be properly thought through and were some way off. The Cabinet should discuss the next phase when the Foreign Secretary returned.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Letter Ehrman to Webb, 27 February 2002, ‘Axis of Evil’.

⁵⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, 28 February 2002.

181. Mr Campbell wrote that Mr David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, had referred to “the unsettling speculation and said a lot of people had difficulty with Rumsfeld” [Mr Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense].⁵⁷ Mr Blair had said President “Bush was in charge, not Rumsfeld”.

182. Lord Wilson of Dinton told the Inquiry that Mr Blunkett and Mr Robin Cook, the Leader of the House of Commons and President of the Council, had pressed for the discussion.⁵⁸ He could not recall what had prompted them but observed: “I would guess it was because the newspapers were full of stories.”

Government statements on the need to deal with the threat from Iraq

183. From late February 2002, Mr Blair and Mr Straw began publicly to argue that Iraq was a threat which had to be dealt with.

184. Mr Blair discussed Iraq and other issues with President Bush on 28 February.⁵⁹

185. Mr Blair reported the tenor of his discussions at the Progressive Governance Summit in Stockholm and that some individuals had been less hostile in private than in public. The record stated that Mr Blair understood that no plans had reached the President’s desk.

186. Iraq would be discussed at their meeting in April in Crawford.

187. Before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia, Mr Blair gave an interview to the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)* on 28 February in which he stated that he agreed with President Bush “very strongly that weapons of mass destruction represent a real threat to world stability”; and that: “Those who are engaged in spreading weapons of mass destruction are engaged in an evil trade and it is important that we make sure that we have taken action in respect of it.”

188. Mr Blair also stated that: “The accumulation of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq poses a threat, not just to the region but to the wider world.” President Bush was “absolutely right to raise it”.⁶⁰

189. Asked if Britain was prepared to use force against Iraq, Mr Blair said:

“When we’re ready to take action, then we’ll announce it. It is a real issue. It is a real threat. How we deal with it is an open matter.”

⁵⁷ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

⁵⁸ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 40.

⁵⁹ Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 28 February 2002, ‘Prime Minister’s Phone Call with President Bush, 28 February: Afghanistan, Iraq and Middle East’.

⁶⁰ *BBC News*, 28 February 2002, *Blair hints at Iraq action*.

190. Mr Campbell wrote that Mr Blair had given an interview for *ABC* which was “very forward on Iraq and pro GWB [President Bush]. He had decided that was the best position to adopt to gain influence.”⁶¹

191. *The Telegraph* the following day reported that Mr Blair had “stepped up his rhetoric against Saddam Hussein”, and that his remarks were the “strongest support yet” for President Bush’s “tough line”. It was “seen as an attempt to prepare the British public for a second phase in the war against terrorism”.⁶²

192. On 3 March, Mr Blair was reported to have told *Channel Nine* in Australia:

“We know they [Iraq] are trying to accumulate ... weapons of mass destruction, we know he’s prepared to use them. So this is a real issue but how we deal with it, that’s a matter we must discuss.”⁶³

193. Mr Blair was also reported to have argued that the lessons of 11 September meant that such threats must be tackled; and that “if we don’t act we will find out too late the potential for destruction”.

194. Introducing a debate in the House of Commons on 4 March, on the Government’s policy towards countries supporting international terrorism, in particular Syria, Iran and Iraq, Mr Jim Murphy (Labour) stated that Iraq had a history of support for terrorist organisations and had:

“More recently ... again assumed a high profile, taking centre stage in world politics. It is now absolutely clear in the wider sense of global and regional security that Iraq must act. Saddam Hussein, newly armed with an improved weapons of mass destruction capability, is a threat not only to his own people and his neighbours, but to international security. The United Kingdom, along with its allies, is rightly considering action, but I firmly believe that we must also publish whatever evidence we can, notwithstanding the lack of observers on the ground.

“There is evidence of the increased viability and range of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, and we need to persuade not only the House but the British public and world opinion – especially Arab opinion that, because of the threat posed by Saddam to his neighbours and to world security, we may, unfortunately, be left with no alternative as an international community but to act, in more than a diplomatic sense ...”⁶⁴

195. Responding to Mr Murphy, Mr Ben Bradshaw, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, encouraged Mr Murphy “and other

⁶¹ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

⁶² *The Telegraph*, 1 March 2002, *Blair backs Bush on ‘evil’ of Iraq*.

⁶³ *BBC News*, 3 March 2002, *Blair gives Iraq new warning*.

⁶⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 4 March 2002, column 125.

Members who support the Government on this issue” to make their views known in a debate on Iraq which would take place on 6 March.⁶⁵

196. Mr Bradshaw stated that the UK’s “European allies very much share our concern that Iraq should comply fully with its obligations under the United Nations resolutions to allow weapons inspectors back into that country without any conditions attached”. If Iraq failed to do that, the international community would:

“... face some very difficult decisions. Those who oppose in principle any talk of a military response against countries such as Iraq in such circumstances need to say how they would deal with rogue states determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction and use them on their neighbours and elsewhere.”⁶⁶

197. In an article published on 5 March, Mr Straw stated that if Saddam Hussein refused to co-operate with weapons inspection, he would have to live with the consequences.

198. Mr Straw wrote an article, published in *The Times* on 5 March, stating:

“The stalemate between the United Nations and Iraq cannot go on for ever. For more than a decade, Britain and the United States have led the UN’s efforts to protect Iraq’s neighbours from aggression and protect the world from Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction.

“Iraq persistently flouts the authority of the UN Security Council and international law ...

“The threat from Iraq is not receding. Unique among the world tyrants, Saddam has both the ruthlessness and capability to employ weapons of mass destruction.”⁶⁷

199. “The international community’s most pressing demand” was that Iraq should allow UN officials to inspect its weapons programmes.

200. The article concluded:

“We cannot allow Saddam to hold a gun to the heads of his own people, his neighbours and the world for ever. Intense diplomatic efforts will continue, and I hope they will achieve our aim of removing the threat which Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction pose to humanity. But if he refuses to open his weapons programmes to proper international inspection, he will have to live with the consequences.

“No decisions have been taken, but let no one – especially Saddam – doubt our resolve.”

⁶⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 4 March 2002, column 128.

⁶⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 4 March 2002, column 129.

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 5 March 2002, *Saddam must allow weapons inspectors into Iraq or suffer the consequences*.

201. The details provided by Mr Straw about Iraq’s programmes are addressed in Section 4.1.

202. A briefing paper prepared at Mr Straw’s request was sent to members of the Parliamentary Labour Party and to the members of Cabinet. That described Iraq as a threat to the international community and its WMD programmes as “massive”.

203. A briefing paper on Iraq was prepared at Mr Straw’s request by his Special Adviser, Dr Michael Williams.⁶⁸

204. The paper provided more detail on the arguments for addressing the Iraqi regime as “a demonstrable threat to the stability of the region”, which Mr Straw had set out in his article in *The Times*, including the key elements of the strategy of containment, Iraq’s failure to comply with most of the 27 obligations imposed in UN resolutions, and criticism of Iraq’s “notorious” human rights record.⁶⁹

205. In response to the question: “Are you preparing for military action against Iraq?”, the paper stated:

“We cannot ignore the threat Iraq poses to the international community through its massive programme of development of weapons of mass destruction.”

206. The statements in Dr Williams’ paper on Iraq’s WMD, in particular the accuracy of the statement that Iraq had the potential to develop a crude nuclear device in about five years if its programmes remained “unchecked”, are addressed in Section 4.1.

207. Mr Straw’s Private Office signed a letter to members of Cabinet on 6 March, suggesting that they might find the briefing paper on Iraq, which had been prepared for the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), “useful background”.⁷⁰

208. On 6 March, Mr Blair published an article setting out why Iraq was still a threat to the UK.

209. An article by Mr Blair, ‘Why Saddam is still a threat to Britain’, was published in the *Daily Express* on 6 March, in which Mr Blair wrote that “we now have to face the fact that there are irresponsible states which either have, or are actively seeking, biological, chemical and nuclear weapons”.⁷¹ That was a threat which President Bush had “rightly highlighted” in his State of the Union speech on 29 January.

210. In relation to the threat posed by Iraq, Mr Blair wrote:

- We “know ... from his own history that Saddam Hussein ... has mass destruction weapons and will use them ...”

⁶⁸ Statement, 9 January 2011, page 5.

⁶⁹ Paper Williams, 5 March 2002, ‘Iraq Briefing’.

⁷⁰ [Letter Sedwill to Rycroft, 6 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Cabinet Discussion’.](#)

⁷¹ *Daily Express*, 6 March 2002, *Why Saddam is still a threat to Britain.*

- The UN had “demanded” in 1991 “that its representatives should be allowed into Iraq to dismantle his weapons of mass destruction and ensure he did not replace them” because Saddam had “used chemical weapons repeatedly against Iranian soldiers”, and had used them “against his own citizens when he attacked Kurds in northern Iraq”.
- The UN weapons inspectors had “discovered and destroyed thousands of chemical and biological weapons, including thousands of litres of anthrax and 48 missiles” before they had been “kicked out”.
- The inspectors were “convinced” that Saddam Hussein had “hidden other deadly arsenals and the plants to manufacture more” but could not track them down because of “almost daily obstruction”.
- It was important to “remain vigilant” about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. If he was not restrained, “a volatile situation in the region could easily become a world crisis”.
- The fact that Saddam Hussein had been contained “for so long” did not mean the threat had gone away, he was “continuing his chemical and biological weapons programmes and ... the long-range missiles to deliver them”.

211. Mr Blair concluded:

“How we act is a matter for discussion ... [I]t is in the interest of all to face up to these threats with determination and resolve.

“... President Bush will consult widely with his allies. Saddam Hussein would be wise not to mistake this for weakness. He should not underestimate the determination of the international community to prevent him developing and using weapons of mass destruction.”

212. The issue of possible UK support for US military action in Iraq was raised in the House of Commons on 6 March.

213. In the debate in Westminster Hall on 6 March Mr Tam Dalyell (Labour) and a number of other MPs, including Mr Menzies Campbell (Liberal Democrat), expressed concerns about the possibility of the UK Government supporting US military action in Iraq.⁷²

214. The issues raised included:

- There was a need for Mr Blair to explain the policy to Parliament.
- Force should not be used until everything possible had been done to avoid war.
- Others beside Iraq were continuing to defy UN resolutions and acquire weapons of mass destruction without military action being taken.
- There was little domestic or international support for military action and a danger of a backlash in Muslim states.

⁷² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 6 March 2002, columns 69-88WH.

- Nothing should be done without the full authority and approval of the UN.
- Military action should never be taken without clear and realistic political objectives that were capable of achievement.
- The most immediate cause of instability in the Middle East was the escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians.
- The need to win the peace as well as war which meant considering a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq before acting.

215. Other speakers were more supportive of military action, particularly if diplomatic routes had been exhausted.

216. Mr George Howarth (Labour) asked if it “was possible to deal with rogue states under the auspices of Security Council resolutions”, and whether Iraq was “a serious enough threat to warrant the type of action that seems to be under consideration”.⁷³ If the United Nations was “to deserve and continue to enjoy a good level of support”, it was “vitally important that Security Council resolutions are taken seriously and amount to more than mere words on paper”. In his view there could be “no doubt” that Saddam Hussein was “developing weapons of mass destruction of various kinds” and that “our security is threatened by what might happen if no action is taken”. He had “no difficulty” supporting the positions taken by Mr Blair and Mr Straw, including “if it became obvious that an appropriate form of intervention was necessary”. In that event he advocated a debate in which the case would be argued properly. There was “a case for action, but it must be cautious, considered and carefully weighed”, and the House should be consulted before action was taken.

217. Mr Alan Duncan, the Opposition spokesman on Defence, stated:

- Iraq under Saddam Hussein had “refused to acknowledge international norms or its own international agreements”, oppressed its own people, and appeared “intent on developing weapons of mass destruction” that the UK would be “naive” to see as “merely defensive”.
- The policy of containment had been followed “with some success” but it was not enough on its own “to defeat the evil of the Iraqi regime and its weapons programme”. He questioned whether it was “any longer realistic to pursue” containment, and whether the policy was “sufficient to guarantee the safety and security of Iraq’s immediate neighbours and the wider world”.
- In facing the “latent threat” from Iraq, “we should not rule out any course of action”.
- “Conservative Members support the Prime Minister in his determination to tackle the issue and not shy away from it, as some would wish. His full support for President Bush shows an appreciation of the gravity of the issue and we await

⁷³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 6 March 2002, column 74WH.

the outcome of their talks ... There is a clear and present danger and we must face it.”

- Saddam Hussein should tell the UN that he was prepared to admit inspection teams and prove that was a realistic option.
- Action in Iraq would be “on an altogether different scale” from Afghanistan. And there would not be a rebel force “similar to the Northern Alliance” to take that military action.
- If Saddam Hussein was to be toppled, there was a need to “be certain to win the peace as well as any war”. That meant “considering a post-Saddam Iraq” before acting, and considering “reconstruction, humanitarian aid and the massive difficulty of filling the political vacuum left by the regime of a dictator”.
- Nor could there be any “support for any form of separation or any breakaway state”.
- If, as he believed, the Government had “considered Iraq’s long-term requirements” and should be supported, “Those who continue to argue that containment is sufficient must answer the charge of naivety.”⁷⁴

218. Responding to the points raised in the debate, Mr Bradshaw stated that there were “no proposals, only speculation”.⁷⁵ He agreed that everything possible should be done to avoid military action. Mr Annan would be holding talks with Iraq in New York the following day, but Mr Bradshaw said it remained to be seen if Iraq was serious. Saddam Hussein had embarked on charm offensives before and they had come to nothing. Iraq was “a state sponsor of terrorism” but the main concern was “its determination to build weapons of mass destruction and the threat it poses, not just to its neighbours, but to the rest of the world”. The UK was actively pursuing diplomacy. In the “hypothetical circumstances” of military action, the legal view was that Iraq was in “flagrant breach” of both UN resolutions and the cease-fire agreement, “which made the cease-fire no longer valid”. Iraq was “unique” in that it had used chemical weapons against its neighbours and its own people.

219. Mr Bradshaw added that all the Labour members who had spoken in the debate opposing the Government’s policy had opposed the policy in Afghanistan and Kosovo: “They were wrong then, and they are wrong now.”

220. During Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) later that day, Ms Diane Abbott (Labour) asked if Mr Blair was:

“... aware of the growing concern in the country that we may be moving by degrees towards war with Iraq? Does he accept that in the event that British troops are sent into action, there should be a debate and a vote on the Floor of the House?”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 6 March 2002, columns 84-85WH.

⁷⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 6 March 2002, column 87WH.

⁷⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 6 March 2002, column 287.

221. Mr Blair replied:

“Of course, were we ever to take action in respect of Iraq, there would be an opportunity for the House to express its views ... However ... no decisions have yet been taken about any possible action in respect of Iraq ...”

222. Referring to Mr Blair’s remarks to the Australian media and the debate in Westminster Hall that morning, Mr Dalyell asked a similar question during Mr Blair’s statement on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. Mr Blair’s reply referred to his answer to Ms Abbott, but he added:

“... it is important ... before anyone takes a position condemning it or supporting it [action on Iraq], we see what the Government propose we should do ...”⁷⁷

DRAFT PAPER ON WMD PROGRAMMES OF CONCERN

223. On 6 March, Mr Scarlett sent Sir David Manning a draft of the paper which had been commissioned on 19 February, setting out the facts “for public use” on WMD programmes of concern in Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Libya.⁷⁸

224. The draft paper was also sent to Sir Richard Wilson, the heads of the intelligence Agencies, and to senior officials in the FCO, the MOD and the Cabinet Office.

225. The substance of the draft paper and its development, including the decision that the document should focus on Iraq and that publication should be postponed, are addressed in Section 4.1.

Cabinet, 7 March 2002

226. The minutes record that Cabinet on 7 March agreed:

- **It was important that the US did not appear to be acting unilaterally.**
- **It was critically important to reinvigorate the Middle East Peace Process.**
- **Any military action taken against President Saddam Hussein’s regime had to be effective.**
- **On the other hand, Iraq was in clear breach of the obligations imposed by the UN Security Council.**
- **Iraq’s WMD programmes posed a threat to peace; and Iraq’s neighbours regarded Saddam Hussein as a danger.**
- **The right strategy was to engage closely with the US Government in order to be in a position to shape policy and its presentation.**

⁷⁷ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 6 March 2002, column 297.

⁷⁸ [Minute Scarlett to Manning, 6 March 2002, ‘WMD Programmes of Concern – Unclassified’, attaching Paper ‘WMD Programmes of Concern’.](#)

- **The international community should proceed in a measured and determined way to decide how to respond to the real threat represented by the Iraqi regime.**
- **No decision to launch further military action had been taken and any action taken would be in accordance with international law.**

227. As agreed the previous week, Cabinet discussed Iraq on 7 March.⁷⁹

228. Mr Straw told Cabinet that “in view of the current media speculation about military action in Iraq, it was important to remind his colleagues of the background to the current situation”. President Saddam Hussein had launched “an unprovoked invasion of Kuwait in 1990”. Following his defeat in 1991, 27 separate obligations had been imposed on Iraq by the UN Security Council; Saddam Hussein’s regime had met only three. The:

“... regime continued to pose a threat to peace through its development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the means to deliver them. United Nations weapons inspectors had been forced to leave Iraq in 1998 because they were close to exposing the full extent of ... Saddam Hussein’s programmes. Iraq’s neighbours were concerned about the threat to peace posed by ... Saddam ... but feared that military action which did not result in his removal would strengthen his position.”

229. Mr Straw continued:

“... sanctions imposed by the United Nations were not preventing food and other humanitarian goods from reaching Iraq. Contracts to the value of \$30 billion had been approved under the Oil-for-Food programme ... The United Kingdom alone had given £100 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq. Negotiations were ... in train to change the sanctions regime so that, with the exception of those military and dual-use goods included on a Goods Review List, all goods could be imported ... without the prior approval of the United Nations. President Saddam Hussein’s regime had to comply fully with all relevant ... Security Council resolutions, including the elimination of all WMD ... to normalise its relations ...”

230. Mr Straw concluded:

“No decision had been taken on launching further military action against the Iraqi regime, but it was important to ensure that the British public and international opinion understood the true nature of the threat posed by the regime and the need to respond effectively.”

⁷⁹ [Cabinet Conclusions, 7 March 2002.](#)

231. Cabinet Ministers raised a number of points in the subsequent discussion, including:

- “it was important to distinguish between the campaign against international terrorism and efforts to address the threat to international peace posed by the Iraqi regime’s continuing development of WMD”.
- It would be “more difficult to convince the public of the need for military action” in Iraq than it had been for Afghanistan. “It would be necessary to have a clear legal basis for military action and to convince people that the situation had deteriorated sufficiently to justify military action”.
- “any military action would create new tensions” in the UK, “particularly within the Moslem community. The domestic impact of action would have to be weighed carefully before any decisions were taken”.
- “it would be important to secure maximum international support ... before any military action took place. Western policy would have to be carefully calibrated to convince President Saddam Hussein that military action would ensue if he failed to comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions, without making such action inevitable”.
- The “military action in December 1998 [Operation Desert Fox], while meeting the objectives set out by the Coalition at the time, had boosted ... Saddam Hussein’s reputation on the Arab Street. The Iraqi regime was a more formidable opponent than the Taliban regime in Afghanistan”.
- “to isolate ... Saddam Hussein” it would be “necessary to make progress towards resolving the Israel/Palestine problem” to avoid accusations that the West was “not being even handed”. “Many people believed” that the US Government was an “uncritical” supporter of the Government of Israel. Mr Blair “could play a key role” in persuading the US to make clear that was not the case.

232. Mr Blair concluded:

“... the concerns expressed in discussion were justified. It was important that the United States did not appear to be acting unilaterally. It was critically important to reinvigorate the Middle East Peace Process. Any military action taken against President Saddam Hussein’s regime had to be effective. On the other hand, the Iraqi regime was in clear breach of its obligations under several United Nations Security Council resolutions. Its WMD programmes posed a threat to peace. Iraq’s neighbours regarded President Saddam Hussein as a danger. The right strategy was to engage closely with the Government of the United States in order to be in a position to shape policy and its presentation. The international community should proceed in a measured but determined way to decide how to respond to the real threat represented by the Iraqi regime. No decisions to launch military action had been taken and any action taken would be in accordance with international law.”

233. The Cabinet, “Took note, with approval.”

234. In his diaries, Mr Campbell provided more detail of the discussion. The points recorded by Mr Campbell included:

- Mr Blunkett had said “he didn’t feel there was much support [for where policy on Iraq was going]”.
- Several Cabinet members thought the “real concern” was the Middle East Peace Process.
- Mr Charles Clarke, Minister without Portfolio and Chairman of the Labour Party, said the Labour Party “would support provided the case was real and properly made”. In his view, judgement of the UK would rest on success or failure. People “understood” Mr Blair’s “position of support in exchange for influence”.
- Mr Blunkett also “raised the international and legal basis for action”. Support for [military intervention in] Kosovo and Afghanistan had been “pretty overwhelming”, but “a military assault on Iraq would carry less weight. It would depend on the role of the UN.”
- Mr Cook described Saddam Hussein as “a psychopath” and stated that there was “a fine balance” to strike on military action. Saddam would not listen to Mr Annan unless he believed “there might be military action”. Mr Cook wasn’t convinced that the [military] action [in December 1998] “had been productive”. He “doubted whether it would be worth taking action” if Saddam was “still standing at the end”, and Saddam would be “much cleverer than the Taliban”. The best way of isolating Saddam would be progress on the MEPP. Mr Cook also warned against allowing the UK to become isolated in Europe.
- Mr Blair had said “people’s concern’s were justified. ‘I do want to assure you that the management has not gone crazy.’ What are the dangers? US unilateralism. Bush doing it for the wrong reasons. Lack of progress on the Middle East. Taking action which proves to be ineffective.” The UK had to “try to influence and shape US strategy. But we have to try to put ourselves in the right position. Get the weapons inspectors back in ... the only thing Saddam responds to was real fear. If we had regime change it would make a huge difference to the whole region.”

235. Lord Wilson told the Inquiry that it was the most important Cabinet discussion of Iraq he had attended in 2002.⁸⁰ It had lasted an hour and he had taken “seven and a bit pages of notes ... and Iraq occupied six and a bit pages”. Lord Wilson commented that that was not bad “as a full discussion without papers”. He had gone “away feeling pretty pleased. I thought ‘In my time as Cabinet Secretary I have seen the Cabinet begin to play its role as I think the Cabinet should play its role.’”

236. Cabinet had:

“... raised all sorts of issues, not political issues particularly, issues about the legal position, about ... what would be involved in military action, whether you could

⁸⁰ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, pages 72-73.

succeed ... about the importance of the United Nations, about the prior importance of the Middle East Peace Process.”

237. Lord Wilson also stated Mr Blair had finished the meeting by saying: “The concerns expressed are justified. The management hasn’t gone crazy.”⁸¹ He added:

“... those are not the words of a man who has had the authority to proceed on a course which is likely to lead to military action. It is about a Cabinet which has expressed concern ... They know that force is an essential ingredient in policy on Iraq.

...

“... and I think Robin Cook said that again, but the message was ... they were worried about the direction the US Administration was going and they wanted the Prime Minister to use his power and influence to focus it on the United Nations, on getting the inspectors back in and on giving Saddam Hussein a real fright to get him to co-operate. They weren’t talking about military action ... [T]he whole flavour ... was, ‘Any decisions on this are a long way away’ ...”⁸²

238. Lord Wilson also explained that Mr Cook had made a number of points in January 1998, about the need to be “ready to use force if necessary, because not being ready ... would undermine leverage over Saddam Hussein; and ... the United States were clear they had legal authority to take action whereas our legal advice was more nuanced ... [T]hose are things you could transpose” to March 2002.⁸³

239. Mr Straw told the Inquiry that there was “great anxiety about the intentions of the Bush Administration”.⁸⁴

240. Mr Straw added that he “would have been fairly circumspect” about his own views in the discussion.⁸⁵ He would not “have spilled out all the things that I was saying to the Prime Minister in private”, not least because he was “concerned about the matter leaking”.

241. Mr Campbell wrote that Cabinet was not exactly divided but there was “a lot of concern” about where policy on Iraq was going. It was not a “row” but it had immediately been briefed to the press as one.⁸⁶ The next day the papers were “full of division, threats of resignation over Iraq”, which were “untrue”.

⁸¹ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 73.

⁸² Public hearing, 25 January 2011, pages 73-74.

⁸³ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, pages 73-74.

⁸⁴ Public hearing, 8 February 2011, page 36.

⁸⁵ Public hearing, 8 February 2011, page 38.

⁸⁶ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

242. In questions to Mr Cook later that day, Mr Dalyell asked for confirmation that the House of Commons would be consulted before a commitment to military action, not after.⁸⁷ Mr Cook responded that Mr Blair had said no decision had been taken, and no one anticipated one being taken in the near or medium future. Mr Cook added:

“Indeed, there is no timetable or process by which such a decision could be taken. It would therefore be ludicrously premature ... to commit myself to what the House may do in the event of a hypothetical outcome that is not expected for many months.”

243. Mr Douglas Hogg (Conservative) asked for an early debate on Iraq, the publication of a document setting out “the chief areas of concern in the context of Iraq”, and that, in the event of military action outside action in the No-Fly Zones, the House should be given an opportunity to vote on a substantive motion.⁸⁸

244. Mr Cook replied that a decision might never be taken. He added that the areas of concern:

“... were well known and unarguable. The fact is that the Iraqi regime has several thousand of unaccounted litres of toxic chemicals that would be appropriate to use in a chemical weapon; it has made a considerable investment in developing biological germ agents that could be used in biological weapons; and has proceeded intensively – and appears to be continuing to do so – with medium-range missiles that could deliver such warheads. In addition ... Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons ...

“Given that history and the present record, it is entirely proper that the world should take action through every available channel, starting with the United Nations to ensure Saddam Hussein accepts what the rest of the world accepts: no regime should have access to weapons of mass destruction unless it fully participates in international regimes to control proliferation.”

245. The following day, an article in *The Guardian* newspaper reported that, questioned by reporters at his weekly meeting, Mr Cook had:

“... admitted that ‘many people sometimes have contradictory instincts on this. Nobody likes military action.’

“... also praised the Labour rebels as MPs who include some with ‘long and honourable records in opposing proliferation and demanding strong action’ against transgressors. That may have been a hint to colleagues that they should not be

⁸⁷ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 March 2002, column 423.

⁸⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 March 2002, column 424.

undermining efforts to keep Saddam nervous about the West’s intentions while efforts are made to re-open weapon inspections.”⁸⁹

246. The article also reported “Signs of real unease” had begun to emerge “last night” about “the perceived hardening of Tony Blair’s opposition towards Iraq”. Officials had described the discussion in Cabinet as a thoughtful and sombre discussion of the options. Downing Street had denied that a Minister had spoken out against the military option.

247. Lord Wilson told the Inquiry that, the day after the 7 March Cabinet, reports of the meeting “appeared in virtually every newspaper”.⁹⁰ The reports were not very accurate, but they had “caused huge ructions”.

248. Given Mr Blair’s subsequent actions, the question of what Cabinet Members understood they had endorsed is a matter of some importance.

249. Cabinet minutes do not provide a verbatim record of the discussion in Cabinet. Their purpose is to provide a record of the key points made and the decisions taken.

250. The discussion undoubtedly took place against a background of considerable Parliamentary, public and media debate about possible US military action to depose and replace Saddam Hussein and whether the UK would support and participate in such action.

251. In the previous week, both Mr Blair and Mr Straw had made public statements that Iraq was a threat which had to be dealt with, and Mr Straw reiterated to Cabinet the need for the British public and international opinion to understand “the true nature of the threat posed by the [Iraqi] regime and the need to respond effectively”.

252. The discussion in Cabinet was couched in terms of Iraq’s need to comply with its obligations and future choices by the international community on how to respond to the threat which Iraq represented.

253. Mr Blair and Mr Straw went to some lengths to assure their colleagues that no decisions had been taken and Cabinet was not being asked to take decisions.

254. Cabinet did endorse the conclusion that Iraq’s WMD programmes posed a threat to peace and a strategy of engaging closely with the US Government in order to shape policy and its presentation. But it did not discuss how that might be achieved.

⁸⁹ *The Guardian*, 8 March 2002, *Cabinet concern grows over Blair’s tough talk on Iraq*.

⁹⁰ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 88.

255. Mr Blair had committed the UK to support the US in the fight against international terrorism, but given the absence of evidence of any Iraqi support for Islamic extremists, it is hard to see how that would have applied to US policy on Iraq.

256. There was no discussion of the nature of the strategy for dealing with Iraq. At that stage, Mr Blair, Mr Straw and Mr Hoon were yet to receive advice.

UN talks with Iraq, 7 March 2002

The UN and Iraq held their first talks for more than a year on the possible return of weapons inspectors, when Mr Annan met Mr Naji Sabri, the Iraqi Foreign Minister on 7 March 2002, before a meeting with experts.⁹¹

The talks were described as exploratory and neither side predicted an immediate breakthrough. They ended with agreement to a further round of talks in April.

Mr Annan told journalists that the talks were an effort to prevent a new Middle East war and that he “didn’t want to see a widening conflict in the region”.

The Iraqis made no specific commitments to co-operate with UN resolutions and posed 19 questions about US/UK policies. The majority were about clarification of resolution 1284.⁹²

The Cabinet Office ‘Iraq: Options Paper’

257. The Cabinet Office co-ordinated background paper on Iraq, commissioned on 19 February, was sent to Mr Blair on 8 March.

258. The existing policy of containment was described as “the least worst option”, which had been “partially successful”.

259. The paper analysed two broad options, toughening the existing containment policy and regime change by military means, but it did not make any recommendations.

260. The Cabinet Office ‘Iraq: Options Paper’, commissioned by Sir David Manning and co-ordinated by the Overseas and Defence Secretariat, was sent to Mr Blair by Sir David Manning on 8 March, as part of the collection of “background briefs that you asked for”, for the meeting with President Bush in April.⁹³

⁹¹ *The Guardian*, 8 March 2002, *Cabinet concern grows over Blair’s tough talk on Iraq*.

⁹² Minute Dodd to Manning, 5 April 2002, ‘Iraq’.

⁹³ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 8 March 2002, ‘Briefing for the US’.

261. The Cabinet Office paper described the UK’s policy objectives on Iraq as:

“Within our objectives of preserving peace and stability in the Gulf and ensuring energy security, our current objectives towards Iraq are:

- the reintegration of a law-abiding Iraq, which does not possess WMD or threaten its neighbours, into the international community. Implicitly, this cannot occur with Saddam in power; and
- hence as the least worst option, we have supported containment of Iraq, by constraining Saddam’s ability to re-arm or build up WMD and to threaten his neighbours.

Subsidiary objectives are:

- preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq;
- improving the humanitarian situation of the Iraqi people;
- protecting the Kurds in northern Iraq;
- sustaining UK/US co-operation, including, if necessary, by moderating US policy; and
- maintaining the credibility and authority of the Security Council.”⁹⁴

262. The Cabinet Office paper provided an analysis, drawing on recent JIC Assessments, of the existing policy of containment, which it described as having been “partially successful”. The policy had:

- effectively frozen Iraq’s nuclear programme;
- prevented Iraq from rebuilding its conventional arsenal to pre-Gulf war levels;
- severely restricted Iraq’s ballistic missile programmes;
- hindered Iraq’s biological and chemical weapons programmes;
- given some protection to the Kurds and the Shia through the operation of the No-Fly Zones; and
- Saddam was not seriously threatening his neighbours.⁹⁵

263. Despite containment, there was considerable oil and other smuggling; Saddam Hussein led a brutal regime and provided a rallying point for anti-western sentiment, which was a cause of instability.

264. Incontrovertible proof of large-scale activity would be needed to convince the Permanent Five and the majority of the Security Council that Iraq was in breach of its obligations on WMD and ballistic missiles.

⁹⁴ [Paper Cabinet Office, 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Options Paper’.](#)

⁹⁵ [Paper Cabinet Office, 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Options Paper’.](#)

265. Reflecting the JIC Assessment of 27 February, that Iraq continued to pursue the development of weapons of mass destruction, the Cabinet Office paper stated that Iraq continued “to develop WMD, although our intelligence is poor”. There was no greater threat now that Saddam would use WMD than there had been in recent years. Current intelligence was “insufficiently robust” to convince the P5 and the majority of the Security Council that Iraq was in breach of its obligations; the proof would need to be “incontrovertible and of large-scale activity to meet that criterion”.

266. The JIC Assessments of Iraq’s ability and intent to pursue weapons of mass destruction programmes, and the robustness of their judgements, is addressed in Section 4.1.

267. An improved containment policy would make a sanctions regime more attractive and reduce Iraq’s illicit revenues. The return of the inspectors would also allow greater scrutiny of Iraq’s WMD programme and security forces.

268. The US had, however, lost confidence in the policy.

269. The Cabinet Office paper stated that a policy to toughen containment would comprise:

- full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions;
- introduction of the revised sanctions regime and a Goods Review List in May as envisaged in resolution 1382 (2001);
- clarification of the modalities of resolution 1284 (1999) with a specific demand that Iraq re-admit UN inspectors with the aim of telling Saddam Hussein to admit inspectors or face the risk of military action;
- pushing for tougher action, especially by the US, against states breaking sanctions;
- maintaining the present military posture, including in the No-Fly Zones, and being prepared robustly to respond to any Iraqi adventurism; and
- continuing to make clear “without overtly espousing regime change” the view that Iraq would be better off without Saddam Hussein.

270. Toughening containment would put pressure on Saddam Hussein. The Goods Review List would make the sanctions regime more attractive. Better implementation of sanctions would reduce Iraq’s illicit revenues. The return of inspectors would allow greater scrutiny of Iraq’s WMD programme and security forces.

271. Some of the difficulties with the existing policy would, however, still apply. They included:

- Tougher containment would not reintegrate Iraq into the international community as it offered little prospect of removing Saddam Hussein.

- Iraq had progressively increased its international engagement and while the GRL might make sanctions more sustainable, the sanctions regime could collapse in the long term.
- Those states in breach of sanctions would want compensation.
- Saddam Hussein was only likely to permit the return of inspectors if he believed the threat of large scale US military action was imminent; and that such concessions would prevent the US from acting.
- Saddam Hussein was likely then to play for time, embarking on a renewed policy of non-co-operation.
- A “contract with the Iraqi people” would need “some detailed work” to be “at all credible”.

272. The US had lost confidence in containment. Some in the US Administration wanted Saddam Hussein removed. The success of Operation Enduring Freedom (the US military operation in Afghanistan), distrust of UN sanctions and inspection regimes, and unfinished business from 1991 were all identified as factors.

273. The Cabinet Office paper identified two possible types of future regime in Iraq:

- **a government led by a Sunni military strongman; or**
- **a Sunni-led representative and broadly democratic government.**

274. The second option would require the commitment of the US and others to nation-building for many years.

275. The paper stated that the UK should consider what sort of Iraq it wanted. It identified two possibilities:

- A “Sunni military strong man” who would be likely to maintain Iraqi territorial integrity. That might allow military forces to “withdraw quickly”. While outside assistance might be “traded” with assurances on WMD programmes and respect for human rights, there would be a strong risk of the Iraqi system reverting to type with a series of military coups until a Sunni dictator emerged who protected Sunni interests and with time could acquire WMD.
- A “representative, broadly democratic government”, which would be Sunni-led but within a federal structure which gave the Kurds guaranteed autonomy and the Shia fair access to government. Such a government was judged to be less likely to develop WMD and threaten its neighbours. But it would require the US and others to commit to nation-building for many years and entail a substantial international security force and help with reconstruction. The paper did not address how a broadly representative government would not be Shia-led.

276. The paper noted that even a representative government could seek to acquire WMD and build up its conventional forces, as long as Iran and Israel retained their WMD and conventional armouries.

277. The Cabinet Office paper stated that the only certain means to remove Saddam Hussein and his elite was to invade and impose a new government. That would be a new departure which would require the construction of a coalition and a legal justification.

278. Examining the internal position in Iraq, the paper stated:

- “In the current circumstances, a military revolt or coup is a remote possibility.”
- “Unaided, the Iraqi opposition is incapable of overthrowing the regime. The **external opposition** is weak, divided and lacks domestic credibility. The predominant group is the Iraqi National Congress (INC) ... The other major group, the Iraqi National Accord (INA) espouses moderate Arab socialism and is led by another Shia, Ayad Allawi. Neither group has a military capability, and both are badly penetrated by Iraqi intelligence ...”
- “The **internal opposition** is small and fractured on ethnic and sectarian grounds. There is no effective **Sunni-Arab** opposition. There are 3-4m **Kurds** in northern Iraq ... divided between two main parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). These groups have an interest in preserving the status quo, and are more interested in seeking advantage over the other than allying against Saddam ...”
- “The Kurds do not co-operate with the **Shia-Arabs** who form 60 percent of the population ... Most Shia would like to have a greater say in Iraqi government, but not necessarily control: they do not want secession, Islamic autonomy or Iranian influence.”

279. Three options for achieving regime change by military means were identified, which were described as “a new departure which would require the construction of a coalition and a legal justification”. Those were:

- Covert support to opposition groups, internal revolt by the Kurds and Shia, and the defection, or at least acquiescence, of large sections of the Army.
- An air campaign providing overt support to opposition groups, leading to a coup or uprising. Pressure on the regime could be increased by massing ground and naval forces and threatening a land invasion.
- A full-scale ground offensive to destroy Saddam Hussein’s military machine and remove him from power. An invasion would need to be preceded by a major air offensive to soften up Iraq’s defences and be sufficient to pose a credible threat to Baghdad to persuade members of the Sunni military elite that their survival was better served by deserting to the coalition than staying loyal to Saddam. That would require fewer forces than Operation Desert Storm because

Iraqi forces were considerably weaker than they had been in 1991. The paper added: “The greater investment of western forces, the greater our control of Iraq’s future, but the greater the cost and the longer we would need to stay. The only certain means to remove Saddam and his elite is to invade and impose a new government, but this could involve nation building over many years.” For logistical reasons, a ground campaign would not be feasible until autumn 2002.

280. The three options were not “mutually exclusive”. The first had a very low prospect of success and the second had no guarantee of success, but either or both would be “natural precursors” to the third.

281. While bases in only a few countries would be essential for a successful invasion, a wider and durable international coalition would be advantageous for both military and political reasons. Securing moderate Arab support would be greatly assisted by the promise of a quick and decisive campaign, and credible action by the US to address the MEPP.

282. Any coalition would need much tending over the difficult months of preparation:

“Iran, fearing further US encirclement and that it will be invaded next, will be prickly but is likely to remain neutral. With his regime in danger, Saddam could use WMD, either before or during an invasion. Saddam could also target Israel as he did during the Gulf war. Restraining Israel will be difficult. It could try to pre-empt a WMD attack and has certainly made clear that it would retaliate. Direct Israeli military involvement in Iraq would greatly complicate coalition management and risk sparking conflict more widely.”

283. The paper stated:

“At this stage we need to wait and see which options or combination of options may be favoured by the US Government.”

284. No legal justification for an invasion currently existed.

285. The Cabinet Office paper stated:

“A legal justification for invasion would be needed. Subject to Law Officers advice, none currently exists. This makes moving quickly to invade very difficult. We should therefore consider a staged approach, establishing international support, building up the pressure on Saddam, and developing military plans. There is a lead time of about 6 months to a ground offensive.”

286. A separate paper prepared by FCO Legal Advisers, ‘Iraq: Legal Background’, circulated as an annex to the Cabinet Office paper, set out the general legal background,

Iraq's obligations in the relevant Security Council resolutions, and the potential difficulties in relying in 2002 on existing resolutions to support the further use of force.⁹⁶

287. As well as examining the legal base for the No-Fly Zones, the Security Council resolutions relevant to the sanctions regime and resolution 1284 which had established UNMOVIC, the FCO addressed three possible bases under international law whereby the use of force could be authorised in relation to the circumstances of Iraq. It stated that two of the bases – self-defence and humanitarian intervention – were not applicable at that time.

288. The third potential legal base was the possibility that the authorisation to use force in resolution 678 (1990) could be revived. That had happened in the past, most recently when Iraq refused to co-operate with the UNSCOM in 1997 and 1998. A series of Security Council resolutions had condemned Iraq.

289. Resolution 1205 (1998) had condemned Iraq's decision to end all co-operation with UNSCOM as a "flagrant violation" of Iraq's obligations under resolution 687 (1991), and restated that effective operation of UNSCOM was essential for the implementation of that resolution. In the UK's view, that had had the effect of reviving the authorisation to use force in resolution 678.

290. In a letter to the President of the Security Council in 1998, the UK had "stated that the objective of Operation Desert Fox was to seek compliance by Iraq with the obligations laid down by the Council, that the operation was undertaken only when it became apparent that there was no other way of achieving compliance by Iraq, and that the action was limited to what was necessary to secure this objective".⁹⁷

291. The revival argument and the UK's position during the 1990s are set out in Section 5.

292. The FCO drew attention to potential difficulties in relying on existing Security Council resolutions to support further use of force in 2002:

"The more difficult issue is whether we are still able to rely on the same legal base for the use of force more than three years after the adoption of resolution 1205. Military action in 1998 (and on previous occasions) followed on from specific decisions of the Council; there has now not been any significant decision by the Council since 1998. Our interpretation of resolution 1205 was controversial anyway; many of our partners did not think the legal basis was sufficient as the authority

⁹⁶ [Paper FCO, \[undated\], 'Iraq: Legal Background', attached to Cabinet Office Paper, 8 March 2002, 'Iraq: Options Paper'](#).

⁹⁷ UN Security Council, 'Letter dated 16 December 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council' (S/1998/1182).

to use force was not explicit. Reliance on it now would be unlikely to receive any support.”⁹⁸

293. The FCO also identified a difference in the view of the UK and US about the role of the Security Council in determining any breach of the cease-fire enshrined in resolution 687 (1991). It stated:

“As the cease-fire was proclaimed by the Council ... it is for the Council to assess whether any breach of those obligations has occurred. The US have a rather different view: they maintain that the assessment of a breach is for individual Member States. We are not aware of any other State which supports this view.”

294. In relation to the possible legal grounds for the use of force set out in the FCO note, Sir Michael Wood, the FCO Legal Adviser from 1999 to 2006, told the Inquiry:

“I think the legal position was pretty straightforward and pretty uncontroversial. The first possible basis would be self-defence and it was clear to all the lawyers concerned that ... a factual basis for self-defence was not present unless circumstances changed ...

“The second possibility would have been the exceptional right to use force in the case of an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe. This was the Kosovo argument, the argument we used in 1999, and also used for the No-Fly Zones. Apart from the No-Fly Zones, it was clear that there was no basis, using that rather controversial argument, for the use of force in 2001/2002.

“So that left the third possible basis, which was with authorisation by the Security Council. There we had had a series of resolutions culminating in 1205 of 1998, which was seen as the basis for Operation Desert Fox ... so there was a slight question whether that finding of a serious breach still had some force.

“But I think all the lawyers who looked at it ... were very clearly of the view that it was not, and that if we sought to rely on that resolution of some years before, we wouldn’t have a leg to stand on.”⁹⁹

295. The Cabinet Office paper stated that for the P5 and the majority of the Security Council to take the view that Iraq was in breach of the cease-fire provisions of resolution 687 (1991):

- they would need to be convinced that Iraq was in breach of its obligations regarding WMD, and ballistic missiles. Such proof would need to be incontrovertible and of large-scale activity. Current intelligence is insufficiently robust to meet this criterion ...; or

⁹⁸ [Paper FCO, \[undated\], ‘Iraq: Legal Background’, attached to Paper Cabinet Office, 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Options Paper’.](#)

⁹⁹ Public hearing, 26 January 2010, pages 12-14.

- ... Iraq refused to admit UN inspectors after a clear ultimatum by the Security Council; or
- the UN inspectors were re-admitted to Iraq and found sufficient evidence of WMD activity or were again expelled trying to do so.”¹⁰⁰

296. If the options for tougher containment or regime change were developed further a “full opinion should be sought from the Law Officers”.

297. The Cabinet Office paper concluded that the use of overriding force in a ground campaign was the only option to offer confidence that Saddam Hussein would be removed and bring Iraq back into the international community.

298. That would require a staged approach and the US should be encouraged to consult widely on its plans.

299. In its “Conclusions”, the Cabinet Office paper stated:

“... despite the considerable difficulties, the use of overriding force in a ground campaign is the only option that we can be confident will remove Saddam and bring Iraq back into the international community.”

300. The elements of a staged approach comprised:

- winding up the pressure: increasing the pressure on Saddam through tougher containment. Stricter implementation of sanctions and a military build-up will frighten his regime. A refusal to admit UN inspectors, or their admission and subsequent likely frustration, which resulted in an appropriate finding by the Security Council, could provide the justification for military action. Saddam would try to prevent this, although he has miscalculated before;
- careful planning: ...
- coalition building: ... Special attention will need to be paid to moderate Arab states and to Iran;
- incentives: ... guarantees will need to be made with regard to Iraqi territorial integrity. Plans should be worked up in advance of the great benefits the international community could provide for a post-Saddam Iraq and its people. These should be published;
- tackling other regional issues: an effort to engage the US in a serious effort to re-energise the MEPP ...
- sensitising the public: a media campaign to warn of the dangers that Saddam poses and to prepare public opinion both in the UK and abroad.”

301. The Cabinet Office paper ended with a statement that the US should be encouraged to consult widely on its plans.

¹⁰⁰ [Paper Cabinet Office, 8 March 2002, 'Iraq: Options Paper'](#).

302. The Cabinet Office also provided a paper, produced by the FCO, on the attitudes of selected third countries, which is addressed in the Box below.¹⁰¹

Attitudes of selected third countries, March 2002

The March 2002 FCO paper on the attitudes of selected third countries to military action in Iraq stated that countries were more likely to be supportive, “or at least neutral or less hostile” if:

- some attempt is made to build UN legitimacy, ie a real effort to get the inspectors in; public presentation of the WMD evidence;
- the US are seen to be making a major effort to revive the MEPP;
- (with allies) there is genuine consultation;
- the US show that this time they are serious about getting rid of Saddam and have a plan that will work;
- the economic concerns of neighbouring states will be taken into account;
- they are convinced that the day-after questions are being addressed;
- the campaign has good prospects of being short as well as successful.”¹⁰²

The FCO assessed that, of the Permanent Members of the Security Council:

- France would be “difficult but not impossible to bring on board”.
- Russia would be looking for “an economic quid pro quo (on debt and future business in Iraq)”.
- China’s interest in improving relations with the US “may overcome its traditional opposition to interference in other countries’ affairs”.

The FCO also advised that:

- In the absence of progress on the MEPP, Arab states would have “the greatest difficulties” in supporting an operation perceived to be serving Israeli interests.
- Turkey would want to know that the US was “focused on maintaining a centralised, secular Iraqi government” and would not want to be the only Islamic country supporting the US.
- Jordan could find itself under the greatest pressure if military action went ahead given its economic dependence on Iraq.
- “Public criticism but private neutrality” was probably the best that could be hoped for from Iran.
- Overt Israeli support would be counterproductive.
- In the EU, France and Germany could probably be brought onside “with careful attention from Washington and depending on the degree of UN cover”. Overt criticism was more likely from Italy. Spain did not want an open breach with the US.

¹⁰¹ [Paper FCO, March 2002, ‘Military Action Against Iraq: Attitudes of Selected Third Countries’.](#)

¹⁰² [Paper FCO, March 2002, ‘Military Action Against Iraq: Attitudes of Selected Third Countries’.](#)

303. SIS10 sent Sir David Manning an Annex to the Cabinet Office paper, outlining options for SIS activity, on 8 March.¹⁰³

304. Addressing the options examined in the Cabinet Office paper, Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

“So that was the two sides of the argument ... which side you came down on really depended on whether you thought post-September 11th we had to be change makers or whether we could still be managers. Up to September 11th we had been managing this issue. After September 11th we decided we had to confront and change ...”¹⁰⁴

THE PROCESS FOR PRODUCING THE CABINET OFFICE ‘OPTIONS PAPER’

305. The Cabinet Office ‘Options Paper’ was prepared as a background paper. It contained no recommendation, and did not represent agreed inter-departmental advice for Ministers.

306. The paper was seen by Mr Straw and Mr Hoon and, later, by Mr Brown; but it was not approved by them or discussed collectively.

307. No further cross-departmental analysis and advice on the policy options was commissioned before Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush.

308. Following discussions with the FCO and MOD, Mr Jim Drummond, Assistant Head (Foreign Affairs) OD Sec, had asked Sir David Manning on 15 February for a “quick meeting” to discuss what next on Iraq.¹⁰⁵

309. Mr Drummond had identified two options:

- Continuing containment by tightening the No-Fly Zones and destroying Iraq’s new air defence system; pursuing the revised sanctions regime; and moving towards clarification of resolution 1284, including being prepared to respond militarily if there were major finds or the inspectors’ work was frustrated.
- Going “for the military option now”. That could involve either “bomb plus stimulate an uprising in the South and/or Kurdish areas”, which the FCO did not think would get rid of Saddam, or “bomb and invade”.

310. Mr Drummond stated that the revised sanctions regime would have “limited impact” on Saddam Hussein’s WMD efforts; and the military option would present legal difficulties.

¹⁰³ Letter [SIS10] to Manning, 8 March 2002, ‘[title redacted]’.

¹⁰⁴ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 39-40.

¹⁰⁵ [Minute Drummond to Manning, 15 February 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

311. Mr Drummond added:

“The US position is critical. There is plenty of press speculation and third hand reporting from embassies about US intentions. Probably they do not yet have a plan, and could be reluctant to share with us because they believe we are firmly set on containment. The Cheney visit ... next month may be important in gauging opinion. Iraq will no doubt be on the agenda for the visit to Crawford. We are planning a Whitehall meeting in early March. Before then, how should we be trying to get a better handle on US intentions?”

312. In his letter to Mr Webb on 27 February, Mr Ehrman concluded that the issues would “...need interdepartmental consultation soon. We should consider prompting the Cabinet Office to initiate the process.”¹⁰⁶

313. In his minute to Mr Hoon of 27 February, Mr Webb asked for permission to participate in the process.¹⁰⁷

314. A minute to Mr McKane forwarding a draft of the paper on 6 March stated: “The paper has been produced in close consultation with FCO, MOD, SIS and the Assessments Staff.”¹⁰⁸

315. Mr McKane sent a folder of papers “commissioned by the Prime Minister” to Sir David Manning on 6 March, including a draft of the ‘Iraq: Options Paper’.¹⁰⁹ Mr McKane stated that the papers would be discussed in a meeting in Sir David’s office the following day; and that Sir David would “want to consider and discuss [the paper] with colleagues before deciding how to take it to the next stage”.

316. Copies of Mr McKane’s minute and the draft paper were sent to Sir Richard Dearlove, Mr Ricketts, Mr Geoff Mulgan, Head of Policy in the Prime Minister’s Office, Mr Scarlett, Mr Julian Miller, Chief of the Assessments Staff, Mr Drummond and to Sir Richard Wilson’s Private Office.

317. The Government has been unable to find any record of Sir David Manning’s meeting on 7 March, at which the draft ‘Options Paper’ was discussed.¹¹⁰

318. A minute to Mr Hoon described the ‘Options Paper’ as “intended to be background reading ... (rather than fully worked up policy positions)”; and informed him that the “current text” had not been agreed by the MOD.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Letter Ehrman to Webb, 27 February 2002, ‘Axis of Evil’.

¹⁰⁷ [Minute Webb to PS/Hoon, 27 February 2002, ‘Axis of Evil’.](#)

¹⁰⁸ Minute Dodd to McKane, 6 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁰⁹ Minute McKane to Manning, 6 March 2002, ‘Papers for the Prime Minister’.

¹¹⁰ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Iraq Inquiry, 22 July 2015, [untitled].

¹¹¹ Minute Cholerton to APS/SofS [MOD], 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq: OD Secretariat Options Paper’.

319. A minute from Mr Simon McDonald, Mr Straw's Principal Private Secretary, recorded that:

- The 'Options Paper', and the (Assessments Staff) paper on WMD Programmes of Concern, had been submitted by Mr Ricketts to Mr Straw on 8 March.
- Mr Straw had asked for a meeting with officials to discuss "all this" and for details of what happened in 1998, "particularly the sequence of events ... what was, in Washington's view, the legal base for a strike on Iraq ... [and] more detail about the Iraqi National Congress".¹¹²

320. Mr Straw's comments on the draft WMD paper and his role in its development are addressed in Section 4.1.

321. In late March, as agreed between Mr Blair and Mr Brown, Mr Rycroft sent Mr Brown's Private Office a copy of the "latest version" of the Cabinet Office 'Options Paper' and the draft paper for publication on WMD "strictly for the Chancellor personally".¹¹³

322. The letter also drew Mr Brown's attention to:

- the JIC Assessment of 27 February, 'Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight';¹¹⁴ and
- the CIG Assessment of 15 March, 'The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes'.¹¹⁵

323. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that the papers were "designed to prepare the Prime Minister for discussions with the President".¹¹⁶

324. Mr McKane told the Inquiry that he had not been directly involved in the production of the 'Options Paper'; his focus had been on the implications of 9/11, and "there wasn't really a great deal of capacity certainly inside the Secretariat to think seriously about Iraq".¹¹⁷

325. Mr McKane stated that, by that time it had been "clear that the US Government is shifting its sights towards Iraq and that the policy we had adopted in the spring of the previous year is not really producing the results that had been hoped for it".¹¹⁸ The 'Options Paper' did not "express an opinion on whether we should stick with containment or a tougher form of containment or should start to shift more towards looking at regime change and military intervention".

¹¹² [Minute McDonald to Ricketts, 11 March 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

¹¹³ Letter Rycroft to Bowman, 26 March 2002, 'Papers on Iraq'.

¹¹⁴ [JIC Assessment, 27 February 2002, 'Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight'](#).

¹¹⁵ [CIG Assessment, 15 March 2002, 'The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes'](#).

¹¹⁶ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 23.

¹¹⁷ Public hearing, 19 January 2011, page 33.

¹¹⁸ Public hearing, 19 January 2011, page 34.

326. Mr McKane told the Inquiry that the Cabinet Office ‘Options Paper’:

“... was prepared in the same kind of way as the previous one; that is a framework for the paper was produced and different elements were commissioned from different Whitehall departments ... It went through a number of drafts and was finalised in early March.”¹¹⁹

327. Lord Wilson told the Inquiry that the initiative for the Cabinet Office paper had arisen from a discussion he had had with Mr McKane; and that it was “just a contingency”.¹²⁰

328. Lord Wilson could not remember the precise origins of the paper:

“All I can tell you now is that the idea of this paper was raised ... and ... I thought it was timely ... We had not been looking at Iraq for a while. We used to do regular reviews of policy on Iraq and I thought it was about time we did another ... I am not sure if No.10 knew or not ...”¹²¹

329. Later in the hearing, Lord Wilson added:

“Ever the optimist, I had rather hoped we would show the options paper to the Prime Minister or to No.10 ... and get a meeting of DOP on it. Forlorn hope. I asked after a while ... and I had been told that it had been wrapped up in the briefing for Crawford.”¹²²

330. The Inquiry sought additional evidence from the two members of Mr McKane’s staff who had written the Cabinet Office paper. They were asked about the process for producing the paper, the basis for the judgements made, and what changes were made as a result of Sir David Manning’s meeting and who was responsible for the advice that led to those changes.

331. In a statement for the Inquiry, Mr Drummond wrote: “From 9/11 until February 2002, Afghanistan and other post 9/11 counter terrorism issues took a higher priority than Iraq in the Secretariat’s work.”¹²³ Mr McKane had handed over responsibility for co-ordination of policy on Iraq to him around the end of 2001.

332. Describing the production of the paper, Mr Drummond wrote that, by mid-February, Mr Blair had been expected to have “a preliminary discussion” on Iraq during his meeting with President Bush in early April. Mr Drummond’s recollection was that “the Secretariat had offered to produce an options paper as background”. The paper had to be prepared quickly in time for Mr Blair’s return from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which ended on 5 March.

¹¹⁹ Public hearing, 19 January 2011, page 35.

¹²⁰ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 15.

¹²¹ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, page 41.

¹²² Public hearing, 25 January 2011, pages 83-84.

¹²³ Statement, 28 March 2013, pages 1-2.

333. Drafts were commissioned at a meeting on 21 February from the:

- FCO on policy objectives towards Iraq and the wider region, a tightened policy of containment, and legal advice on regime change;
- MOD on the military options for regime change; and
- SIS on possible successor regimes.

334. A draft paper had been circulated on 28 February for a discussion on 1 March and a further draft on 5 March for discussion the same day.

335. Mr Drummond had chaired the two discussions but he was unable to recall them in any detail and the files did not contain records of the contributions or what was discussed:

“The paper clearly drew on the JIC and Assessments Staff judgements about the likelihood of Saddam having WMD and that his regime was unlikely to be removed by internal opposition ... There was debate about continuing containment and that is recorded in the paper as an option, before considering regime change and the options for how that could be achieved.”

336. Mr Drummond added:

“As a background paper, no recommendations were made and ... it was submitted as being in close consultation with FCO, MOD, SIS and the Assessment Staff rather than agreed word for word with them.”

337. After Sir David Manning’s meeting on 7 March, Mr Drummond had “made some changes ... after further consultation” with the FCO, MOD and SIS, which “covered the difficulty of identifying successor regimes, that it was unlikely Iraq would disintegrate”, and changes clarifying the legal advice.

338. Mr Drummond concluded:

“At the time of drafting, we expected this paper to be the first of several that would help Ministers to reach conclusions on policy towards Iraq and hoped that there would be discussion with them.”

339. In his statement, Mr Tom Dodd, who was a desk officer in OD Sec, wrote that he was the principal drafter of the paper.¹²⁴ He made similar points to Mr Drummond about the process, with more detail of the individuals and Departments with whom Mr Dodd had held bilateral discussions.

340. The judgements in the paper “drew on the collective wisdom of the time, informed by JIC judgements of the state of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein”. The policy judgements had been “formulated in the first instance” by himself and Mr Drummond,

¹²⁴ Statement, 3 April 2013, pages 1-2.

then “endorsed or mutated in group discussion”. Sir David Manning had suggested some changes to the draft paper, but “they were not major”.

341. Mr Dodd remembered:

“... spending some time debating as a group the final wording of the statement ‘the use of overriding force in a ground campaign is the only option that we can be confident will remove Saddam and bring Iraq back into the international community’.”

Lord Goldsmith’s request to be kept informed

342. Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, asked in early March to be involved in Ministerial thinking about Iraq as policy was being formulated not just to be asked for his advice at the last minute.

343. On 8 March, Mr Paul Berman, a member of the Attorney General’s Office, contacted the Cabinet Office to say that Lord Goldsmith had seen the previous week’s Cabinet Conclusions and would hope to be involved in Ministerial thinking about Iraq as policy was being formulated rather than be consulted formally only at the last minute.¹²⁵

344. Mr McKane, explained to Mr Berman that Mr Blair had made clear to Cabinet that decisions on military action were not imminent; and that it was “well understood” that the Attorney General would need to be “properly engaged at the right time” but that was “most unlikely to be before the Prime Minister’s meeting with President Bush”.¹²⁶

345. Mr McKane advised Sir David Manning that he thought there was:

“... a good case for engaging the Attorney General in a discussion, so that he understands the options and the policy background, before he is asked formally for advice. Intriguingly Paul Berman said that the Attorney General did not rule out justification for military action based on Article 51 (self defence) but would certainly want to be assured that the alternatives (UN Security Council resolutions) had been thoroughly explored in the first instance.”

346. Sir David Manning replied to Mr McKane: “I think we should engage the Attorney after the Texan [Crawford] summit.”¹²⁷

347. In a minute to Lord Goldsmith, Mr Berman recorded that he had told Mr McKane that Lord Goldsmith:

“... wanted to be in a position to engage constructively with this issue. This meant keeping you in the loop from a very early stage, as policy was being formulated,

¹²⁵ [Minute McKane to Manning, 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹²⁶ [Minute McKane to Manning, 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹²⁷ [Manuscript comment Manning to McKane, 8 March 2002, on Minute McKane to Manning, 8 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

so that your advice could be factored into the development of different options. It would not be helpful for you, or Ministerial colleagues, if you were presented at the last moment with a request for a 'yes or no' answer. You [were] always available to discuss these matters with Ministerial colleagues."¹²⁸

348. Mr Berman also wrote that he had "recalled (and Mr McKane agreed) that the legal basis for the use of force in 1998 had been very difficult and contentious. Any proposed recourse to the inherent right of self-defence would also be far from straightforward."

349. Mr Berman had contacted Mr Michael Wood, the FCO Legal Adviser, who told him that a policy paper had already been submitted to No.10 but he (Mr Wood) could not send Mr Berman a copy. Mr Wood had provided a copy of the FCO paper ('Iraq: Legal background'). Mr Berman had "underlined to Mr Wood the importance of ensuring that LSLO [Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers] was fully kept in ... the loop – in relation to the development of policy as well as any comments on the legal issues".

Discussions with the US Administration, March 2002

MR BLAIR'S MEETING WITH VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY, 11 MARCH 2002

350. The FCO briefing for Mr Blair's meeting with Vice President Cheney suggested that:

- **Mr Blair should state that the UK supported the US objective of regime change in Iraq.**
- **It would be important to alert a sceptical world to the threat posed by Iraq.**

351. The FCO briefing for Mr Blair's meeting with Vice President Cheney covered a range of issues but Iraq was identified as:

"... the main issue, including for the media given speculation that the US are moving towards early decisions on military action ... This will ... be an important opportunity ... to get a feel for where the debate in Washington stands and what options are emerging."¹²⁹

352. The FCO suggested that the key messages for Mr Cheney on Iraq were:

- "In complete agreement on objective. World a better place without Saddam in power. Need to ratchet up the pressure on Iraq."
- "Containment policy has had some success ... Climate post 11 September could provide opportunities for enhanced containment, but cannot bring about regime change."

¹²⁸ [Minute Berman to Attorney General, 11 March 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

¹²⁹ Letter McDonald to Rycroft, 8 March 2002, 'US Vice President's Call on the Prime Minister, 11 March'.

- “Military action requires key allies, particularly in the region, to be on board. That is why we see continuing with the UN route – i.e. ratcheting up pressure on Iraq to comply with UN resolutions and allow weapons inspectors back in as a necessary precursor. We doubt Saddam will co-operate but we must be seen to have tried.”
- “Also essential to alert sceptical world to the WMD threat ... We are working on evidence paper.”
- “Meanwhile ... should continue our efforts to get GRL implemented – will remind international community that our quarrel is not with the Iraqi people.”
- “... Introduction of revised sanctions regime will send an important signal of Security Council unanimity. Thereafter focus will be on clarification of UNSCR 1284. We should use this to put pressure on Saddam to readmit inspections.”
- “Consistent message we are getting from region and beyond is that if it is decided to launch military action, that action must succeed in removing Saddam, otherwise we will be worse off than we are now.”
- “Issues arising from regime change on which I would welcome your thoughts:
 - Assessment of Iraqi Opposition ...
 - Require serious movement on MEPP to give us space in which to act;
 - Day after issues loom large. Territorial integrity of Iraq important. Likely replacement for Saddam – another Sunni strongman. Establishing representative Government would require long term commitment;
 - Genuine consultation and construction of convincing legal basis will be important ...”¹³⁰

353. Mr Blair told Vice President Cheney on 11 March that it was “highly desirable to get rid of Saddam”, and that the “UK would help” the US “as long as there was a clever strategy”.

354. That meant building up the case against Saddam carefully and intelligently; putting him in the wrong place over inspections and compliance with UN Security Council resolutions; and thereby helping to convince “international opinion to rally to the idea of regime change” and avoiding unintended consequences.

355. Mr Blair’s approach reflected a deliberate choice that the right way to get close to the US in order to influence it was to offer the UK’s support for its objectives.

356. In his public statement after the meeting, Mr Blair emphasised that no decisions had been taken.

¹³⁰ [Note FCO, ‘Visit of US Vice President Dick Cheney 11 March: Iraq’, attached to Letter McDonald to Rycroft, 8 March 2002, ‘US Vice President’s Call on the Prime Minister, 11 March’.](#)

357. The record of the meeting between Mr Blair and Vice President Cheney confirms that most of the discussion addressed US concerns, in the context of Al Qaida's pursuit of WMD, about the need for action to deal with the threat posed by Iraq and the potential link between terrorism and WMD.¹³¹

358. Mr Blair confirmed that "it was highly desirable to get rid of Saddam"; and that:

"Arguing that this was in the interests of regional stability was probably a better line even than the threat from WMD ... The UK would help ... as long as there was a clever strategy, and one that worked. This meant building up the case against Saddam carefully and intelligently.

"... If action was taken suddenly against Saddam now, the international community would ask what had changed. It was important to take enough time to put Saddam in the wrong place over inspections and compliance with UNSCRs. This would play an important part in convincing international opinion to rally to the idea of regime change.

"... we also needed a proper strategy for dealing with the Iraqi opposition.

"... We should also concentrate much more on the appalling nature of Saddam's regime.

"... As far as military strategy was concerned, we must ensure that our forces were equipped to finish the job quickly and successfully ... the Arab world ... did not want a campaign launched against him [Saddam] unless we were determined to see it through to a successful conclusion.

"... it was particularly important to guard against the law of unintended consequences ... We must ensure that a campaign to bring about regime change in Iraq did not inadvertently destabilise other countries in the Middle East. The Arab street was very angry ... We needed to generate a sense that we were determined to promote a peace process that would give justice to the Palestinians ... If this problem were not tackled successfully, it would dominate the way that the Arabs thought about the Iraq problem."

359. Following confirmation that the US were considering deploying ground troops and a discussion of whether the US was looking for a wide international discussion, Mr Blair understood that the US would welcome whatever contribution the UK could make, but it was not looking for other help. Mr Blair also said that:

"... the diplomacy surrounding action against Saddam would be important. We must avoid giving any appearance of having taken a decision and then making everything else fit round it."

¹³¹ Letter Manning to McDonald, 11 March 2002, 'Conversation between the Prime Minister and Vice President Cheney, 11 March 2002'.

360. Mr Blair concluded that “one argument worth stressing” was that we “had paid a terrible price” by failing to act on warnings about Al Qaida and the Taliban:

“We should not make the same mistakes again ignoring warnings about the international trade in WMD and the threat that this posed to us. We must educate the public.”

361. After the meeting, Mr Blair asked for further advice about the nature and role of the opposition to Saddam Hussein inside and outside Iraq; and for advice on the timetable for trying to get weapons inspectors back into Iraq and their remit.

362. In the press conference after the meeting, Vice President Cheney stated that London was “the first stop on an important trip to the Middle East” and President Bush had wanted him to “check in first” with Mr Blair.¹³² Vice President Cheney referred to the “clarity and conviction” of Mr Blair’s assurance to President Bush on 2 October 2001 that the UK would stay with the US “until the last”, and said that he was “[soliciting] the views of important friends and allies” about the “threat of weapons of mass destruction and the important choices that await us in the days ahead”.

363. Asked about the second phase of the war on terrorism and what evidence there was that Saddam Hussein had, or shortly would have, the capability to threaten countries in Western Europe or the United States, Mr Blair replied:

“Let us be under no doubt whatever. Saddam Hussein has acquired weapons of mass destruction over a long period of time. He is the only leader in the world that has actually used chemical weapons against his own people. He is in breach of at least nine UN Security Council resolutions ... He has not allowed the [UN] weapons inspectors to do the job the UN wanted them to do in order to make sure that he can’t develop them ... no decisions have been taken on how we deal with this threat, but that there is a threat ... is not in doubt at all.”

364. Addressing the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Mr Blair said that the UK would “do everything we possibly can to assist the US in the efforts to bring about some relaunching” of the Middle East Peace Process.

365. Vice President Cheney stated that effective policies were needed to deal both with that conflict and Iraq: “We have an obligation to deal with both simultaneously.”

366. Asked whether, if Saddam Hussein allowed inspectors back into Iraq, that would negate the need for military action, Vice President Cheney replied:

“... we feel very strongly ... that it needs to be the kind of inspection regime that has no limitations on it ... so ... the outside world can have confidence that he is not hiding material that he has promised to give up.”

¹³² The National Archives, 11 March 2002, *Press Conference – PM and Vice President Dick Cheney*.

367. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that the meeting with Vice President Cheney constituted the first “face to face” discussions with the US.¹³³ Mr Cheney wanted to discuss Iraq with Mr Blair before he consulted Middle East leaders about what should be done in Iraq and “their tolerance ... for action”.

368. Mr Powell explained Mr Blair’s warning about “the law of unintended consequences” as: “If you are going to deal with something like Iraq, you have to think ahead about what might happen ... including things you do not expect.” Mr Cheney had said “that a coalition was nice, but not essential”.

369. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that he didn’t think that Mr Cheney’s message had been a “particular surprise”, and:

“... when the Prime Minister says you have got to have a clever plan ... I think he is probably saying that you have got to go back through the UN system ... he’s clear in his own mind that it’s very important to try to keep the international community together ...”¹³⁴

370. Sir David added that there was a difference between Mr Blair saying Iraq would be better off without Saddam Hussein and:

“... saying that he’s sympathetic to the idea that regime change is the purpose of the activity. He always made it clear there had to be disarmament. That was what we were looking for ...

“So I think it would be a mistake to assume that this conversation means the Prime Minister has signed up [to an invasion] ...”¹³⁵

SIR DAVID MANNING’S DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON, 12 TO 13 MARCH 2002

371. During a visit to Washington on 12/13 March, Sir David Manning reiterated the position Mr Blair had taken in his discussion with Vice President Cheney that the UK “would continue to give strong support to the idea of regime change” in Iraq, but a convincing plan would be needed.

372. Sir David Manning and Dr Rice’s discussions were focused on how to achieve legitimacy and international support if the US decided to take military action to secure the removal of Saddam Hussein. Sir David and Dr Rice did not discuss the objectives of US and UK policy.

373. Sir David set out a list of concerns that would need to be addressed if the US wanted allies to participate in military action.

¹³³ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 18. The transcript incorrectly records the date of the meeting as 1 March.

¹³⁴ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 26.

¹³⁵ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 27-28.

374. Sir David reported that President Bush wanted to hear Mr Blair’s views before taking decisions, and that Mr Blair would have real influence.

375. Sir David also warned that there was a risk that the US Administration was underestimating the difficulties.

376. In his discussions with Dr Rice on Iraq in mid-March, Sir David Manning recorded that he had “made it clear that we would continue to give strong support to the idea of regime change, but we were looking to the US to devise a convincing plan of action. This would also need to answer the question of who would follow Saddam.”¹³⁶

377. Sir David told Dr Rice that a series of issues would need to be addressed if the US decided on military action against Iraq.

378. One was whether the US “wanted company”. If it wanted the support of a coalition, it would have to address a number of concerns that would be critical in determining the attitude of potential partners. Those were the need to:

- “mount a public information campaign explaining the nature of Saddam’s regime and the nature of the threat he posed”;
- “describe the role that the US envisaged for the UN, and particularly for the weapons inspectors”;
- “provide a convincing plan setting out how a combination of outside military pressure, and external and internal opposition could topple Saddam”; and
- “provide an equally convincing blueprint for a post Saddam Iraq ... acceptable to its neighbours as well as to its own population”.

Preparing public opinion and deciding who and what might replace Saddam Hussein were tough propositions.

379. Sir David Manning told Dr Rice that the UK “hoped shortly to publish an unclassified paper giving as much detail as possible about Saddam’s WMD programme”. The UK would “share as much as possible” as a way of convincing governments and public opinion of the dangers of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

380. Sir David also pointed out the importance of taking:

“... time and trouble over the UN observers. Demonstrating to international opinion that Saddam was in breach of the UNSCRs and continued to thwart the activities of Blix [Dr Hans Blix, the Executive Chair of UNMOVIC] and his team was a crucial part of coalition building ... It should not be impossible to persuade moderate public opinion that it was Saddam who was at fault if he flouted the conditions and blocked the inspectors ... we should find ways of getting him to speak out publicly about what his inspection team would need if they were to function effectively.”

¹³⁶ Letter Manning to McDonald, 14 March 2002, ‘Discussions with Condi Rice on 12-13 March’.

381. Sir David Manning told Dr Rice that the Israel/Palestine crisis, “where we were accused of double standards”, would be “critical to Washington’s prospects of constructing a coalition against Iraq”. If the crisis “went on spiralling down, it could lead to a sharp divergence of view between Washington and the Europeans”. That would “make the prospect of joint action against Iraq much more problematic”. Sir David stated that the “urgent need for a process, and progress, towards peace” was “not an optional extra”, it was “integral” to the strategy on Iraq. That would be the subject that Mr Blair would “concentrate on when he sees the President after Easter”.

382. Sir David sent the account of his discussions with Dr Rice and other members of the US National Security Council (NSC) to Mr Straw and Mr Hoon’s Private Secretaries and to key officials.

383. Sir David Manning sent a separate note to Mr Blair.¹³⁷

384. Sir David reported that President Bush was grateful for Mr Blair’s support and had registered that Mr Blair was “getting flak”. Sir David had told President Bush that Mr Blair:

“... would not budge in your support for regime change but you had to manage a press and Parliament and a public opinion that was very different from anything in the States. And you would not budge either in your insistence that, if he pursued regime change, it must be carefully done and produce the right result. Failure was not an option.”

385. Sir David wrote that Dr Rice was still enthusiastic about regime change, but there were “some signs ... of greater awareness of the practical difficulties and political risks”. But President Bush had:

“... yet to find answers to the big questions:

- how to persuade international opinion that military action against Iraq is necessary and justified;
- what value to put on the exiled Iraq opposition;
- how to co-ordinate a US/allied military campaign with internal opposition ...
- what happens on the morning after?”

¹³⁷ [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 14 March 2002, ‘Your Trip to the US’.](#)

386. Sir David advised Mr Blair that President Bush would want “to pick your brains”. He would “also want to hear whether we can expect coalition support”. Sir David wrote that he had told Dr Rice that if the US:

“... wanted company, it would have to take account of the concerns of potential partners. In particular:

- the UN dimension. The issue of the weapons inspectors must be handled in a way that would persuade European and wider opinion that the US was conscious of the international framework, and the insistence of many countries on the need for a legal base. Renewed refusal by Saddam to accept unfettered inspections would be a powerful argument;
- the paramount importance of tackling Israel/Palestine. Unless we did, we could find ourselves bombing Iraq and losing the Gulf.”

387. Sir David concluded:

“No doubt we need to keep a sense of perspective. But my talks with Condi convinced me that Bush wants to hear your views on Iraq before taking decisions. He also wants your support. He is still smarting from the comments from other European leaders on his Iraq policy.

“This gives you real influence: on the public relations strategy; on the UN and weapons inspections; and on US planning for any military campaign. This could be critically important. I think there is a real risk that the Administration underestimates the difficulties. They may agree that failure is not an option, but this does not mean they will avoid it.

“Will the Sunni majority really respond to an uprising led by Kurds and Shias? Will the Americans really put in enough ground troops to do the job ...? Even if they do, will they be willing to take the sort of casualties ... if it turns out to be an urban war, and Iraqi troops don't ... collapse ... as Richard Perle and others confidently predict? They need to answer these, and other tough questions, in a more convincing way than they have so far before concluding that they can do the business.

“The talks at the ranch will also give you the chance to push Bush on the Middle East. The Iraq factor means that there may never be a better opportunity to get this administration to give sustained attention to reviving the MEPP.”

388. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that he had gone to Washington on 12 March for a “reconnaissance visit” in preparation for the meeting at Crawford, and that the intention was to “take soundings”.¹³⁸ The UK had been clear by then that Iraq would be on the agenda and he had wanted to establish “where they [the US] had got to in reviewing Iraq policy”.

¹³⁸ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 11-12.

389. Sir David stated that he had also wanted to reflect Mr Blair’s “preoccupations” and thinking. He told Dr Rice that if the US “was thinking about reviewing its policy and ... wanted the participation of its allies ... it would have to address allies’ concerns ... including obviously our own”. He had set out the issues which would need to be addressed. Sir David had also said that, after Afghanistan, the idea of working with a coalition was a “powerful” one.

CABINET, 14 MARCH 2002

390. Summing up the Cabinet discussion on 14 March on the deteriorating position in the Middle East, Mr Blair referred to his planned meeting with President Bush and stated that:

“... it was necessary to remain close to the Government of the United States and to persuade President Bush to re-engage completely in the [Middle East] Peace Process, not least because it would otherwise be difficult to gather support for addressing the threat posed by the Iraqi regime ...”¹³⁹

SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER’S ADVICE, MARCH 2002

391. Sir Christopher Meyer wrote to Sir David Manning reporting his conversation with Mr Paul Wolfowitz, US Deputy Secretary of Defense, on 17 March.¹⁴⁰

392. On Iraq, Sir Christopher took the same line as Sir David had in his discussions with the NSC about the actions necessary if the US wanted to build support for military action against Saddam Hussein.

393. Sir Christopher told Mr Wolfowitz that:

“If the UK were to join with the US in any operation against Saddam, we would have to be able to take a critical mass of parliamentary and public opinion with us. It was extraordinary how people had forgotten how bad he was.”

394. The UK was giving serious thought to publishing “a paper that would make the case against Saddam”.

395. Sir Christopher reported that Mr Wolfowitz considered the “WMD danger ... was crucial to the public case against Saddam, particularly the potential linkage to terrorism”, but he saw “Saddam’s barbarism” as an “indispensable” element of the case for action.

396. Sir Christopher and Mr Wolfowitz also discussed the potential role of the Iraqi opposition and “well documented” debate inside the Administration about supporting the Iraqi National Congress or a wider coalition of opposition groups. Mr Wolfowitz seemed to prefer the former and “brushed over” Sir Christopher’s reference to the absence

¹³⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 14 March 2002.

¹⁴⁰ [Letter Meyer to Manning, 18 March 2002, ‘Iraq and Afghanistan: Conversation with Wolfowitz’.](#)

of Sunni in the INC and argued for replacing Saddam Hussein with a functioning democracy not another military officer.

397. Sir Christopher and Mr Wolfowitz also discussed developments in Afghanistan, including the planned deployment of 45 Commando Group and Sir Christopher’s view that:

“... the greatest danger in Afghanistan was a slipping back to the conditions which had allowed Al Qaida to prosper in the first place; that the greatest safeguard against this was a continuing visible presence of the US military ... for some time to come. Wolfowitz displayed the DoD’s customary distaste for an ISAF-type expansion to other Afghan cities. He thought there was a case for something akin to OSCE monitors in certain regions.”

398. Sir David thought the report sufficiently interesting to show to Mr Blair.¹⁴¹

399. Sir Christopher Meyer told the Inquiry that Sir David Manning had given him a new set of instructions during his visit to Washington in March 2002.¹⁴²

400. Sir Christopher described the new message for the Americans as:

“Look, if you want to do regime change, and if this is going to require military action, you ... can do it on your own ... but if ... you want your friends and partners to join you, far better that you should do it inside an alliance, preferably taking the UN route.

“That ... was the single most important message I delivered to the US Administration at that time.”

401. Sir Christopher Meyer told the Inquiry:

“... I had to come up with a set of arguments, which ... he [Wolfowitz] might find appealing enough not to become a serious obstacle to a policy that would involve the UN.”¹⁴³

402. Later Sir Christopher added:

“... I think the attitude of Downing Street ... was ... it was a fact that there was ... the Iraq Liberation Act. It was a fact that 9/11 had happened and it was a complete waste of time, therefore ... if we were going to be able to work with the Americans, to ... say, ‘We can’t support it [regime change]’ ... the attempt was made to square the circle ... was actually ... so to contextualise it, that regime change, if and when

¹⁴¹ Manuscript note Manning to Prime Minister on Letter Meyer to Manning, 18 March 2002, ‘Iraq and Afghanistan: Conversation with Wolfowitz’.

¹⁴² Public hearing, 26 November 2009, pages 38-39.

¹⁴³ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, page 39.

it happened, would be with the benefit of the support of the international community in the framework of UN action, quite possibly through a Security Council resolution.

“... What we said was, ‘Let’s do this cleverly ... and that means ... go to the UN and get a Security Council resolution ...

“... You talked the talk of regime change, but you walked the walk, you hoped, of a UN Security Council resolution permitting the use of force, if that was what it was going to come to.”¹⁴⁴

403. Asked whether at that stage the US Administration was looking at options other than military action, Sir Christopher replied:

“... are you asking me at what point was it clear that war was inevitable? ... that’s a ... hard question to answer. What was inevitable ... was that the Americans were going to bust a gut to carry out the mandated policy of regime change.”¹⁴⁵

404. Asked how confident he was at that stage that the UK could influence the US, Sir David Manning replied:

“I wasn’t confident, but I thought my job was to try ... on two levels. One, on the role I had as an official reflecting the British Government’s view that we needed to go back to the UN, we needed to get the inspectors back, the issue was disarmament not regime change. But I also felt very strongly personally that it was the way we should go ...

“I wasn’t confident it would work ... there was a sense that the [US] Administration [...] that military force had worked in Afghanistan ... This was going to be the global war on terror. This was a 1945 or 1991 moment when they were going to change the world for the better on their watch. It was very tough but it was an historic moment and they would do whatever it took.

“We didn’t really have that perception ... So I was very conscious that there was a very strong sense of historical destiny at work in the Bush Administration ...

“But I was also conscious that there were different views within the Administration ...”¹⁴⁶

405. Commenting on the media reaction in the US to Vice President Cheney’s tour of the Middle East, Sir Christopher Meyer advised on 20 March that there had been “no public flinching by Bush et al from tackling Saddam”; and that “No attempt is being made by the Administration to counter the media supposition that it is no longer a question of whether, but when and how to take action against Saddam.”¹⁴⁷ Public support for US

¹⁴⁴ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, pages 41-42.

¹⁴⁵ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, page 44.

¹⁴⁶ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 28-29.

¹⁴⁷ Telegram 386 Washington to FCO London, 20 March 2002, ‘US/Iraq: The Current Mood’.

action against Iraq was strong. A *CNN* poll earlier that week had shown 70 percent were in favour of military action.

406. Sir Christopher also reported that in discussions between the Foreign Affairs Committee and a range of contacts in the US about “the need to make a solid case to Europeans and others, the consensus response was that once the US showed it was serious, other countries would come on board. But, equally, there was no sense that serious military action is imminent.”

Preparations for Crawford

FCO advice on the role of the Iraqi opposition and the history of weapons inspections

407. The FCO paper on the Iraqi opposition concluded that regime change led by the external opposition was not a viable option and the most realistic successor to Saddam Hussein would be a senior Sunni military or ex-military figure.

408. The FCO explained that the provisions of resolution 1284 were ambiguous because the P5 had been unable to reach agreement in 1999, and there had been no progress on clarification since.

409. There would be difficulties with securing agreement from Iraq, the US and Russia on its implementation. The US could seek to raise the barrier for Iraqi compliance; Russia was likely to take the opposite view. France might support the UK because it saw agreement on a tough inspection regime as the only realistic alternative to US military action.

410. On 15 March, in response to Mr Blair’s request for further advice following his meeting with Vice President Cheney on 11 March, the FCO sent Sir David Manning a Research Analysts’ paper on the opposition and a separate note summarising the history of attempts to get weapons inspectors back into Iraq.¹⁴⁸

411. The FCO Research Analysts’ paper on the nature and role of the opposition to Saddam Hussein stated that the UK’s “ability to influence and/or direct the Iraqi opposition” was “reliant on contacts with the external Iraqi community, while the internal opposition remains closed to us”.¹⁴⁹ The paper described the internal and external opposition.

412. The Research Analysts concluded:

“Various opposition groups ... have told us of plans involving a national liberation movement in which Iraqis, backed from the outside, would launch a series of attacks

¹⁴⁸ Letter McDonald to Manning, 15 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁴⁹ [Paper Research Analysts \[FCO\], 14 March 2002, ‘Iraq: The Nature and Role of the Opposition to Saddam Hussein’.](#)

on Saddam's forces with the intention of occupying specific territory. Allied air support would be required ...

"In any case, we do not assess the external opposition to be capable of leading a military operation as outlined above. They do not have the leverage within the military and security apparatus to realise a plan of this kind, and leading oppositionists are not credible figures for a provisional government. Regime change relying mainly or exclusively on the external opposition is therefore not a viable option.

"More realistic calculations suggest that the immediate successor to Saddam Hussein will be a senior Sunni member or ex-member of the Iraqi military ..."

413. The note on inspections summarised the history of efforts to get inspectors back into Iraq, examined the future prospects for doing so through clarification of resolution 1284 (1999), and described the remit of UNMOVIC and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency).¹⁵⁰ It described the "main feature" of resolution 1284 as being that it offered Iraq "a suspension of sanctions in return for co-operation with the weapons inspectors, including progress on key disarmament tasks. Resolution 687 (1991) had offered lifting of sanctions "only when the inspectors say disarmament is complete", which Iraq regarded as "an unattainable goal".

414. The FCO wrote that Iraq:

- remained "determined to escape sanctions without fulfilling its disarmament obligations";
- had "never accepted" resolution 1284;
- continued to "refuse to allow inspectors to return"; and
- justified its position by claiming that resolution 1284 was "so ambiguous" that the US could "easily deny" that co-operation had been "adequate".

415. Addressing the prospects for the future, the FCO advised that there was "no independent timetable as such" for the return of the inspectors. The "key" would be persuading Iraq to accept resolution 1284:

"While it is possible that the threat of military action might also prompt a change in the Iraqi position, we have always assumed that the only real prospect lies in clarifying ... [resolution] 1284. We recognise there are ambiguities ... They are there for a good reason: the P5 was unable to reach agreement. If positions remain as entrenched as they were during ... negotiations, there is little prospect of the situation changing, which is why clarification has not been attempted sooner. But SCR 1382 [2001] now commits the Security Council to trying."

¹⁵⁰ [Note, \[undated\], 'Iraq: Weapons Inspectors', attached to Letter McDonald to Manning, 15 March 2002, 'Iraq'.](#)

416. The FCO reminded Mr Blair that the US was “reluctant to go down the road of clarification” because of fears it represented a “slippery slope towards a weaker inspections regime”. No Security Council member had “yet challenged this”, although the FCO predicted that “pressure may increase” following the talks between Iraq and Mr Annan on 7 March. “Nearly all of Iraq’s serious points” had related to clarification; and Mr Annan expected the Security Council “to provide answers” before the next round of talks in April. The US would “not be able to hold out against beginning clarification talks for much longer without appearing unreasonable”.

417. The FCO advised that the UK “would be willing to see some clarification” as long as this did not water down Iraq’s obligations or cut across UNMOVIC’s mandate or rights. That included:

- “Elaboration of post-suspension financial controls, i.e. how much, if any, control of the Iraqi economy, including oil revenues, should revert to the Iraqi government once sanctions are suspended.”
- “Definition of key remaining disarmament tasks”.
- “Clarification/shortening of the suspension timetable”.
- “Clarification of the triggers for suspension, i.e. what is meant by full co-operation with the inspectors.”

418. The FCO advised that the US would “resist strongly any attempt to lower the barrier for Iraqi compliance” and they “could even seek to raise it”. That probably meant that the US would adopt an “extreme position” and Russia was “likely to take the opposite extreme”. The FCO predicted that France might support the UK because it saw a “Security Council agreement on a tough inspection regime as the only realistic alternative to US military action”.

419. The FCO also explained that UNMOVIC had been given “all UNSCOM’s responsibilities, rights and resources”. It had additionally been tasked “with establishing a reinforced system of ongoing monitoring and verification, under which outstanding disarmament issues would be addressed”. UNMOVIC and the IAEA were also asked to “draw up a list of key disarmament tasks and to report on the level of co-operation” they had received “so that the Security Council” could “judge whether the conditions for sanctions suspension” had been met.

420. The FCO concluded:

“Neither SCR 687 or any subsequent resolutions contain any provision for ending ... monitoring and verification, even after sanctions lift. It is our interpretation that ending monitoring would require a separate decision by the Security Council, hence ... Iraq could be subjected to special scrutiny indefinitely, until we were completely satisfied that it no longer posed a threat.”

JIC Current Intelligence Group Assessment, 15 March 2002: 'The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes'

421. A Current Intelligence Group (CIG) Assessment of the status of Iraq's WMD programmes was produced to inform Mr Blair's discussions with President Bush. It stated that Iraq continued to pursue a policy of acquiring WMD and their delivery means.

422. A CIG Assessment, 'The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes', was "approved on behalf of the Committee" by Mr Miller on 15 March.¹⁵¹ (The status of a CIG is explained in Section 2.)

423. The paper stated that it had been commissioned by the FCO "to aid policy discussions on Iraq", but the minutes of the JIC of 6 March suggest it was produced in response to a request from Sir David Manning specifically to inform Mr Blair's discussions with President Bush.¹⁵²

424. The Key Judgements in the Assessment were:

- Iraq **retains up to 20 Al Hussein ballistic missiles** ... The location and condition of these is unknown, but there is sufficient engineering expertise to make them operational.
- Iraq has begun development of **medium range ballistic missiles over 1000km** ... but will **not be able to produce such a missile before 2007** provided that sanctions remain effective.
- Iraq is **pursuing a nuclear weapons programme**. But it will **not be able to indigenously produce a nuclear weapon while sanctions remain** in place, unless suitable fissile material is purchased from abroad.
- Iraq **may retain some stocks of chemical agents**. Following a decision to do so, Iraq could produce:
 - significant quantities of **mustard within weeks**;
 - significant quantities of **sarin and VX within months**, and in the case of VX may already have done so.
- Iraq currently **has available**, either from pre Gulf War stocks or more recent production, a number of biological agents. Iraq could produce more of these **biological agents** within days.
- A decision to begin CBW production would probably go undetected.
- Iraq can deliver CBW weapons by a variety of means including ballistic missiles. **Iraq's CBW production capability is designed to survive** a military attack and UN inspectors."

¹⁵¹ [CIG Assessment, 15 March 2002, 'The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes'](#).

¹⁵² Minutes, 6 March 2002, JIC meeting.

425. In the main text, but not in the Key Judgements, the Assessment warned that the intelligence on Iraq’s WMD and ballistic missile programmes was “**sporadic and patchy**”. It added , however, that Iraq was:

“... well practised in the art of deception, such as concealment and exaggeration. A complete picture of the various programmes is therefore difficult. But it is clear that Iraq continues to pursue a policy of acquiring WMD and their delivery means. Intelligence indicates that planning to reconstitute some of its programmes began in 1995. WMD programmes were then given a further boost with the withdrawal of UNSCOM inspectors.”

426. The Assessment and the uncertainties underlying its judgements are addressed in more detail in Section 4.1.

Mr Blair’s minute, 17 March 2002

427. Mr Blair concluded that the papers he had been given on Iraq did not constitute a properly worked out strategy and that he would need to provide the US with a far more intelligent and detailed analysis of a game plan.

428. Mr Blair asked for a meeting with military personnel. He did not seek a collective discussion with Mr Straw, Mr Hoon and other key Cabinet colleagues.

429. Mr Blair sent a minute on 17 March to Mr Powell, and a copy to Sir David Manning, setting out three points in response to the briefing papers he had been given for the meeting with President Bush:

“(1) In all my papers I do not have a proper worked-out strategy on how we would do it. The US do not either, but before I go [to Crawford], I need to be able to provide them with a far more intelligent and detailed analysis of a game plan. I will need a meeting on this with military folk.

“(2) The persuasion job on this seems very tough. My own side are worried. Public opinion is fragile. International opinion – as I found at the EU – is pretty sceptical.

“Yet from a centre-left perspective, the case should be obvious. Saddam’s regime is a brutal, oppressive military dictatorship. He kills his opponents, has wrecked his country’s economy and is source of instability and danger in the region. I can understand a right-wing Tory opposed to “nation-building” being opposed to it on the grounds it hasn’t direct bearing on our national interest. But in fact a political philosophy that does care about other nations – eg Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone – and is prepared to change regimes on their merits, should be gung-ho on Saddam. So why isn’t it? Because people believe we are only doing it to support the US; and they are only doing it to settle an old score. And the immediate WMD problems don’t seem obviously worse than 3 years ago.

“So we have to re-order our story and message. Increasingly I think it should be about the nature of the regime. We do intervene – as per the Chicago speech. We have no inhibitions – where we reasonably can – about nation-building ie we must come to our conclusion on Saddam from our own position, not the US position.

“(3) Oil prices. This is my big domestic worry. We must concert with the US to get action from others to push the price back down. Higher petrol prices really might put the public off.”¹⁵³

430. Asked to explain his thinking in the minute Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

- The first sentence was asking: “How we would either get Saddam to cease being a threat peacefully or to get him out by force.” He had been very open in public about that. The minute was “more about the politics”.
- The WMD question was about the changed assessment of the risk and the difficulty of making the case that Saddam Hussein posed a threat.
- The message had to address the nature of the regime and the security threat to command the support of both the right and the left of the political debate.
- The change in the security risk after 11 September was the basis for changing the regime but the nature of the regime was why “we should be proud of having got rid of him [Saddam Hussein]”.¹⁵⁴

431. Mr Blair added:

“So if September 11 hadn’t happened, we would have carried on in the same way frankly that George Bush and I first discussed ... in February 2001.”

The threat to the UK

432. From March 2002, the Security Service advised that, in the event of a US attempt to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime, the threat to the UK and UK interests from Iraq would be limited and containable.

433. Consideration of Iraq’s capability effectively to threaten the UK had begun in early 2002.

434. On 22 March 2002, Ms Eliza Manningham-Buller, the Deputy Director General of the Security Service, wrote to Mr John Gieve, the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, about the “possible terrorist consequences should the US, possibly with UK support, seek to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ [Minute Blair to Powell, 17 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁵⁴ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 43-45.

¹⁵⁵ [Letter Manningham-Buller to Gieve, 22 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Possible Terrorist Response to a US Attack’.](#)

435. The letter stated that since 1991, Iraq had been “implicated” in “only one terrorist plan directed against a Western target – a planned car bomb attack on ex-President Bush in Kuwait in 1993”. The letter reflected the JIC Assessment, of 21 November 2001 (see Section 3.1), that Saddam Hussein was likely to order terrorist attacks only if he perceived that his regime was threatened. It stated:

“If Saddam were to initiate a terrorist campaign ... Iraqi capability to mount attacks in the UK is currently limited. We are aware of no Iraqi intelligence (DGI) officers based in the UK. There are up to [...] DGI agents here who report on anti-regime activities. But most of these agents lack the inclination or capability to mount terrorist attacks. So if the DGI wished to mount attacks in the UK it would need to import teams from overseas.”

436. Addressing a potential chemical or biological attack, the letter stated that there had been “media stories” during the Gulf Conflict and:

“... a 1998 scare (arising from a tale put about by Iraqi émigrés) that Saddam planned to send anthrax abroad in scent bottles. Given Iraq’s documented CB capabilities, we can anticipate similar stories again.”

437. “Most Iraqi CB attacks” had, however, been “assassination attempts against individuals” and there was “no intelligence that Iraq has hitherto planned or sought mass-casualty CB terrorist attacks”. If the survival of the regime was in doubt, Saddam Hussein’s “preferred option would be to use conventional military delivery systems against targets in the region, rather than terrorism”.

438. The letter also described the steps being taken by the Security Service in response to the potential threat.

439. Sir David Omand, Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator from September 2002 to April 2005, told the Inquiry that, in March 2002, the Security Service judged that the “threat from terrorism from Saddam’s own intelligence apparatus in the event of an intervention in Iraq ... was judged to be limited and containable”.¹⁵⁶

440. Baroness Manningham-Buller confirmed that position, stating that the Security Service felt there was “a pretty good intelligence picture of a threat from Iraq within the UK and to British interests”.¹⁵⁷

441. Baroness Manningham-Buller added that subsequent events showed that the judgement that Saddam Hussein did not have the capability to do anything much in the UK, had “turned out to be the right judgement”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Public hearing, 20 January 2010, page 37.

¹⁵⁷ Public hearing, 20 July 2010, page 6.

¹⁵⁸ Public hearing, 20 July 2010, page 9.

Advice from Cabinet Ministers

CABINET, 21 MARCH 2002

442. Mr Blair told Cabinet on 21 March that he would be meeting President Bush in the first week of April:

“Their talks would focus on how to respond to the threat to international security represented by the Iraqi regime, efforts to build on the success of the Coalition’s intervention in Afghanistan, how to achieve progress in the Middle East Peace process and gathering support for the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development.”¹⁵⁹

443. No further discussion of the issues is recorded.

444. Cabinet also discussed the deployment of an infantry battlegroup based on 45 Commando Royal Marines to Afghanistan, and the nature of the task it would perform. Mr Blair concluded that:

“... the troops were supported by the majority of the people in Afghanistan and would not be seeking to occupy territory, there was substantial United States air cover and there were troops from several Coalition partners involved. There was no parallel with the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. The total number of British forces engaged in operations related to Afghanistan was substantial, but still only one-tenth of the number deployed during the 1991 Gulf War.”

445. The deployment of the battlegroup, which was the largest deployment of UK forces since 1991, had been announced on 18 March.¹⁶⁰ That is addressed in Section 6.1.

MR HOON’S ADVICE, 22 MARCH 2002

446. Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 22 March emphasising the importance of a counter-proliferation strategy in the Middle East.

447. On Iraq, Mr Hoon advised that the UK should support President Bush and be ready to make a military contribution; and that UK involvement in planning would improve the US process. One of Mr Blair’s objectives at Crawford should, therefore, be to secure agreement to the UK’s participation in US military planning.

448. Mr Hoon also stated that a number of issues would need to be addressed before forces were committed to military action, including the need for a comprehensive public handling strategy convincingly to explain why such drastic action against Iraq’s WMD was needed now.

¹⁵⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 21 March 2002.

¹⁶⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 March 2002, columns 37-48.

449. Following a discussion with key officials, which is addressed in Section 6.1, Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair, on 22 March, stating:

“The key strategic problem is the spread of WMD – of which Saddam is only one unpleasant dimension. A more active counter-proliferation strategy is required for the region as a whole (for example any Iraqi government will seek WMD if Iran is getting them so our strategy must cover both). On Iraq, we should support President Bush and be ready for a military contribution ... [W]e should be involved in the detail before we commit our forces.”

“... In objective terms, Iran may be the greater problem for the UK ... Ironically, we have Saddam Hussein bound into an established control mechanism. There is some substance in the US view that he as an individual is at the root of the WMD risk in Iraq. But any Iraqi government is likely to try and achieve a balance of forces with Iran. I strongly support the parallel campaign by Jack [Straw] to tackle Iran through the IAEA system.”¹⁶¹

450. Mr Hoon identified three factors that the UK should keep in mind in considering how to support President Bush:

- The US already has heavy land forces in the region ... [and] is planning on the basis that it would take 90 days to deploy all necessary forces to the region; it would take us longer.
- Despite 10 years of searching, no one has found a credible successor to Saddam.
- If a coalition takes control of Baghdad (especially without catching Saddam), it will probably have to stay there for many years.”

451. Mr Hoon wrote that the UK “should support President Bush and be ready for a military contribution” for Iraq. Mr Hoon cautioned that the UK was:

“... not privy to detailed US planning, either strategically across the region or on Iraq. Before any decision to commit British forces, we ought to know that the US has a militarily plausible plan with a reasonable prospect of success compared to the risks and within the framework of international law. Our involvement in planning would improve their process – and help address our lead time problem. It would enable either CDS to reassure you that there is a sound military plan or give you a basis to hold back if the US cannot find a sensible scheme ... I suggest one of your objectives at Crawford should be to secure agreement to the UK’s participation in US military planning ...”

¹⁶¹ [Letter Hoon to Prime Minister, 22 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

452. Finally, Mr Hoon proposed that Mr Blair might raise with Present Bush “the need for a comprehensive public handling strategy, so that we can explain convincingly why we need to take such drastic action against Iraq’s WMD now”.

453. Copies of Mr Hoon’s letter were sent to Mr Straw and to Sir Richard Wilson.

MR STRAW’S ADVICE, 25 MARCH 2002

454. Mr Straw wrote to Mr Blair on 25 March setting out the risks which could arise from discussions with President Bush, but suggesting the “case against Iraq and in favour (if necessary) of military action” might be made in the context of seeking regime change as an essential part of a strategy of eliminating Iraq’s WMD, rather than an objective in its own right.

455. Mr Straw advised that the fact that Iraq was in flagrant breach of the obligations imposed on it by the Security Council provided the core of a strategy based on international law.

456. The case could be based on a demand for the unfettered re-admission of inspectors.

457. The US was likely to oppose any proposal for a new mandate from the UN Security Council, but the weight of UK legal advice was that a new mandate “may well be required”.

458. Mr Straw also stated that, if the argument was to be won, the whole “case against Iraq and in favour (if necessary) of military action” needed to be narrated with reference to the international rule of law.

459. In his meeting on 18 March, Mr Straw asked for “detailed advice from FCO Legal Advisers on the provisions in international law for the use of the kind of force that might be required should the Americans set themselves the objective of regime change”.¹⁶²

460. Mr Straw concluded he would write to the Prime Minister to flag up the main issues for Crawford, including a media strategy, and asked for a draft, submitted through Sir Michael Jay.

461. Mr John Grainger, FCO Legal Counsellor in the Middle East Department, advised on 21 March that any action by HMG to assist any group to overthrow the regime in Iraq by violent means would be contrary to international law; and that any use of force with the objective of changing the Iraqi regime would be unlawful.¹⁶³ But regime change would not be unlawful if it was a consequence of the use of force permitted by international law.

¹⁶² [Minute Sedwill to Patey, 18 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁶³ [Minute Grainger to PS \[FCO\], 21 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Regime Change’.](#)

462. Mr Ricketts sent a personal minute advising Mr Straw that:

“By sharing Bush’s broad objective, the Prime Minister can help shape how it is defined and the approach to achieving it. In the process he can bring home ... some of the realities which will be less evident from Washington. He can help Bush make good decisions by telling him things his own machine probably isn’t.”¹⁶⁴

463. Mr Ricketts added that “broad support for the objective” brought “two real problems which need discussing”. The first was the threat from Iraq on which Mr Ricketts wrote, “The truth is that what has changed is not the pace of Saddam Hussein’s WMD programmes, but our tolerance of them” after 9/11.

464. Mr Ricketts advised:

“This is not something we need to be defensive about, but attempts to claim otherwise publicly will increase scepticism about our case ...

“US scrambling to establish a link between Iraq and Al Qaida is so far frankly unconvincing. To get public and Parliamentary support for military operations we have to be convincing that:

- the threat is so serious/imminent that it is worth sending our troops to die for;
- it is qualitatively different from the threat posed by other proliferators who are closer to achieving nuclear capability (including Iran).

“We can make the case on qualitative difference (only Iraq has attacked a neighbour, used CW and fired missiles against Israel). But the overall strategy needs to include re-doubled efforts to tackle other proliferators ... in other ways ... But we are still left with a problem of bringing public opinion to accept the imminence of a threat from Iraq. This is something the Prime Minister and President need to have a frank discussion about.”

465. The second problem was the need to define an “end state” for any military action. Mr Ricketts advised:

“Military operations need clear and compelling military objectives ... For Iraq, ‘regime change’ does not stack up. It sounds like a grudge match between Bush and Saddam. Much better, as you have suggested, to make the objective ending the threat to the international community from Iraqi WMD before Saddam uses it or gives it to terrorists. That is ... easier to justify in terms of international law, but also more demanding. Regime change which produced another Sunni general still in charge of an active Iraqi WMD programme would be a bad outcome (not least because it would be almost impossible to maintain UN sanctions on a new leader who came in promising a fresh start).”

¹⁶⁴ [Minute Ricketts to Secretary of State \[FCO\], 22 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Advice for the Prime Minister’.](#)

466. Mr Ricketts added:

“As with the fight against UBL, Bush would do well to de-personalise the objective, focus on elimination of WMD, and show that he is serious about UN Inspectors as the first choice means of achieving that (it is win/win for him: either Saddam against all the odds allows Inspectors to operate freely, in which case we can further hobble his WMD programmes, or he blocks/hinders, and we are on stronger ground for switching to other methods).”

467. Mr Ricketts concluded:

“Defining the end state in this way, and working through the UN, will ... also help maintain a degree of support among the Europeans, and therefore fits with another message which the Prime Minister will want to get across: the importance of positioning Iraq as a problem for the international community as a whole, not just for the US.”

468. In a personal minute to Mr Blair on 25 March, Mr Straw advised:

“The rewards from your visit to Crawford will be few. The risks are high, both for you and for the Government. I judge that there is at present no majority inside the PLP for any military action against Iraq ...”¹⁶⁵

469. Mr Straw wrote that making the case that “Saddam and the Iraq regime are bad” was “easy”, but there were four areas where there was:

“a long way to go to convince them as to:

- (a) the scale of the threat from Iraq and why this has got worse recently;
- (b) what distinguishes the Iraqi threat from that of eg Iran and North Korea so as to justify military action;
- (c) the justification for any military action in terms of international law;
- (d) whether the consequence of military action really would be a compliant, law abiding replacement government.

“The whole exercise is made much more difficult to handle as long as conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is so acute ...”

470. Mr Straw advised that the Iraqi regime posed “a most serious threat to its neighbours, and therefore to international security” but, from “the documents so far presented it has been hard to glean whether the threat from Iraq is so significantly

¹⁶⁵ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 25 March 2002, ‘Crawford/Iraq’.

different” as to justify military action. Without the attacks of 11 September, it was “doubtful that the US would now be considering military action against Iraq”. There was:

“... no credible evidence to link Iraq with UBL and Al Qaida ...

“... Objectively, the threat from Iraq has not worsened as a result of 11 September. What has, however, changed is the tolerance of the international community (especially that of the US), the world having witnessed on September 11 just what determined evil people can these days perpetrate.”

471. Addressing the difference between Iraq, Iran and North Korea, Mr Straw wrote:

“By linking these countries together in his ‘axis of evil’ speech, President Bush implied an identity between them not only in terms of their threat, but also in terms of the action necessary to deal with the threat. A lot of work will now need to be done to delink the three, and to show why military action against Iraq is so much more justified than against Iran and North Korea. The heart of this case – that Iraq poses a unique and present danger – rests on the fact that it:

- invaded a neighbour;
- has used WMD, and would use them again;
- is in breach of nine UNSCRs.”

472. In relation to the position in international law, Mr Straw wrote:

“That Iraq is in flagrant breach of international legal obligations imposed on it by the UNSC provides us with the core of a strategy, and one which is based on international law. Indeed, if the argument is to be won, the whole case against Iraq and in favour (if necessary) of military action needs to be narrated with reference to the international rule of law.

“We also have better to sequence the explanation of what we are doing and why. Specifically, we need to concentrate in the early stages on:

- making operational the sanctions regime foreshadowed by UNSCR 1382;
- demanding the re-admission of weapons inspectors ... to operate in a free and unfettered way ...

“... I believe that a demand for the unfettered re-admission of weapons inspectors is essential, in terms of public explanation, and in terms of legal sanction for any subsequent military action.

“Legally, there are two potential elephant traps:

- (i) regime change per se is no justification for military action; it could form part of the method of any strategy, but not a goal. Of course, we may want credibly to assert that regime change is an essential part of the strategy by

which we have to achieve our ends – that of the elimination of Iraq’s WMD capacity; but the latter has to be the goal;

- (ii) on whether any military action would require a fresh UNSC mandate (Desert Fox did not). The US are likely to oppose any idea of a fresh mandate. On the other side, the weight of legal advice here is that a fresh mandate may well be required. There is no doubt that a new UNSCR would transform the climate in the PLP. Whilst that (a new mandate) is very unlikely, given the US’s position, a draft resolution against military action ... could play very badly here.”

473. Addressing the consequences of military action, Mr Straw wrote:

“A legal justification is a necessary but far from sufficient pre-condition for military action. We have also to answer the big question – what will this action achieve? There seems to be a larger hole in this than on anything. Most of the assessments from the US have assumed regime change as a means of eliminating Iraq’s WMD threat. But none has satisfactorily answered how that regime change is to be secured, and how there can be any certainty that the replacement regime will be better.

“Iraq has had no underlying history of democracy so no-one has this habit or experience.”

474. Mr Straw also wrote:

“I will talk to you about handling the PLP. But one thing which would help greatly is agreeing that any UK action would have to be endorsed by a substantive resolution of the Commons. There is precedent for this – in the Gulf War. It makes the Government look weak and condescending to its own parliamentary party, to evade a substantive vote. A more messy alternative expression of dissent (on the division for the adjournment) cannot be avoided if there is no substantive vote. The question will also be asked of you – if there can be substantive votes on a trivial issue like hunting, why not on war?”

475. Mr Straw’s minute does not appear to have been sent to anyone outside No.10.¹⁶⁶

476. A minute from Mr Patey states that Mr Straw and Mr Blair were due to meet on 26 March to discuss “amongst other things, Iraq”.¹⁶⁷

477. An undated manuscript note from Mr Powell to Mr Blair suggested that Mr Straw wanted to discuss his advice.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ [Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 25 March 2002, ‘Crawford/Iraq’.](#)

¹⁶⁷ Minute Patey to Goulty, 25 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Action’.

¹⁶⁸ Manuscript comment Powell to PM, [undated], on Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 25 March 2002, ‘Crawford/Iraq’.

478. There is no No.10 record of that discussion.

479. Mr Straw told the Inquiry that his recommendation was:

“... not a route of regime change ... [but] not containment.

“Of course there was debate about whether we should just put up with containment, but the problem with just putting up with containment, notwithstanding [resolution] 1409 [adopted in May 2002] was that it wasn’t going anywhere ... Meanwhile, the perception of the risk had completely changed ...”¹⁶⁹

480. Asked if the messages to the US Administration before 25 March that the UK was prepared to be part of a coalition pursuing regime change had pre-empted his advice, Mr Straw told the Inquiry that his minute to Mr Blair was part of the debate in the UK Government.¹⁷⁰ Part of that was how to handle the US.

481. Mr Straw added that the UK had succeeded in achieving its policy objective when the US was persuaded to go down the UN route “for the sole purpose, not of regime change, but of dealing with, ‘The threat posed by Iraq to international peace and security’”.

MR STRAW’S CONVERSATION WITH SECRETARY POWELL, 25 MARCH 2002

482. In a conversation with Secretary Powell, on 25 March, Mr Straw was reported to have described the political situation in the UK as:

“... generally ‘twitchy’, mostly for domestic reasons. Everyone accepted the case against Iraq but not everyone acknowledged that post-11 September, our tolerance of threats to security had reduced. He explained the need for military action, should it take place later in the year, to be clearly within international law, even if not explicitly endorsed by UNSCRs. He understood American impatience with our approach ... There would be a real problem if the objective of military action were regime change. The Foreign Secretary felt entirely comfortable making a case for military action to deal with Iraq’s WMD and could even say that the means of meeting those concerns might be regime change, but this could not be the objective. Politically we needed a strategy to swing parliamentary, public and European opinion behind whatever course of action we took.”¹⁷¹

483. When he saw the record of the conversation with Secretary Powell, Mr Wood reminded Mr Straw that a further decision by the Security Council was likely to be needed to revive the authorisation to use force in Iraq.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Public hearing, 21 January 2010, pages 17-18.

¹⁷⁰ Public hearing, 21 January 2010, pages 20-21.

¹⁷¹ Telegram 194 FCO London to Washington, 25 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Conversation with Colin Powell 25 March 2002’.

¹⁷² [Minute Wood to Private Secretary \[FCO\], 26 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

484. Having seen the telegram reporting the conversation between Mr Straw and Secretary Powell, Mr Wood wrote to Mr Straw's office to remind him of the advice in the FCO paper, 'Iraq: Legal Background', including that:

"... we would receive no support for reliance on the 1990 resolution authorising the use of force prior to Desert Storm in the absence of a further decision by the Council (whether by Presidential statement or by new resolution) that Iraq was in flagrant violation of its obligations under the cease-fire resolution.

"... The Attorney General's advice will need to be sought at the appropriate stage before Ministerial decisions on actions or public statements."¹⁷³

485. Sir Michael Wood told the Inquiry that was the first of a series of occasions on which he sent such a note:

"I was obviously quite concerned by what I saw him [Mr Straw] saying ... often reports are not accurate. They are summaries, they are short. He may well not have said it in quite the form it came out in the telegram, but whenever I saw something like that, whether from the Foreign Secretary or from the Prime Minister or from officials ... I would do a note just to make sure they understood the legal position.

"This is just an example of quite a few notes, but it certainly wasn't my impression that the Foreign Secretary really misunderstood the legal position at that stage."¹⁷⁴

486. Sir Michael added:

"This was quite early. It was before it had got into the bloodstream ... of the Foreign Office and others, what the legal position was. So it was necessary just to remind people of what was the accepted view."¹⁷⁵

487. Asked about Mr Wood's minute, Mr Straw told the Inquiry:

"What we were seeking to do – that was just before Crawford – was to persuade the Americans to go down the UN route. There were still a number of views about whether or not [resolutions] 678 and 687 could 'revive' the authority for military action. As is well-known, I had told the Prime Minister that my view was that we had to go down the UN route in any event, but I also had to keep our negotiating position protected publicly, and that was why I used the words that I did."¹⁷⁶

488. Preliminary discussions on the US and UK interpretations of the legal authorities for the use of force took place at the end of March.

¹⁷³ [Minute Wood to Private Secretary \[FCO\], 26 March 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

¹⁷⁴ Public hearing, 26 January 2010, page 16.

¹⁷⁵ Public hearing, 26 January 2010, page 17.

¹⁷⁶ Public hearing, 8 February 2010, pages 3-4.

489. In late March 2002, Lord Goldsmith, Attorney General, informed Mr Hoon and Mr Straw that there could be considerable difficulties in justifying the use of force without further action by the Security Council.

490. Lord Goldsmith was seeking to avoid Ministers making apparently authoritative statements before he had been asked to give his views.

491. On 24 March, both Mr Straw and Mr Hoon were interviewed on television and asked questions about the legal basis for any military action against Iraq.

492. In response to a question about whether international law provided a mandate to attack Iraq during an interview on *Breakfast with Frost* on 24 March, Mr Straw replied:

“... we have never been involved in any military action in our history since the establishment of the United Nations without the backing of international law and we’re not going to be ...

...

“We don’t have a mandate to invade Iraq now, no ... what we need to do however is to ensure the full compliance by Iraq ... with these United Nations obligations ... if Iraq refuses to comply ... then the position in international law may very well change ... Nobody wants military action ... at all and the way out lies very clearly in Saddam Hussein’s hands.

...

“... But, on the fundamental issue, do you need to ensure that any action that is taken is justified in international law, there can only be one answer and that is yes.”¹⁷⁷

493. Later the same day, in an interview by Mr Jonathan Dimbleby on *ITV* about the deployment of 1,700 Royal Marines to Afghanistan, Mr Hoon was asked whether, if Saddam Hussein did not allow weapons inspectors in or only allowed them in on terms which the US and UK found unacceptable, the UK would insist on having a mandate from the United Nations Security Council or were the existing resolutions enough to validate military action.¹⁷⁸ Mr Hoon replied: “In principle they would be, not least because those weapons of mass destruction might well be capable of posing a threat to the United Kingdom in which case we will be entitled to act in self defence.”

494. Asked whether Ms Clare Short, the International Development Secretary, was correct to say that it was not tolerable to act militarily against Saddam Hussein without a UN mandate, Mr Hoon replied: “well what I am saying is that legally we would be perfectly entitled to use force without a specific United Nations resolution”.

¹⁷⁷ *BBC Breakfast with Frost*, 24 March 2002.

¹⁷⁸ *Jonathan Dimbleby ITV*, 24 March 2002.

495. In answer to a further question about what kind of necessity there might be to go back to the UN, Mr Hoon responded that would “depend on the circumstances on the ground, the nature of the information we had about the regime and crucially the extent to which Saddam Hussein was or was not prepared to accede to existing ... resolutions.” Pressed further, Mr Hoon added that it would: “Depend on the context ... But as far as I understand the position legally we would be perfectly entitled to use force as we have done in the past without the support of a United Nations Security Council resolution.”

496. A minute from Mr Patey recorded that the media were “playing up apparent differences between the Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary over a legal basis for military action. No.10 will seek to play this down at the lobby briefing today”.¹⁷⁹ He concluded that it would be “important not to get drawn in public on the legal position in respect of what are, at this stage, hypothetical scenarios”.

497. Lord Goldsmith saw the transcripts of both interviews and wrote to Mr Hoon on 28 March pointing out that:

“... the Law Officers’ opinion has not been sought on the legality of possible action and I have not therefore offered any views on the legal position. The clarity of your statement and the apparently authoritative way it was produced puts me ... in a difficult position.

“I would not want to be definitive until I have had the benefit of full submissions ... Nonetheless I think you should know that I see considerable difficulties in being satisfied that military action would be justified on the basis of self defence ...

“I am aware that another potential argument is that the breaches of Security Council resolutions by Iraq would revive the authorisation to use force in ... resolution 678 (1990). I would welcome detailed submissions on that argument ... but, in the absence of further action by the Security Council, there could be considerable difficulties in justifying reliance on the original authorisation to use force.”¹⁸⁰

498. Lord Goldsmith concluded by drawing attention to the advice of the then Law Officers in 1997, and that he “would of course be happy to discuss this matter with you and Jack Straw at any time”.

499. Lord Goldsmith sent Mr Straw a copy of his letter, but it was not sent to No.10.

500. Following a discussion with Lord Goldsmith, Mr Hoon responded on 11 April stating that he had been speaking “in principle” about acting in self defence “if it were shown that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which were capable of posing a threat to the

¹⁷⁹ Minute Patey to Goulty, 25 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Action’.

¹⁸⁰ [Letter Goldsmith to Hoon, 28 March 2002, \[untitled\]](#).

UK”.¹⁸¹ He did not think that curtailed Lord Goldsmith’s “ability to offer an opinion about the legal position in due course”. Mr Hoon added in manuscript that he was “sure that we can discuss this further”.

501. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that the interview with Mr Dimbleby had been long and that he had been pushed “quite hard on legality”.¹⁸² He had been “trying quite hard not to answer any questions, and that’s quite difficult”. Mr Hoon added that Lord Goldsmith had not been “particularly concerned about the nature of my legal observation, I think he was more concerned that I might be, in effect, boxing him in when he came to write his own opinion”.

502. Lord Goldsmith told the Inquiry he had “achieved my purpose of making it clear that I didn’t want to see senior ministers making apparently authoritative statements on behalf of HM Government about the use of force before I had even been asked to express any view of it”.¹⁸³

503. Mr Wood also reminded Mr Straw that a further decision by the Security Council was likely to be needed to revive the authorisation to use force in Iraq.

504. As agreed in Mr Straw’s meeting of 18 March, Mr Wood and Mr Grainger visited Washington on 28 March for talks on a range of subjects, not just Iraq, with Mr William H Taft IV, the US State Department Legal Advisor.¹⁸⁴ They also met Mr John Bellinger III, the NSC General Counsel.

505. The talks included a preliminary discussion of different US and UK interpretations of the legal authorities in various UN resolutions on Iraq for the No-Fly Zones and future use of military force but were not intended to reach an agreed position.

506. The record of the discussions was sent to Mr Paul Berman who sent it to Lord Goldsmith and Mr David Brummell, the Legal Secretary to the Law Officers.¹⁸⁵

Mr Charles Kennedy’s letter, 26 March 2002

507. Mr Charles Kennedy, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, wrote to Mr Blair on 26 March expressing concern about the possibility of military action against Iraq and arguing that before the UK lent its support for action the Government must be satisfied that there was no other course of action open to the international community.

¹⁸¹ [Letter Hoon to Goldsmith, 11 April 2002, \[untitled\]](#).

¹⁸² Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 65-66.

¹⁸³ Public hearing, 27 January 2010, page 19.

¹⁸⁴ Minute Grainger to Wood, 8 April 2002, ‘Meetings at US State Department’.

¹⁸⁵ Manuscript comment Berman to Goldsmith and Brummell, 12 April 2002, on Minute Grainger to Wood, 8 April 2002, ‘Meetings at US State Department’.

508. Mr Charles Kennedy wrote to Mr Blair on 26 March “in advance of your meeting with President Bush to express the concern that many feel with regard to the possibility of military action against Iraq”.¹⁸⁶

509. Mr Kennedy wrote:

“... those of us who believe that the case for fresh military action remains unproven are in no way apologists for a brutal dictator who subjects his own people to ignominy and deprivation, flouts international law, and continues to pose a threat to international security.

“Military action should never be undertaken without clear and realistic political objectives that are capable of achievement, and always as a last resort after all other available means of achieving those objectives have been explored. I urge you to seek such avenues with the same vigour and determination which you showed in helping to build the international coalition against terrorism ...

“It is axiomatic that those of us who seek to make Iraq fulfil its obligations under international law, should ensure that any action taken to impose these obligations is supported by international law.

“... there is no evidence to link Baghdad with the events of 11 September. Nor is there any published evidence of the chemical, biological or nuclear capability of Iraq since the withdrawal of the UNSCOM inspectors in 1998, but it would be reasonable to conclude from past history that there is a strong probability that such capabilities exist or at least are being actively pursued.

“The return of the weapons inspectors ... must remain the international community’s priority. I would therefore urge engagement with the regime to solicit agreement on access ...

“Before the UK lends its support for action against Iraq, the Government must be satisfied that there is no other course of action open to the international community. I would also urge the Government should seek the views of the elected representatives of the British People in debate and a substantive motion before the House of Commons before any further British forces be deployed beyond present military commitments against Iraq.”

Mr Powell’s advice, 28 March 2002

510. Mr Powell advised Mr Blair that the objectives for his meeting with President Bush were to “agree sensible plans” on both Iraq and the MEPP; and to “capitalise” on his standing in the US and support for the US Administration.

¹⁸⁶ [Letter Kennedy to Blair, 26 March 2002, \[untitled\]](#).

511. In relation to the tactics on Iraq, Mr Powell suggested making the case against Saddam Hussein and then setting an ultimatum seeking the return of weapons inspectors.

512. Mr Powell advised Mr Blair on 28 March that:

“Your meeting with Bush is an unusually important one and as timely on substance as it is untimely in terms of domestic politics.

“On substance I think we have two basic aims:

- a) to agree sensible plans for Iraq and for the MEPP. On the former I would not major on UN authorisation or legal base or any of that. I would stick to how we come up with a military and political plan that is likely to be successful; how we get the necessary support; and how we set it up properly, with Afghanistan as the model – we need to make the case against Saddam and then set an ultimatum (in this case return of inspectors rather than handing over UBL). On the MEPP, the US are now engaged ...
- b) to capitalise on your standing in the US and your support for the Administration ...”¹⁸⁷

513. Mr Powell foresaw the need: “In terms of positioning” to “wrestle with three important audiences – the PLP, US and Europe – all of whom want to hear different things”. He suggested:

- Putting Iraq into the internationalist context. Refer back to Chicago ...
- Make the case against Iraq on grounds of the way it treats its own people as well as the WMD threat.
- Set an ultimatum before we act rather than acting precipitately: we will only act if Iraq defies UN resolutions by refusing to accept the inspectors back in (and it does need to be anyone, anytime, anywhere).
- Demonstrate we do not have double standards by showing we are persuading the Americans to engage seriously on the MEPP.”

514. Finally, Mr Powell advised on the need to position the Prime Minister’s approach “before, during and after” the visit and suggested that Mr Blair should make it clear that he was speaking as part of Europe as well as the UK: “You are a bridge not a poodle!” Mr Blair needed “warm words from him [President Bush] on MEPP in return for warm words from you on Iraq”. Mr Blair could use the speech at College Station, “to put Iraq into the wider context”.

¹⁸⁷ [Minute Powell to Prime Minister, 28 March 2002, ‘Crawford’.](#)

515. Mr Powell told the Inquiry:

“I actually put a note to the Prime Minister setting out what I thought we should focus on ... This is not Kosovo. This is not Afghanistan. If you are thinking about Iraq, you have to think about it in a different way. You have to be able to put it in a political context. I referred ... to the Chicago speech ... You need to think about the long term, about the Middle East peace process ... and how you’d put Saddam in a ... proper framework to consider this sort of action.”¹⁸⁸

516. Mr Powell emphasised that he was not providing Mr Blair with options in his note on 28 March, and others had also given Mr Blair their views. His role was to help Mr Blair to focus before the meeting.

517. Mr Powell added that he was:

“... talking about how we could influence the Americans ... we were trying to replicate what we had done after 9/11 on Afghanistan. We were trying to say to them, ‘Don’t rush into anything. Move at a deliberative pace and, above all, build a coalition. Talk to people, go the UN route. Don’t rush into unilateral action.’ We believed unilateral action would have been a terrible thing by America, and we wanted to try and put it in a much wider political context.”¹⁸⁹

518. Mr Powell said that Mr Blair was:

“... always clear that the world would be better off without Saddam Hussein ... from the very beginning ... he thought the best way to pursue this, as with Afghanistan, would be to go down the UN route and give Saddam every chance to comply, but, if he didn’t, to build a coalition to deal with him.”¹⁹⁰

Sir Christopher Meyer’s advice, 1 April 2002

519. Sir Christopher Meyer advised on 1 April that President Bush had raised expectations that the US would take military action against Iraq but questions were beginning to be asked about the risks.

520. Sir Christopher also warned about the implications of the US approach to nation building in Afghanistan.

521. In a telegram describing President Bush as “riding high” on his definition of himself as “Commander in Chief of the war on terrorism” which had transformed his Presidency, Sir Christopher Meyer advised that President Bush needed to:

“... show if not victory, at least momentum, and he has raised expectations that this means taking the war to Iraq. Until recently, the overwhelming tide of opinion inside

¹⁸⁸ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 19-20.

¹⁸⁹ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 22-23.

¹⁹⁰ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 30-31.

the Administration and out, was that the only decision still to be taken on Iraq was how to do it. Now, the question on everyone’s lips is how far Iraq has been pushed back by the Palestinian conflict: by the outcome of Cheney’s tour: and by a longer prognosis for operations in Afghanistan.

“There is no shortage of Bush insiders who tell us that the die is cast for a regime-change operation of some sort this autumn. But there is now a sense that the Administration are for the first time really staring the hard questions in the face: how much international support is needed: what smart options are available to topple Saddam: above all what happens afterwards. There is a doubt among some – no bigger than a fist sized cloud on the horizon – that Iraq might be too risky politically.

“There is no bigger obstacle than the Israeli Palestinian conflagration ...”¹⁹¹

522. Separate advice from the Embassy to Whitehall analysing recent US polls a few days earlier reported strong support (88 percent) for removal of Saddam as an important foreign policy goal of the US, although only 46 percent favoured using ground troops to invade Iraq.¹⁹² The Embassy concluded that US public opinion was ready to respond to strong leadership: the US had been attacked and:

“... if and when a persuasive case is made for specific action in Iraq as part of the war on terrorism, the American people will be up for it. But for now, it would be unwise to interpret the headline figures as depicting a bellicose and confident US ready to do whatever it takes to rid the world of Saddam.”

523. Sir Christopher Meyer also offered advice on the US approach in Afghanistan, where decisions had been taken:

“... in a very small circle of key officials around the President. Where Rumsfeld (and General Franks) have not been fully engaged, little action has resulted. Many in the Administration recognise that, on the ground, there is a real danger of losing Afghanistan because of a US fear of getting sucked into nation-building. But Rumsfeld has, in effect, blocked all but a minimalist approach.”¹⁹³

524. Sir Christopher suggested that the UK should “vigorously” use the leverage from the deployment of 45 Commando Royal Marines to:

“... push for greater US engagement in international stability efforts ... We have proportionately far more ground forces in Afghanistan than the Americans. If we are not careful, the US will try to pass to us lead responsibility for Afghan stability for the

¹⁹¹ [Telegram 451 from Washington to FCO London, 1 April 2002, ‘PM’s Visit to Texas: Bush and the War on Terrorism’.](#)

¹⁹² Note British Embassy Washington, 26 March 2002, ‘US Public Opinion on Operations Against Iraq’.

¹⁹³ Telegram 451 from Washington to FCO London, 1 April 2002, ‘PM’s Visit to Texas: Bush and the War on Terrorism’.

foreseeable future. Keeping us on as ... lead nation until the end of June is exactly what the Americans wanted from the start.”

525. Sir Christopher told the Inquiry that he had advised Mr Blair to focus on three things at Crawford:

- “... how to garner international support for a policy of regime change, if that is what it turns out to be.”
- “If it involves removing Saddam Hussein, how do you do it and when ...”
- “Above all ... get them to focus on the aftermath ...”¹⁹⁴

526. Sir Christopher added that regime change in Iraq did not, at that time, “necessarily mean an armed invasion”.

Advice on the economic effects of military action

527. In response to his concern about the impact that high oil prices might have on public support for military action, Mr Blair was sent advice by both the FCO and Mr Scarlett.

528. In his minute of 17 March, Mr Blair had described oil prices as his “big domestic worry”; and that higher petrol prices “really might put the public off”.¹⁹⁵

529. Mr Michael Arthur, the FCO Economic Director, sent Sir David Manning a briefing on the economic effects of military action against Iraq which concluded that: while military action against Iraq would pose some risk to the oil market, it should be containable; there would be unavoidable economic consequences for Iraq’s neighbours, particularly Jordan; and economic effects on Iraq itself were inevitable.¹⁹⁶ It suggested that the UK should think about helping northern Iraq.

530. Mr Scarlett responded to a separate request from Sir David Manning for an update on Iraq’s oil production, the importance of oil income to the Iraqi regime and the effect of a halt in oil exports on the world oil market on 4 April.¹⁹⁷

531. Mr Scarlett advised:

- Iraq benefited from both manipulating the Oil-for-Food regime and illegal oil exports.
- It was “unlikely that Iraq would voluntarily cease its illegal oil sales”.
- Iraq had halted oil exports under OFF for five weeks in mid-2001 to pressurise the Russians to resist UK/US proposals on revised sanctions.

¹⁹⁴ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, pages 27-28.

¹⁹⁵ [Minute Prime Minister to Powell, 17 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁹⁶ Letter Arthur to Manning, 26 March 2002, ‘Iraq: Back Pocket Economics’.

¹⁹⁷ [Minute Scarlett to Manning, 4 April 2002, ‘Iraq: Oil’.](#)

- Iraq could “survive for several months at least and possibly several years” without any oil income, as it had between 1991 and the end of 1996.
- The contribution of revenues from OFF was not “regarded as necessarily crucial to regime survival”.
- Removal of access to revenue from illegal oil exports would be a “more direct threat to the regime”.
- There had been considerable successes in limiting oil smuggling through the Gulf, but it had “proved politically impossible to counter effectively Iraq’s other illegal oil exports”.
- While a sudden cut in Iraqi oil exports would probably cause a temporary spike in the oil price, the price rise would be “moderate” (less than US\$5 per barrel).
- Market expectations would be a key factor in determining the duration of the spike. They were already influenced by “jitters over the Middle East and talk of war with Iraq”.

532. When Iraq announced on 8 April that it would halt oil exports under the UN Oil-for-Food programme for 30 days “or until Israel withdraws from Palestinian territories”, Mr Blair was advised that the market had already factored in the possibility of disruption given the situation in the Middle East and the possibility of from an Iraqi suspension of exports around the UN discussion of sanctions at the end of May.¹⁹⁸

Chequers meeting, 2 April 2002

533. Mr Blair discussed the need for a strategy to remove Saddam Hussein and possible US military action in a meeting at Chequers on 2 April 2002.

534. The meeting was clearly intended to inform Mr Blair’s approach in his discussion with President Bush.

535. Following Mr Blair’s request in his minute of 17 March for a meeting with military personnel, a meeting was held at Chequers on 2 April. No formal record was made of the discussion or who was present.

536. Accounts given by participants suggest that Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), Sir Kevin Tebbit, MOD Permanent Under Secretary (representing Mr Hoon who was unable to attend), Lieutenant General Sir Anthony Pigott, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments), Lieutenant General Cedric Delves, senior UK liaison officer at CENTCOM, Sir Richard Dearlove, Mr Powell, Sir David Manning and Mr Scarlett were present.

¹⁹⁸ Minute No.10 [junior official] to Prime Minister, 8 April 2002, ‘Iraq Suspends Oil Exports; Impact on the Oil Markets’.

537. Mr Straw was overseas at the UK/Caribbean Summit at that time, but no FCO representative was present.¹⁹⁹

538. Lt Gen Pigott produced a set of briefing slides at the meeting.²⁰⁰ They identified a provisional end state for military action against Iraq which was defined as:

“A law-abiding Iraq which is reintegrated in the international community, that does not threaten its neighbours, or global security.”

539. The slides prepared for Lt Gen Pigott also contained elements related to Afghanistan, the need to eliminate international terrorism as a force in international affairs and a series of questions in relation to the goals and approach of any military action in Iraq, including that if the US wanted the UK to be involved in any military action, the UK would need to be involved in the planning.

540. Dr Simon Cholerton, Assistant Director in the MOD Secretariat (Overseas), advised Sir Kevin Tebbit:

“... we believe that the key issue for the PM to raise with President Bush is the outcome the US would seek from any military action: would it simply be [to] control Iraq’s WMD, remove Saddam from office (in the knowledge that a successor regime may well continue with Iraq’s WMD programmes) or is it necessary to install a replacement regime? The answer to this question will be key to military planning; how action would fit into the framework of international law and help hugely in subsequent work to influence US policy.”²⁰¹

541. Mr Blair wrote in his memoir that Adm Boyce and Lt Gen Pigott:

“... gave a presentation. They warned it could be a bloody fight and take a long time to remove Saddam. The US were engaged in preliminary planning, but it was hard to read where they were going with it. We needed to get alongside that planning and be part of it ...”²⁰²

542. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that the meeting at Chequers was a “key meeting ... to talk about what he [Mr Blair] should do at Crawford”.²⁰³

543. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that he did not remember the Chequers meeting as “outstandingly important”, though he recollected that “things accelerate in the second quarter of the year”.²⁰⁴ There had been a similar meeting on Afghanistan which had explored the feasibility of military action.

¹⁹⁹ FCO Daily Bulletin, 2 April 2002.

²⁰⁰ [Email DCDS\(C\)/MA2 to CDS REGISTRY-5 and PS/PUS, 28 March 2002, ‘Iraq Briefing Slides’.](#)

²⁰¹ Minute Cholerton to PS/PUS [MOD], 8 April 2002 [date is incorrect], ‘Iraq: Meeting with Prime Minister at Chequers’.

²⁰² Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

²⁰³ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 19.

²⁰⁴ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 34-35.

544. Sir Richard Dearlove had discussed the Chequers meeting with colleagues on 4 April.²⁰⁵ In response to questions from the Inquiry, Sir Richard confirmed that regime change didn't necessarily mean military action and could, at that stage, have meant a variety of things.

545. Asked whether, from his memory of Chequers, Sir Richard thought Mr Blair would have taken that view, Sir Richard replied: “I think you have got to look at it in the broadest, most general sense”.

546. Asked if Mr Straw and Adm Boyce would have gone along with Mr Blair's view, or were they more cautious, Sir Richard replied:

“I am not sure. I think you've got to realise that SIS at this point is in a pretty extraordinary position ... with an insight into what's happening in the US which was probably much more profound than anyone else in Government has got.”

547. Sir Richard had also reported to his colleagues that: “WMD would only be one of several arguments pointing to the need to uproot Saddam.”

548. Sir Richard had told his colleagues that Mr Blair was seized of the fact that the WMD threat from Libya was more serious than that from Iraq.²⁰⁶ Sir Richard added that it had been about that time the UK “discovered that Libya has an active nuclear programme”, which had been “something of a shock”.

549. Asked whether the concerns about WMD in other countries – Iran, North Korea and Libya – were more important than Iraq, and how important WMD was for making the case “to topple the [Iraqi] regime”, Sir Richard told the Inquiry that in April 2002 concerns about Iraq's WMD were “above the level of routine” and there was “an assumption that Iraq's interest in WMD” continued.²⁰⁷ Mr Blair would “push” President Bush to pursue an active policy on Iraq “but the initial phase would be to prepare international public opinion”.

550. Asked how to interpret a reference in the record of the discussion [on 4 April] to Mr Blair wanting to lead, not just support the process of regime change, Sir Richard told the Inquiry he thought it was the former: “keeping our hands on what's going on and not letting the Americans run away with the ball”.²⁰⁸

551. Mr Campbell produced the most detailed account of the meeting. In his diaries, he described it as:

“... a repeat of the smaller meeting we'd had on Afghanistan. Boyce ... mainly set out why it was hard to do anything ...

²⁰⁵ Private hearing, 16 June 2010, pages 38-43.

²⁰⁶ Private hearing, 16 June 2010, pages 27-28.

²⁰⁷ Private hearing, 16 June 2010, pages 28-29.

²⁰⁸ Private hearing, 16 June 2010, page 29.

“TB [Tony Blair] wanted to be in a position to give GWB [President Bush] a strategy and influence it. He believed Bush was in the same position as him, that it would be great to get rid of Saddam and could it be done without terrible unforeseen circumstances? ...

“We were given an account of the state of Iraqi forces, OK if not brilliant, the opposition – hopeless – and Saddam’s ways – truly dreadful. CDS [Adm Boyce] appeared to be trying to shape the meeting towards inaction, constantly pointing out the problems, the nature of the administration, only Rumsfeld and a few others knew what was being planned, TB may speak to Bush or Condi but did they really know what was going on? ... He said apart from Rumsfeld, there were only four or five people who were really on the inside track.

“... but CDS would keep coming back to the problems ... General Tony Pigott did an OK presentation which went through the problems realistically but concluded that a full-scale invasion would be possible, ending up with fighting in Baghdad. But it would be bloody, could take a long time. Also, it was not impossible that Saddam would keep all his forces back. He said post-conflict had to be part of conflict preparation. The Americans believed we could replicate Afghanistan but it was very, very different ... [Lt Gen] Cedric [Delves] ... said Tommy Franks [General Franks, Commander in Chief CENTCOM] was difficult to read because he believed they were planning something for later in the year, maybe New Year. He basically believed in air power plus Special Forces. CDS said if they want us to be involved in providing force, we have to be involved in all the planning, which seemed fair enough.

“TB said it was the usual conundrum – do I support totally in public and help deliver our strategy, or do I put distance between us and lose influence?

“We discussed whether the central aim was WMD or regime change. Pigott’s view was that it was WMD. TB felt it was regime change in part because of WMD but more broadly because of the threat to the region and the world ... [P]eople will say that we have known about WMD for a long time ... [T]his would not be a popular war, and in the States fighting an unpopular war and losing is not an option.

“C said that the Presidential Finding, based on an NSC paper, made clear it was regime change that they wanted ... There was a discussion about who would replace Saddam and how could we guarantee it would be better. Scarlett said it couldn’t be worse ...”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

Presidential Finding in early 2002

In an article in *The Washington Post* on 16 June 2002, Mr Bob Woodward wrote that President Bush had signed an intelligence order earlier in the year “directing the CIA to undertake a comprehensive, covert program to topple Saddam Hussein, including authority to use lethal force to capture the Iraqi President”.²¹⁰

The order was:

“... an expansion of a previous Presidential Finding designed to oust [Saddam] Hussein”.

The Finding directed the CIA to “use all available tools, including:

- Increased support to Iraqi opposition groups and forces inside and outside Iraq including money, weapons, equipment, training and intelligence information.
- Expanded efforts to collect intelligence within the Iraqi government, military, security service and overall population where pockets of intense anti-Hussein sentiment have been detected.
- Possible use of CIA and U.S. Special Forces teams, similar to those that have been successfully deployed in Afghanistan since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Such forces would be authorized to kill Hussein if they were acting in self-defense.”

The US perspective on Mr Blair’s position, pre-Crawford

552. Secretary Powell told President Bush that Mr Blair:

- **would want to present the strategic, tactical and public affairs lines he believed would strengthen support for the US and UK; “common cause” in relation to the war on terrorism and Iraq; and**
- **recognised he would pay a political price for supporting the US on Iraq and wanted to minimise that. UK voters would be looking for signs that the UK and US were “equity partners in the special relationship”.**

553. Secretary Powell told President Bush that Mr Blair would want to discuss “Afghanistan; Iraq; the Middle East; Russia and NATO enlargement; and trade and development”.²¹¹

554. Secretary Powell wrote that Mr Blair:

“... continues to stand by you and the US as we move forward on the war on terrorism and Iraq. He will present to you the strategic, tactical and public affairs lines that he believes will strengthen global support for our common cause. [...]

²¹⁰ *The Washington Post*, 16 June 2002, *President Broadens Anti-Hussein Order*.

²¹¹ Memorandum Powell to Bush, 28 March 2002, ‘Your Meeting with United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair, April 5-7, 2002 at Crawford’.

“Blair and the UK are in Afghanistan with us for the long haul. He readily committed to deploy 1700 commandos, even though his experts warn that British forces are overstretched ... [...].

“On Iraq, Blair will be with us should military operations be necessary. He is convinced on two points: the threat is real; and success against Saddam will yield more regional success. Aside from his foreign and defense secretaries, however, Blair’s Cabinet shows signs of division, and the Labour Party and the British public are unconvinced that military action is warranted now. Blair may suggest ideas on how to (1) make a credible public case on current Iraqi threats to international peace; (2) keep Iraq’s neighbours on our side; (3) handle calls for a UNSC blessing that can increase support for us in the region and with UK and European audiences; and (4) demonstrate that we have thought through ‘the day-after.’

“The UK will follow our lead in the Middle East, but Blair may seek greater US engagement [...] He will argue that continued terrorist violence and Israeli military action are rapidly sapping European and Arab support for a tough line on Baghdad. [...]

“... He is sharply criticised by the media for being too pro-US in foreign and security policy, too arrogant and ‘presidential’ (not a compliment ...

“Blair knows he may have to pay a political price for supporting us on Iraq, and wants to minimize it. Nonetheless, he will stick with us on the big issues. His voters will look for signs that Britain and America are truly equity partners in the special relationship.”

555. The US Embassy in London reported on 2 April that MPs in the Labour Party were opposed to military action and identified the actions likely to be needed to secure their support.

556. Mr Blair’s challenge was to judge the timing and evolution of America’s Iraq policy, and to bring his party and the British people on board, so that the UK could be the “keystone” for any coalition the US wanted to build.

557. On 2 April, a telegram from Ambassador William Farish, US Ambassador to the UK, reported that “for a noticeable time after” President Bush had “identified Iraq’s development of WMD and missiles as a serious threat” in his State of the Union speech on 26 January, Mr Blair’s Government “essentially kept quiet on whether it agreed”.²¹² That had “changed at the end of February” when Mr Blair “spoke out forcefully” at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia.

²¹² Telegram 7579 from AMEMBASSY London to SECSTATE Washington, 2 April 2002, ‘Iraq Coalition-Building: UK Labor Party Not Yet Convinced’.

558. The Embassy reported that the Government had a week later released a Foreign Office briefing paper to the Parliamentary Labour Party “that outlined the case against Iraq”. That had been followed by the article in *The Times* by Mr Straw [on 5 March] and a similar piece by Mr Blair the following day. The subsequent “debate” on the issue in the House of Commons was described as “sharp”, with opposition to military action going “unfortunately, well beyond the ‘usual suspects’”. The large number of signatories of an Early Day Motion opposing support for US military action, 130 of whom 100 were Labour MPs, was “significant” and “many more ... did not sign” but agreed with its thrust. The MPs were seen to be reflecting overall voter opinion.

559. Labour MPs who considered “themselves to be moderate and strongly pro-US” had told the US Embassy that they needed “more evidence of Iraq’s connivance with terrorism and/or willingness to use WMD before they could support HMG co-operation with military action”. Labour MPs had “especially” raised “concerns about the reaction of the Arab world”. “Several MPs” had also told the Embassy “that progress in the Middle East Peace Process could defuse some of their concerns”. “Another element raised was that there would be less negative fallout if military action were taken only after all other options were seen to have been exhausted” and “virtually all MPs with whom we spoke” wanted “the UN to endorse any military action”. MPs were worried:

“... that the US is ‘looking for another fight’ and will ‘ignore even its close friends if they object’ ... There is the impression ... that the US is not acknowledging the relevance of the UK to the US agenda.”

560. Addressing what it would take to convince Labour Parliamentarians to support military action against Iraq, Ambassador Farish wrote that widespread revulsion with the Iraqi regime did not:

“... necessarily translate into support for war. Some MPs would endorse action if they had proof that Iraq has continued to develop WMD since UN inspectors left. More would follow if convinced that Iraq has succeeded in developing significant WMD capability (not just CW, but BW and/or nuclear/radiological) and the missiles to deliver it. Many more would follow if they see compelling evidence that Iraq intends and plans to use such weapons. A clear majority would support military action against Iraq if Saddam is implicated in the 9/11 attacks or other egregious acts of terrorism. Other factors of influence include ... Arab sentiment, progress in the MEPP, UN support, civilian casualties, and having a plan that works.

“Since making his decision to move to a more robust public diplomacy on Iraq, Blair plus Straw and ... Hoon have made a string of tough statements. Blair was especially forthright when standing alongside VP Cheney on March 11.”

561. Ambassador Farish concluded:

“Blair has proved an excellent judge of political timing, and he will need to be especially careful about when to launch a ramped-up campaign to build support

for action against Iraq. He will want neither to be too far in front, or behind, US policy. As one FCO official pointed out to us, if Blair unleashes a full scale campaign in Parliament and with the general public when Parliament returns from the Easter recess, and the US policy turns out to be on a longer-term trajectory, when the time comes for action, the PM may find that his preparations have come unglued. On the other hand, if he waits too long, then the keystone of any coalition that we wish to build may not be firmly in place. No doubt these are the calculations that Blair hopes to firm up when he meets the President at Crawford ...”

Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush at Crawford, April 2002

562. Mr Peter Watkins, Mr Hoon’s Principal Private Secretary, sent a report of a visit to Washington by MOD officials to Sir David Manning on 4 April (see Section 6.1).²¹³

563. Sir David Manning added in a manuscript comment: “... further request from Geoff Hoon that you should persuade Bush to include us in the US military planning process.”²¹⁴

564. Mr Campbell wrote that on 3 April Mr Blair “was anxious that we get the focus for the meeting at Crawford ... off Iraq simply and on to the Middle East”.²¹⁵

565. Mr Rycroft sent Mr Blair an updated briefing pack for the meetings at Crawford to Mr Blair on 4 April.²¹⁶ For Iraq, that comprised:

- the folders of background papers requested by Mr Blair;
- a FCO steering brief;
- Sir Christopher Meyer’s telegram of 1 April;
- the latest version of the draft paper for public release on Iraq’s WMD;
- a draft paper on Iraq’s human rights abuses;
- background papers on the Iraqi opposition and the weapons inspectors;
- the letter from Mr Charles Kennedy expressing concern about military action; and
- further background papers on ensuring the security of energy supply.

²¹³ Letter Watkins to Manning, 4 April 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²¹⁴ Manuscript comment Manning to PM, 5 April 2002 on Letter Watkins to Manning, 4 April 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²¹⁵ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

²¹⁶ Minute Rycroft to Prime Minister, 4 April 2002, ‘Texas’.

566. Sir David Manning provided a separate checklist of topics which described the objective on Iraq as:

“Commitment from Bush to transparency and consultation. (The model is Afghanistan.) We need to start US/UK military planning (i.e. access for UK military planners in Washington and CENTCOM – the point CDS made at Chequers).”²¹⁷

567. The Overseas and Defence Secretariat advised Sir David Manning on 5 April:

- The Iraq ‘Options Paper’ remained “current”.
- Mr Annan met an Iraqi delegation on 7 March. The Iraqis had made no specific commitments to co-operate with UN resolutions and posed 19 questions about US/UK policies. The majority were polemics but some were about clarification of resolution 1284. Mr Annan wanted the Security Council to answer those questions before further talks scheduled for 18/19 April. The UK position was that Mr Annan had no mandate to negotiate with Iraq and that he should urge them to talk to UNMOVIC and the IAEA about readmitting weapons inspectors.
- The US was working on a draft UN resolution to encapsulate recent agreements with Russia on the Goods Review List.²¹⁸

568. Mr Campbell wrote that Mr Blair had “decided that he wanted to be totally supportive but also push for more US engagement”.²¹⁹ He “would make clear that the UK would support the US on Iraq, but also make the point about UN inspectors effectively as an ultimatum”. For the first time that Mr Campbell could recall, Mr Blair had produced “his own written checklist for the meeting” with President Bush. Mr Blair had wanted “to do Iraq and MEPP first so that he knew where he was”.

Mr Blair’s meetings with President Bush at Crawford, April 2002

569. Mr Blair met President Bush at Crawford, Texas, on 5 and 6 April. Much of the discussion took place in private meetings between the two leaders.

570. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that President Bush and Mr Blair had dined together [on the evening of Friday 5 April] and that there was a more formal meeting on the Saturday morning.²²⁰ Sir David stressed that the discussions at Crawford had been about “many other things as well as Iraq” particularly the Middle East Peace Process.

571. A three-page record of the discussions on Iraq was circulated on a secret and strictly personal basis by Sir David Manning in a letter to Mr McDonald which was sent

²¹⁷ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 4 April 2002, ‘Crawford Checklist’.

²¹⁸ Minute Dodd to Manning, 5 April 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²¹⁹ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

²²⁰ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 14-15.

only to Mr Watkins (for Mr Hoon), Admiral Boyce, Sir Michael Jay, Sir Richard Dearlove, Sir Christopher Meyer and Mr Powell.²²¹

572. Much of the discussion took place privately between the two leaders. Sir David Manning recorded that the meeting on Saturday morning was informed:

- There was no war plan for Iraq.
- Thinking so far had been on a broad, conceptual level.
- A very small cell in Central Command in Florida had recently been set up to do some planning and to think through the various options.
- When the US had done that, US and UK planners would be able to sit down together to examine the options.
- The US and UK would work through the issues together.

573. Sir David recorded that Mr Blair and President Bush had discussed:

- the need to enhance not diminish regional stability;
- who might replace Saddam Hussein if action was taken to topple him;
- the impact of a moderate, secular regime in Iraq on other countries in the region;
- the need to manage public relations with great care;
- putting Saddam Hussein on the spot over UN inspections and seeking proof of the claim that he was not developing WMD; and
- the timing of possible military action. If a decision was taken to use military action, that would not take place before late 2002/early 2003.

574. Mr Blair said that it was important to go back to the United Nations and to present that as an opportunity for Saddam Hussein to co-operate:

“... no one could doubt that the world would be a better place if there were regime change in Iraq. He was sure it was right to go the inspectors’ route. But we would have to give careful thought about how we framed the ultimatum to Saddam to allow the inspectors to do their job.”

575. Mr Blair thought that Saddam Hussein would probably try to obstruct the inspectors and play for time. That was why it was so important that they must be allowed in at any time and be free to visit any place or installation. He also identified the need for an accompanying public relations strategy that highlighted both the risks of Saddam’s WMD programme and his “appalling” human rights record, and the importance of managing European public opinion and helping to construct an international coalition.

576. Mr Blair said he would emphasise that Saddam was being given an opportunity to co-operate. If “as he expected” Saddam failed to do so, it would be “very much harder

²²¹ Letter Manning to McDonald, 8 April 2002, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to the United States: 5-7 April’.

to resist the logic that we must take action to deal with an evil regime that threatened us with its WMD programme”.

577. Mr Blair considered that the US and UK would “still face the question of why they had decided to act now; what had changed?” In his view one of the lessons of 11 September was that: “Failure to take action in good time meant that the risks would only grow, and might force us to take much more costly action later.”

578. Sir David Manning also recorded that, following a further conversation with President Bush, Mr Blair had concluded that President Bush wanted to build a coalition, and that had led him to dismiss pressure from some on the American right.

579. The record contained no reference to any discussion of conditions which would be necessary for military action.

580. A letter from Sir Christopher Meyer to Sir David Manning on 15 May indicated that Mr Blair and President Bush had also discussed the first quarter of 2003 as a timeframe for action against Saddam Hussein.²²²

581. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that, at Crawford:

“... [President] Bush acknowledged the possibility that Saddam would allow inspectors in and let them go about their business. If that happened we would have to adjust our approach accordingly.

“So it was absolutely clear we were not signing up for a war ... we were signing up for going down the UN route and giving Saddam a chance to comply.”²²³

582. Asked if military options were discussed, Mr Powell replied:

“I don’t recall them getting into any sort of discussion of military options ...”

583. Mr Powell added that he thought Mr Blair’s message to President Bush was:

“... if you are going to do this, you have got to do this in the most intelligent manner possible, like after Afghanistan, like after 9/11. You have got to put this on a political track ... build support. You have got to go down the UN route. You have got to exhaust that UN route ... to give Saddam a chance to comply.”²²⁴

584. Mr Powell stated that Mr Blair was talking about the things that would need to be done to make action against Iraq successful:

“The first was to put the Middle East peace process in a different place ... That strikes me as a fundamental point that he repeated again and again subsequent

²²² Letter Meyer to Manning, 15 May 2002, ‘Your Visit to Washington’.

²²³ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 24.

²²⁴ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 24-25.

to that meeting. He talked about what would happen on the day after ... so ... he ... listed all the right questions ...”²²⁵

585. The issue of conditions for military action and how those were interpreted by Mr Blair and others is addressed in Section 3.3.

586. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry, that Afghanistan was the main pre-occupation at that time.²²⁶ In his view, “The sense that this was all about Iraq, in my recollection, was wrong.”

587. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that there had been “a general discussion of the possibility of going down the military route but obviously, we were arguing for that to be if the UN route failed”.²²⁷

588. President Bush wrote that he and Mr Blair had:

“... talked about coercive diplomacy as a way to address the threat from Iraq. Tony suggested that we seek a UN Security Council resolution that presented Saddam with a clear ultimatum: allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq, or face serious consequences. I didn’t have a lot of faith in the UN. The Security Council had passed sixteen resolutions against Saddam to no avail. But I agreed to consider his idea.”²²⁸

589. Dr Rice wrote that President Bush and Mr Blair had “had an extended discussion about Iraq and the need to do something about Saddam. The President was clear that Saddam had to fear the international community if he was ever going to comply. He and Blair found common ground in that assessment ...”²²⁹

590. In their press conference on 6 April, President Bush and Mr Blair both mentioned WMD in their introductory remarks, but neither mentioned Iraq specifically. Iraq was, however, raised in many of the questions.

591. President Bush stated:

- He and Mr Blair both agreed Saddam Hussein had to prove he was not developing WMD.
- US policy was regime change and all the options were on the table.
- Mr Blair understood that Saddam Hussein could not be allowed to “hook up” with a terrorist network.

²²⁵ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 26.

²²⁶ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 30.

²²⁷ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 59.

²²⁸ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

²²⁹ Rice C. *No Higher Honour*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

592. Mr Blair stated that “doing nothing” was not an option; the threat of WMD was real and had to be dealt with. The lesson of 11 September was to ensure that “groups” were not allowed to develop a capability they might use.

593. In his memoir, Mr Blair characterised the message that he and President Bush had delivered to Saddam Hussein as “change the regime attitude on WMD inspections or face the prospect of changing regime”.

594. In the press conference President Bush said that the bonds between the peoples of the US and UK were “stronger than ever” and that they shared “common interests and a common perspective on the important challenges of our times”.²³⁰ He was “extremely grateful” for Mr Blair’s “courageous leadership” since 11 September, and the world was “grateful for all that Great Britain has contributed in the war against terror”. He and Mr Blair both understood that “defeating global terror requires a broad based, long-term strategy” and “the importance of denying terrorists weapons of mass destruction”. They had also had “extensive conversations about the situation in the Middle East” where both nations were “strongly committed to finding a just settlement”. He and Mr Blair had “agreed to work closely in the weeks and months ahead on these difficult issues”.

595. Mr Blair said he agreed with President Bush on the Middle East and that they had also discussed international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. They had agreed that “the issue of weapons of mass destruction cannot be ducked, it is a threat, it is a danger to our world and we must heed that threat and act to prevent it being realised”. In Afghanistan, it was important “not just that we root out the last remnants of the Al Qaida terrorist network ... but also that we help that country to go from being a failed state ... to a state that offers some hope of stability and prosperity for the future”.

596. In response to questions about the need for military action in Iraq, Mr Bush said he and Mr Blair had:

“... of course, talked about Iraq. We both recognise the danger of a man who is willing to kill his own people harboring and developing weapons of mass destruction ... He’s a man who obviously had something to hide.

“He told the world that he would show us that he would not develop weapons of mass destruction and yet, over the past decade he has refused to do so. And the Prime Minister and I both agree that he needs to prove that he isn’t developing ... [WMD]

“I explained ... the policy of my government is the removal of Saddam and that all options are on the table.”

²³⁰ The White House, 6 April 2002, *President Bush, Prime Minister Blair Hold Press Conference*.

597. Mr Blair said that:

“... any sensible person ... asking the question, would the region, the world, and not least the ordinary Iraqi people be better off without the regime of Saddam Hussein, the only answer anyone could give ... would be, yes.

“... how we approach this, is a matter for discussion ... for considering all the options. But a situation where he continues to be in breach of all the United Nations resolutions, refusing to allow us to assess ... whether and how he is developing these weapons of mass destruction. Doing nothing is not an option ...

“But the President is right to draw attention to the threat of weapons of mass destruction. That threat is real. How we deal with it, that’s a matter we discuss. But ... we have to deal with it ...”

598. Asked whether removal of Saddam Hussein was now the policy of the British Government, Mr Blair replied:

“... it has always been our policy that Iraq would be a better place without Saddam Hussein. I don’t think anyone can be in any doubt about that for all the reasons I have given. But how we proceed ... how we make sure that this threat that is posed by weapons of mass destruction is dealt with, that is a matter that is open. And when the time comes for taking those decisions, we will tell people about those decisions ...”

599. Asked whether regime change was a change in policy, President Bush replied that it was not:

“... the worst thing that can happen is to allow the man to abrogate his promise, and hook up with a terrorist network. And then all of a sudden you’ve got one of those shadowy terrorist networks that have got an arsenal at their disposal, which could create a situation in which nations down the road get blackmailed. We can’t let that happen, we just can’t ... And, obviously, the Prime Minister is somebody who understands this clearly ...”

600. Asked about the absence of a direct linkage between Al Qaida and Saddam Hussein, President Bush replied:

“... he wouldn’t accept that. But can’t they see the linkage between somebody who’s willing to murder his own people and the danger of him possessing weapons of mass destruction, which he said he would not develop? I see the linkage between someone who is willing ... to use chemical weapons in order to keep himself in power, and at the same time develop a weapon that could be aimed at Europe, aimed at Israel, aimed anywhere, in order to affect foreign policy ...

“I can’t imagine people not seeing the threat and not holding Saddam Hussein accountable for what he said he would do, and we’re going to do that. History has called us into action. The thing I admire about the Prime Minister is he doesn’t need

a poll or focus group to convince him the difference between right and wrong. And it’s refreshing to see leaders speak with moral clarity when it comes to the defense of freedom.

“... We will hold Saddam Hussein accountable for broken promises. And that’s what a lot of our discussion ... has been about. And ... we are going to continue our discussions.”

601. Mr Blair added:

“You talked about no linkage there. There is a reason why United Nations resolutions were passed ... calling upon him to stop developing weapons of mass destruction ... and that is because we know he has been developing these weapons.

“We know that those weapons constitute a threat. Three days after the 11 September when I made my first statement to the House of Commons ... I specifically said then that this issue of weapons of mass destruction has to be dealt with ... [W]hat happened on the 11th of September was a call to us to make sure that we didn’t repeat the mistake of allowing groups to develop a destructive capability and hope that, at some point, they weren’t going to use it. They develop that destructive capability for a reason.

“Now we’ve made it very clear to you how we then proceed and how we deal with this. All the options are open. And I think after the 11th September this President showed that he proceeds in a calm and a measured and a sensible, but in a firm way. Now that is precisely what we need in this situation too.”

602. In his memoir, Mr Blair wrote that he and President Bush had “delivered a strong message” during the press conference, which he characterised as:

“It was basically: change the regime attitude on WMD inspections or face the prospect of changing regime.”²³¹

603. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that the “worry” about the press conference was that “we had a different position on regime change” and they had spent some time discussing how to avoid exposing a “huge gulf between us”.²³²

College Station speech, 7 April 2002

604. As suggested by Mr Powell, Mr Blair used his speech at College Station on 7 April to argue for an internationalist approach in dealing with Iraq.

605. Mr Blair advocated a policy of “an enlightened self interest that put fighting for our values at the heart of the policies necessary to protect our nations”.

²³¹ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

²³² Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 35.

606. Leaving Iraq to develop WMD in breach of its obligations to the Security Council was “not an option”, although the moment for decision on how to act had not yet been reached. Saddam Hussein had to let the weapons inspectors back in with unrestricted access.

607. Mr Blair used his speech at the George Bush Senior Presidential Library at College Station, Texas on 7 April to set out an internationalist approach drawing on his speech in Chicago in 1999.²³³

608. Mr Blair identified two views of international affairs: one, which was utilitarian, where “each nation maximises its own self interest”; the other was utopian, where “we tried to create a better world”. In Mr Blair’s view those two views were merging and he advocated an approach of “an enlightened self interest that put fighting for our values at the heart of the policies necessary to protect Our nations”. “Engagement in the world on the basis of these values, not isolationism from it, is the hard headed pragmatism for the 21st century.”

609. Citing the example of intervention in Kosovo, Mr Blair stated that it was “still costing us time, effort and money, but it’s a lot less than if we had turned our back and let the Balkans plunge into civil war”.

610. Mr Blair described instability as “contagious” and that “the surest way to stability is through ... values of freedom, democracy and justice”. Promotion of those values was:

“... part of our long-term security and prosperity. We can’t intervene in every case. Not all the wrongs of the world can be put right, but where disorder threatens us all, we should act.”

611. Mr Blair described the response to the terrorist attacks on 11 September as one where “the world stood firm. America took the lead, but it led a coalition of extraordinarily wide international proportions.” Mr Blair warned there was “a real danger we forget the lessons of September 11”.

612. In Mr Blair’s view there was “no escape” from facing events and “dealing with them”. Four “policy positions” should guide those responses.

613. Firstly:

“... the world works better when the US and EU stand together ...

“... The international coalition matters. Where it operates the unintended consequences of action are limited, the diplomatic parameters better fixed ...”

²³³ The National Archives, 7 April 2002, *Prime Minister’s Speech at the George Bush Senior Presidential Library*.

614. Secondly:

“... we must be prepared to act where terrorism or weapons of mass destruction threaten us. The fight against international terrorism is right. We should pursue it vigorously. Not just in Afghanistan but elsewhere. Not just by military means but by disrupting the finances of terrorism ... But there should be no let up.

“If necessary the action should be military and again, if necessary and justified, it should involve regime change. I have been involved ... in three conflicts involving regime change ...

“Britain is immensely proud of the part our forces have played and with the results but I can honestly say that the people most pleased have been the people living under the regime in question ...

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

“As for Iraq, I know that some fear precipitate action. They needn't. We will proceed as we did after September 11, in a calm, measured, sensible but firm way. But leaving Iraq to develop WMD, in flagrant breach of no less than nine separate UN Security Council resolutions, refusing still to allow weapons inspectors back to do their work properly, is not an option. The regime of Saddam is detestable. Brutal, repressive, political opponents routinely tortured and executed: it is a regime without a qualm in sacrificing the lives of its citizens to preserve itself, or starting wars with neighbouring states and it has used chemical weapons against its own people.

“As I say, the moment for decision on how to act is not yet with us. But to allow weapons of mass destruction to be developed by a state like Iraq without let or hindrance would be grossly to ignore the lessons of September 11 and we will not do it. The message to Saddam is clear: he has to let the inspectors back in, anyone, any time, any place that the international community demands.”

615. Thirdly, quoting the plight of the Middle East, the dispute between India and Pakistan and conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Angola, Mr Blair stated:

“... we should work hard to broker peace where conflict threatens a region's stability because we know the dangers of contagion ...”

616. Fourthly, Mr Blair argued:

“Prevention is better than cure. The reason it would be crazy for us to clear out of Afghanistan once we had finished militarily, is that if it drifts back into instability, the

same old problems will re-emerge. Stick at it and we can show, eventually, as in the Balkans, the unstable starts to become stable.”

617. In the concluding section of his speech, Mr Blair stated that an integrated approach was needed. He was not suggesting that nothing should be done without unanimity:

“That would be a recipe for the lowest common denominator – a poor policy. I am arguing that the values we believe in are worth fighting for ... We shouldn’t be shy of giving our actions not just the force of self-interest but moral force.

“And in reality, at a certain point these forces merge. When we defend our countries ... we aren’t just defending territory. We are defending what our nations believe in: freedom, democracy, tolerance and respect towards others.

“... Fighting for these values is a cause the world needs ...

“But if that’s what I and many others want ... It means we don’t shirk our responsibility. It means that when America is fighting for those values, then, however tough, we fight with her. No grandstanding, no offering implausible but impractical advice from the comfort of the touchline, no wishing away the hard not the easy choices on terrorism and WMD, or making peace in the Middle East, but working together, side by side.

“That is the only route I know to a stable world ...

“If the world makes the right choices now – at this time of destiny – we will get there. And Britain will be at America’s side in doing it.”

618. Mr Campbell wrote that Mr Blair had written the speech “pretty much ... himself”. He would make it clear that the UK would “support” the US on Iraq “but also make the point about UN inspectors effectively as an ultimatum”.²³⁴

619. The references in the speech to the UN and the use of the word “justified” in relation to regime change were “strengthened” after the discussions with President Bush.²³⁵

620. Sir Michael Jay commended the speech in a telegram to FCO posts on 7 April and invited them to draw on it.²³⁶

621. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that Mr Blair’s College Station speech was not intended to develop a new policy on Iraq; and that there was “no intention of changing policy on regime change in Iraq”. He added that the comments on regime change were in the

²³⁴ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

²³⁵ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

²³⁶ [Telegram 73 FCO London to Madrid, 10 April 2002, ‘The Prime Minister’s Meeting with President Bush, 5-7 April’.](#)

context of a need for the international community “to take action where we need to take action, but you can’t do that just on the basis of the wish for regime change”.²³⁷

622. A brief account of the outcome of the visit was provided in a telegram from the FCO on 10 April, providing additional points which Mr Ricketts had used in briefing EU Ambassadors.²³⁸ In relation to Iraq, it stated:

“The Prime Minister came away convinced that President Bush would act in a calm, measured and sensible but firm way. There was no question of precipitate action. But they agreed that Iraq’s WMD programmes were a major threat to the international community, particularly when coupled with Saddam’s proven track record on using these weapons. Letting that programme continue unhindered was not an option. The Prime Minister and President Bush agreed that action in the UN was the priority. It was essential to get the weapons inspectors deployed to begin to assess the extent of the Iraqi WMD programmes. The Prime Minister had been tough in his demand that Saddam must let the inspectors back in: ‘any one, any time, any place that the international community demands’.”

Reports to Parliament

623. Mr Straw was concerned about the potential reaction in Parliament to developments on Iraq.

624. Mr Straw advised that Parliament should be given a chance to vote on a substantive motion before any military action.

625. Mr Straw warned Mr Blair that Lord Goldsmith had expressed “serious doubt” about whether existing resolutions would provide “sufficient cover” for military action.

626. Mr Straw also advised that Mr Blair should avoid being “pinned down” on whether a new UN resolution would be required to provide the legal basis for military action.

627. Mr Straw welcomed Mr Blair’s decision to make a statement to Parliament about the discussions with President Bush but made a number of points in relation to Iraq:

- Mr Blair should concede that any military action in Iraq should be decided in a debate on a substantive motion in the House of Commons, not a debate on the adjournment. This was “quite a point of principle with many in the PLP”.
- The shift of focus to the re-admission of weapons inspectors was welcome and would “greatly help in making the argument for military action if (as I suspect) Iraq fails properly to comply”.

²³⁷ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 34-36.

²³⁸ [Telegram 73 FCO London to Madrid, 10 April 2002, ‘The Prime Minister’s Meeting with President Bush, 5-7 April’.](#)

- But it drew the UK and the US “inexorably into questions of cover in international law for any such military action”. Lord Goldsmith had expressed “serious doubt” that any existing resolution would provide “sufficient cover”.
- Mr Straw’s “strong advice” was “not to get pinned down on the question ... of whether a new UNSC mandate would be needed for military action”. Mr Blair should “readily acknowledge” that the UK had “always operated within the framework of international law”.
- Mr Straw had asked for work on whether it would be possible to strengthen the forthcoming resolution bringing the Goods Review List into operation “in respect of weapons inspectors”.
- Mr Blair could say that the document [for publication] on Iraq would be produced “shortly”. In Mr Straw’s view the UK could “certainly get something out pretty quickly”.
- The Early Day Motion signed by more than 150 members of the PLP had gained support because “it spoke of no military action ‘at this time’; and called for weapons inspectors to go back”.²³⁹

628. During PMQs on 10 April, Mr Blair emphasised the threat Iraq posed to the world, and the need for Saddam Hussein to comply with the UN resolutions and allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq. The region would be a better place without Saddam Hussein, but the method of achieving that was “open to consultation and deliberation”.

629. During PMQs on 10 April, Mr Iain Duncan Smith, leader of the Opposition, and other MPs asked a number of questions on Iraq.²⁴⁰

630. Stating that Iraq would “if left unchecked ... be able to deploy its weapons of mass destruction against targets in western Europe, including the United Kingdom”, Mr Duncan Smith asked Mr Blair:

- “... to confirm reports that he told President Bush ... that if military action is needed against Saddam Hussein, the British Government will support and, if necessary contribute to it?”;
- “... to confirm that getting rid of Saddam Hussein may now be an objective of the Government”;
- whether he believed that “countering the growing threat from Saddam Hussein” was “about protecting lives in Britain and the lives of British forces abroad, and not just about supporting our allies”; and
- in a reference to his speech at College Station, whether Mr Blair believed that those who refused to accept the need to act “misunderstand the nature of the threat, or that they will simply refuse to accept any evidence they are given”.

²³⁹ [Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 9 April 2002, ‘Your Commons’ Statement’.](#)

²⁴⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 10 April 2002, columns 11-18.

631. In response, Mr Blair stated:

- “The time for military action has not yet arisen. However, there is no doubt at all that the development of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein poses a severe threat not just to the region, but to the wider world ... [I]n my first statement to the House ... after 11 September, I made it clear that the issue of weapons of mass destruction had to be, and should be, dealt with. How we deal with it will be a matter for consultation and deliberation in the normal way. After 11 September, we proceeded in a calm and sensible way, and we shall do so again, but we must confront the issue of weapons of mass destruction.”
- “... there is no doubt at all that the region would be a better place without Saddam Hussein ... the Iraqi people would rejoice most at Saddam Hussein leaving office ... that regime has a particular record: the Iran-Iraq war ... the annexation of Kuwait ... and perhaps the most appalling act of all, the use of chemical weapons on the Kurdish people ... However, the method of achieving that is ... open to consultation and deliberation. When the judgements are made, I have no doubt at all that this House – indeed, the whole country – will want to debate the issue thoroughly.”
- “... The key issue is that this is not something that has suddenly arisen ... Before 11 September, a whole series of negotiations took place about potential new United Nations Security Council resolutions to put in place a better sanctions regime, and about how we try to ensure that weapons inspectors get back inside Iraq. The reason why the Security Council resolutions that were originally proposed and passed demand that weapons inspections take place ... is precisely that the threat of weapons of mass destruction is real and present.”
- “The issue is quite clear ... Saddam Hussein has a very clear message from the international community: the weapons inspectors should go back in – anyone, any place, any time ... Simply turning our backs on the issue of weapons of mass destruction is not an option. That is why I think it so important that we stand with the United States in saying this issue is one that has to be, and will be, confronted. We will do so in a sensible and measured way, but we cannot allow a state of this nature to develop those weapons without let or hindrance.”

632. Asked by Mr George Howarth (Labour) for an assurance that, before any military action which might become necessary was contemplated, Saddam Hussein would be “given every opportunity to comply with” the Security Council’s resolutions, Mr Blair replied that Saddam Hussein was:

“... in defiance of the resolutions ... However, he has the opportunity to comply now. He is not in any doubt about what is necessary. The United Nations resolutions are clear; there are nine and he is in breach of every one. The international community’s position is also clear. Whatever people think about the action that will follow, he must comply with the resolutions.”

633. Mr Blair's subsequent statement to the House of Commons focused on the discussions with President Bush on the crisis in the Middle East.

634. On Iraq, Mr Blair reiterated his statements that decisions would be "sensible", and that the House of Commons would have a proper opportunity to debate them before action was taken.

635. Mr Blair assured Parliament that the question of whether action in respect of Iraq would have the backing of international law would be considered "very carefully"; but that the time to debate any legal basis was when such action was taken.

636. Mr Blair's statement to the House of Commons on 10 April concentrated on the crisis in the Middle East.²⁴¹

637. Addressing Iraq in the context of stability in the Middle East Mr Blair stated:

"There will be many occasions on which to debate Saddam Hussein's flagrant breach of successive UN resolutions on his weapons of mass destruction ... [His] regime is despicable, he is developing weapons of mass destruction, and we cannot leave him doing so unchecked. He is a threat to his own people and to the region and, if allowed to develop these weapons, a threat to us also.

"Doing nothing is not an option ... [W]hat the international community should do through the UN is challenge Saddam to let the inspectors back in without restriction ... If he really has nothing to hide, let him prove it.

"... no decisions on action have been taken. Our way of proceeding should be and will be measured, calm and thought through. When judgements are made, I shall ensure the House has a full opportunity to debate them."

638. Mr Charles Kennedy, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, stated that the issue of Iraq:

"... crosses the political spectrum – there is genuine unease in the Labour party, among the Liberal Democrats and perhaps in sections of the Conservative party ... that unease is a reflection of genuine and sincerely held shades of opinion throughout the country. Therefore, as a result of his discussions with President Bush, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that no country can conduct a foreign policy on the basis of 'my ally, right or wrong'? Although I am not implying that the Government are seeking to do so, there is a need for discernment. Many of us hope that the Government may be able to temper some of the ideas of the American Administration ..."

²⁴¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 10 April 2002, columns 22-38.

639. Mr Kennedy welcomed the fact that “if decisions on Iraq have to be reached at some point in the future”, Mr Blair had confirmed the House of Commons would have “an opportunity to debate the matter fully”.

640. Mr Kennedy asked for confirmation that, if that stage was reached, “incontrovertible evidence” would “be presented publicly, preferably at the level of the United Nations Security Council”. That would be “most important, not just for the legitimacy of any action under international law, but for maintaining a political consensus”.

641. Mr Blair replied:

“... Some people will be against taking action in respect of Iraq no matter what it does, but I accept entirely that there are many people who are concerned ... whether that action will be sensible, whether it will have the backing of international law and whether proper thought has been given to the consequences for the wider region ... [T]hose are questions that we shall consider very carefully ...

“... most people would accept ... Saddam Hussein does lead a despicable regime, that he is a threat in respect of weapons of mass destruction and that it is important that we deal with that threat ...

“... it is the case that Saddam Hussein poses a threat. That is why the UN resolutions are there ... [T]his is somebody who has a track record of absolutely extraordinary aggression on his neighbours, on his own people, on everyone that he sees advantage in being aggressive towards ... That is why British pilots are still flying over the No-Fly Zone in order to protect people in Iraq. That is why the inspectors went in, could not do their job properly and then came out.

“... in the end we can all respond to concerns but we have to take decisions on them. I can assure people that those decisions will be sensible and that the House will have a proper opportunity to debate them before we act upon them.

“I have never taken the view that we support the US right or wrong ... But I do believe ... that the relationship is special and ... that it is a fundamental part of British foreign policy and should remain so. All I can say is that in my dealings with the Administration and with this President, we have found them immensely open and consultative, and where they have acted they have acted not just with consultation but in what I would regard as a sensible way.”

642. Mr Douglas Hogg (Conservative) asked Mr Blair to tell President Bush that “many in this country are not yet persuaded that the threat posed by Saddam Hussein is sufficiently great to justify military action, especially when the Middle East is in such a turbulent state”.

643. Mr Tam Dalyell (Labour) asked whether President Chirac (of France) had told Mr Blair that he had taken “the thuggish young Vice-President of Iraq” [Saddam Hussein]

to the “French equivalent of Aldermaston”; and that it was to his (Mr Dalyell’s) discredit that he “like many others, turned a blind eye to the huge amount of arms being poured into Iraq in the 1980s by our country and others”. He also stated that Iraq had been given a “clean bill of health on nuclear capacity” by the International Atomic Energy Agency in January 2002; and that Mr Hoon had “an invitation to send a scientific delegation of his choosing to Iraq at the beginning of March”. Mr Dalyell asked: “... would it not be wise at least to go and talk to Iraq? If nothing comes of that, so be it, but is it not high time that we started serious discussions?”

644. Mr Blair replied that sending a team out to Iraq was “best done through the United Nations” and that Saddam Hussein had “the opportunity to prove that he has nothing to hide by letting the inspectors back in unconditionally”. There was “some truth” in the point that everyone had turned a blind eye “to what was happening in Iraq in the 1980s” but “what we are learning about the international community is that when we turn a blind eye, sooner or later the problems come back to us full frontally. That is precisely what happened in Afghanistan, and it is one reason why ... we should certainly not turn a blind eye to what Saddam Hussein is doing.” There was “no doubt” that Saddam Hussein was “still trying to acquire nuclear capability and ballistic missile capability. Furthermore, although we do not know what has happened, we suspect that the piles of chemical and biological weapons remain.”

645. Mr Stuart Bell (Labour) referred to Saddam Hussein’s attacks using chemical weapons on Halabja and other villages in northern Iraq in 1988 and 1999 which had affected “4 million people” and asked: “Can we not remind ourselves of how important it is that Saddam Hussein lives with UN resolutions, and the sooner he does so the better?”

646. Mr Blair replied that Mr Bell was “right to remind us of the nature of Saddam’s regime and the way it deals with its political opponents”. He added that “most people realise that” Saddam Hussein “constitutes a threat”.

647. Mr Robert Wareing (Labour) stated that everyone would agree that the “world would be better off without” Saddam Hussein’s regime, but Mr Bradshaw had told the House that “the objective of British foreign policy was to remove the threat of Iraq’s weapons and not to replace the Iraqi Government, which was described as a matter for the people of Iraq”. President Clinton had stated that sanctions “must remain as long as Saddam Hussein lasted”.

648. Mr Wareing asked:

“What is the current view and policy of the British Government? If they take the latter position, there is no incentive to get the current regime in Iraq to change tack and allow the inspectors back in. I happen to remember that, initially, the inspectors left of their own accord; the difficulty now is to get them back in.”

649. Mr Blair replied:

“Of course, the policy is to protect ourselves against weapons of mass destruction, but obviously that cannot be divorced from the regime, because it is the regime that is responsible ... regime change in Iraq has been the policy of successive American Governments ... precisely because of the fear of weapons of mass destruction ... [I]t is for that very reason that the international community has said to Saddam Hussein, ‘Let the inspectors back in’. That is what I am saying, but it must be done unconditionally.”

650. In relation to Mr Blair’s comments about Saddam Hussein’s chemical weapons attacks on the Kurds, Ms Joyce Quin (Labour) asked Mr Blair to confirm that “the maintenance of the breadth of the international coalition against terrorism” remained “an important priority for him and President Bush”. She stated that it was:

“... important to ensure that those who have already been victims ... will not suffer a second time in any action against Iraq. Indeed we should not repeat the mistakes of the past, in which one evil regime was replaced by another, but try to create as far as possible the conditions for a multi-ethnic, religiously tolerant, representative regime in Iraq, if and when Saddam Hussein’s regime is changed.”

651. Mr Blair replied:

“I strongly agree ... about the international coalition. It is important that we build as much support as possible for any action that we may undertake. She is entirely right that, if the regime in Iraq is to change, it is important that it changes to one that is genuinely broad based. I hope that we have provided some symbol of our good intentions ... by what has happened in Afghanistan ... I am sure that she, like me and many others ... would be one of the first to say that many people in Iraq would rejoice at Saddam Hussein’s departure. I hope that at some stage we shall be able to furnish the House with details of the way in which his regime operates, because its brutality is scarcely believable.

“It is important to proceed in a measured way. As I said in my speech in Texas, I have been involved in three regime changes ... and I can honestly say that we should not regret any of them. Let us proceed with care ... we must ensure that, if we ever get a regime change in Iraq, what follows is an improvement on what is there now.”

652. Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Plaid Cymru) welcomed Mr Blair’s reference to seeking an early United Nations Security Council resolution but asked whether one would be “sought before any further action is taken against Iraq”.

653. Mr Blair replied: “The time for debating any legal basis of action against Iraq is when we take such action.”

Cabinet, 11 April 2002

654. Mr Blair told Cabinet on 11 April that regime change in Iraq was greatly to be desired but no plans for achieving that had been tabled during his discussions with President Bush at Crawford.

655. Reflecting Mr Straw's advice, Mr Blair emphasised to Cabinet on 11 April that it would be important for the Government not to "tie its hands" in relation to the need for a further Security Council resolution.

656. Mr Blair had stated publicly that doing nothing was not an option, and that the threat from Iraq had to be dealt with.

657. Mr Blair suggested that the US Government recognised the need to embark on a process involving a clear ultimatum and an effort to gather international consensus for action.

658. Mr Blair did not disclose that he had informed Vice President Cheney on 11 March that the UK would help the US to achieve its objective of regime change provided that there was a clever plan.

659. Mr Blair reported his discussions with President Bush to Cabinet on 11 April.²⁴² He told colleagues that the talks with President Bush had been dominated by events in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

660. On Iraq, Mr Blair said that the US Government wanted to see a change of regime, which was greatly to be desired. No plans for achieving that had, however, been tabled. The significance of the crisis in Israel and the Occupied Territories for policy in Iraq was recognised. He had consulted his hosts about his speech, at College Station on 7 April, which had made clear that Iraq should unconditionally permit UN weapons inspectors to return. That suggested the US Government recognised the need to embark on a process involving a clear ultimatum and an effort to gather international consensus for action.

661. In the subsequent discussion a number of points were made. Those included:

- A UN resolution would be helpful in cementing support both internationally and in the UK for any military action against the Iraqi regime. It would, however, be important not to become boxed in by stating that a UN Security Council resolution would be a necessary pre-condition for military action against the Iraqi regime.
- Saddam Hussein was in breach of nine UN resolutions. He could avert action by the international community if he were to abide by those resolutions.
- It was important to encourage the US to remain engaged in the Middle East and to take account of the concerns of the international community, including the Secretary-General of the UN.

²⁴² Cabinet Conclusions, 11 April 2002.

- The impact of events in the Middle East on attitudes among the ethnic minorities in the UK, and the encouragement that could give to political extremists, should not be under-estimated.

662. Mr Blair concluded that it was important to maintain the maximum possible level of international support for policy towards the Middle East, including Iraq. Given the impossibility of foreseeing precisely how events would unfold, it was important for the Government not to “tie its hands”. If Saddam Hussein were to reject a clear ultimatum on the return of weapons inspectors, there would be widespread understanding of the need to take appropriate action.

663. In his statement to the Inquiry, Mr Blair wrote that there had been “a full Cabinet discussion” after the visit on 11 April “where we set out our objectives”.²⁴³

664. Asked whether the Cabinet was discussing regime change and how it might have been effected, Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

“... from 11 April ... the Cabinet was discussing this. We are going to have to deal with this issue now. Everybody knew that the Americans were taking a different and stronger line. The issue was very simple. He [Saddam Hussein] either had a change of heart, or regime change was on the agenda. That was clear from the minutes, from the discussion at Cabinet and indeed from the whole of the public discourse around this.

“Now you could have regime change happening in a number of different ways. There didn’t need to be military action but the likelihood was that’s what would happen.”²⁴⁴

665. Lord Wilson confirmed that the flavour of the discussion was of turmoil in the Middle East and the Arab world, although “we were left in no doubt by Crawford ... that the Americans wanted regime change”, which “in a sense” was “not news”. In addition to Mr Blair, Mr Straw and Mr Hoon, four Cabinet Ministers had spoken on Iraq.²⁴⁵

666. Lord Wilson described Mr Blair’s report to Cabinet on 11 April as:

“... skilfully touching on the things Cabinet had been concerned about and reassuring them that nothing was imminent and he was using his influence to bring the American President in the direction he wanted to go. Indeed, I think he may have been congratulated by one Cabinet Minister on shifting American thinking in ... the direction of the United [Nations].”²⁴⁶

667. Lord Wilson added that he did not think “anyone would have gone away thinking they had authorised a course of action likely to lead to military action”.

²⁴³ Statement, 14 January 2011, page 4.

²⁴⁴ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 13-14.

²⁴⁵ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, pages 74-76.

²⁴⁶ Public hearing, 25 January 2011, pages 75-76.

668. Mr Straw continued to make clear, as he had suggested in his letter of 25 March, that action in support of regime change in Iraq would be justified only as a means to remove the threat from WMD.

669. SIS activity was discussed in a meeting with Mr Straw and Mr Wright on 11 April.²⁴⁷

670. Mr McDonald's record of the meeting stated that Mr Straw had noted that:

“... legally and politically, regime change in Iraq was justified only as a means to the end of removing the threat of their WMD. If Saddam Hussein were to allow in weapons inspectors, that would change the equation: to seek regime change would no longer be possible for us because our desired end state would have been achieved.”

671. Mr Straw also agreed with Mr Wright that the focus was on operations which built up the forces of opposition and democracy.

The perceptions of key officials

672. The evidence offered to the Inquiry and accounts in memoirs provide some indications of the perceptions held by key officials about the UK's strategy before Mr Blair's meeting with President Bush at Crawford.

673. In his memoir, Sir Christopher Meyer described his view of the position before Mr Blair's meeting with President Bush.²⁴⁸ He wrote that the debate about Iraq in Washington “had become deafening”, although on the eve of Mr Blair's visit the escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians had “reached such a pitch that for a while it pushed Iraq into the background”. It had been clear to him that President Bush was:

“... determined to implement the official American policy of regime change; but the how and when ... were uncertain. It made war probable but not inevitable ... There were one or two people in Washington, whose judgement I respected, who thought that when Bush finally realised the scale of his Iraqi ambition, he would see that the risk was too great.

“It was time to put our fix into American thinking before it coagulated ...”

674. Sir Christopher added:

“The central issue was to influence the Americans. Blair had already taken the decision to support regime change, though he was discreet about saying so in public. It would be fruitless to challenge a fixed ... policy that had bipartisan support in the US. It was hard to see how Saddam could be de-fanged without

²⁴⁷ Minute McDonald to [SIS10], 12 April 2002, '[Name of Operation]'.

²⁴⁸ Meyer C. *DC Confidential: The Controversial Memoirs of Britain's Ambassador to the U.S. at the Time of 9/11 and the Run-up to the Iraq War*. Phoenix, 2006.

being removed from power. Blair was also wedded to the proposition that, to have influence in Washington, it was necessary to hug the Americans close ...”

675. Sir Christopher wrote that “Support for regime change caused deep concern inside the Foreign Office.” There were questions about the legal basis and uncertainties about the consequences of action. Those were tough questions on which the UK wanted the US to focus. In his conversation with Mr Wolfowitz on 17 March, Sir Christopher had taken his cue from Sir David Manning’s exchanges with Dr Rice, and:

“To reinforce my credentials as something to say worth listening to, I emphasised the Prime Minister’s commitment to regime change. I wanted Wolfowitz to know that we were starting from the same premise, and that in Britain it was not without political cost. It was the diplomacy of ‘Yes, but ...”

676. Sir Christopher described the approach as identifying tough questions which would need to be answered if the US wanted coalition partners and support from the international community, including the need for a “clever plan which convinced people that there was a legal basis for toppling Saddam”.

677. Sir Christopher told the Inquiry that, in his speech at College Station on 7 April 2002, Mr Blair had tried to:

“... draw the lessons of 9/11 and apply them to the situation in Iraq, which led, I think, not inadvertently, but deliberately, to a conflation of the threat by Usama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein.”²⁴⁹

678. Sir Christopher added that the speech represented “a tightening of the UK/US alliance and the degree of convergence on the danger that Saddam Hussein presented”. It drew on Mr Blair’s speech on humanitarian intervention in Chicago in 1999, and “was a rather sophisticated argument for pre-emption”, that Saddam Hussein’s record was “too bad” and the potential threat he presented could not be ignored.

679. Sir Christopher Meyer told the Inquiry that by the time Mr Blair and President Bush met at Crawford:

“... they weren’t there to talk about containment or sharpening sanctions. There had been a sea change in attitudes in the US Administration to which the British Government, progressively from October [2001] onwards, had to adapt and make up its mind where it stood.”²⁵⁰

680. In his statement, Sir Jeremy Greenstock wrote:

“I was aware of the theoretical option to promote regime change through the use of force; but it was not until February or March 2002 that I heard that serious

²⁴⁹ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, pages 29-30.

²⁵⁰ Public hearing, 26 November 2009, page 37.

preparations might have begun in Washington for an attack on Iraq. Even then I gave these relatively little credence ... my conception of the difficulties and downsides of taking on such a task outweighed my understanding of the determination of the Bush Administration to undertake such an initiative.”²⁵¹

681. Sir Jeremy Greenstock told the Inquiry:

“It wasn’t until the Crawford meeting ... that I realised that the United Kingdom was being drawn into quite a different sort of discussion, but that discussion was not made totally visible to me ... nor did I have any instructions to behave any differently in the United Nations as a result of what might have been going on in bilateral discussions with the United States.

“... I wasn’t being politically naive, but I wasn’t being politically informed either, and I had a job to do to maximise the strength of the United Nations instruments on Iraq at the time ... and that continued to mean acting under the resolutions we had.”²⁵²

682. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry:

“Our view, the Prime Minister’s view, the British Government’s view throughout this episode was that the aim was disarmament. It was not regime change. The Prime Minister never made any secret of the fact that if the result of disarming Saddam was regime change, he thought this would be a positive thing, but, for the Americans, it was. It was, ‘We want regime change in order to disarm Saddam Hussein.’”²⁵³

683. Sir David told the Inquiry that at Crawford Mr Blair was saying:

“Yes, there is a route through this that is a peaceful and international one, and it is through the UN, but, if it doesn’t work, we will be ready to undertake regime change.”²⁵⁴

684. Sir David Manning believed Mr Blair had wanted to influence US policy towards Iraq:

“I think that when it became clear ... that the United States was thinking of moving its policy forward towards regime change, he [Mr Blair] wanted to try and influence the United States and get it to stay in the UN, to go the UN route, which is what we spent the rest of the year trying to do, but he was willing to signal that he accepted that disarmament might not be achieved through the UN route.

“But I don’t think he felt ... that these were moments of decision in February and March before he went to Crawford. I think he saw that much more as an attempt

²⁵¹ Statement, November 2009, page 5.

²⁵² Public hearing, 27 November 2009, pages 24-25.

²⁵³ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, page 24

²⁵⁴ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, page 58.

to find out where the Americans had got to, but to impress on them his own conviction that we needed to ensure that inspections were continued.”²⁵⁵

685. Asked whether the US had already changed tack, Sir David replied:

“I think you are right about the Americans moving onto a different track ... the perception ... was that containment was probably finished ... but I don’t think, at that stage, there was a view in London ... that we had completely given up on containment. We were waiting ... to see what sort of pressure the US would produce in the light of the debate that we knew was taking place in handling Iraq.

“Our concern ... and the Prime Minister’s view ... was that it [action on Iraq] must be retained within the United Nations ... I don’t think he thought ... that it was likely that the President ... would accept containment any longer, and I suspect that he probably didn’t think containment was relevant any longer; but I think he did think that there was everything to play for in terms of trying to ensure that the Iraq problem remained managed in an international context, rather than that the Americans went unilaterally for regime change.”²⁵⁶

686. Asked when Iraq became a priority for the UK, Sir David Manning responded:

“In the early months of 2002 ... we knew that we had to deal with Iraq as a more pressing priority because the US Administration were going to insist on making it more prominent. They were concerned about a threat from Iraq in a new way because they believed threats internationally were now threats they had to meet rather than contain.

“... Iraq was given a salience, it was given an importance because the US Administration was determined to confront the international community over this perceived threat. Therefore we had to respond to that.”²⁵⁷

687. Asked about the rationale for focusing on Iraq in the early months of 2002, Sir David Manning replied:

“... because the US Administration was determined to confront the international community over this perceived threat. Therefore, we had to respond to that ... This was something that the Prime Minister wanted resolved in an international context ... he wanted the inspectors to be reintroduced into Iraq ... and he believed international pressure was the best way of trying to ensure that happened, and that in turn was the best way of managing the Iraq crisis that had been given a new prominence by an American Administration that was no longer willing to settle for containment.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 75-76.

²⁵⁶ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 76-77.

²⁵⁷ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, page 78.

²⁵⁸ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 78-79.

688. Mr Campbell told the Inquiry that he disagreed with Sir Christopher Meyer's analysis that Mr Blair's position had shifted from a policy of containment and disarmament to one of regime change.²⁵⁹ He described Mr Blair's policy, before Crawford, at Crawford and afterwards as "to pursue disarmament of Saddam Hussein through the United Nations".

689. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that the policy:

"... was to persuade the Americans to take a multilateral approach, to put the focus on the UN, to give Saddam a chance to comply with the UN Resolutions and to force the issue there ... the only way you can get Saddam's attention is by the threat of military force."²⁶⁰

690. Mr Powell added that it was "a shift to a policy of disarmament through the UN", leading to military action and regime change, "If that is what was necessary to remove the threat of weapons of mass destruction".

691. Asked whether he thought "the Foreign and Defence Secretaries were trying to pull back on the Prime Minister's reins in giving advice", Sir David Manning told the Inquiry:

"Yes, I think probably I did. How far, I'm not sure, but ... certainly the Foreign Secretary was keen ... to make it very clear there were risks ... and not to be more forward than was wise for the Government, especially when he didn't know exactly where the policy was going to take us ... I think it probably was an attempt to say let's just see where the Americans are going on this. It's a position I would certainly sympathise with."²⁶¹

692. In the context of a reference during his evidence about his visit to the US in March 2002, to his strong personal view that the issue was disarmament not regime change, Sir David Manning was asked how much he was trying to influence Mr Blair.²⁶² Sir David responded that he:

"... certainly argued strongly for the UN route with the Prime Minister, and subsequently argued very strongly that we needed two resolutions. I also argued very strongly with him that we needed more time."

693. Sir David added, "that's what you are paid for". Mr Blair had wanted to know what he thought.

²⁵⁹ Public hearing, 12 January 2010, pages 22-23.

²⁶⁰ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 67.

²⁶¹ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 30.

²⁶² Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 29.

694. Asked about the rationale for focusing on Iraq first, Sir David responded that he thought there were a number of reasons. One was:

“... that the Americans were determined to focus on it. We weren’t given a choice ... In the international system, whether it wanted to have a good look at Iraq at this point or not, it really had no option because Bush was going to do this ...

“The question was therefore how far you could get inside the argument and try and shape it and shape what happened, and I think that’s where the Prime Minister was in April. They are going to do something. We have to try and be in a position to affect the policy.

“He believed ... that given his own relationship with Bush, he probably had a good chance of doing that. So therefore he was determined to have that discussion, though ... he didn’t need any persuading that Iraq was a problem ... he felt Iraq was a serious destabilising influence in the system, but I don’t want to pretend that it would have been his top priority at this stage if it hadn’t been one of Bush’s top priorities ... it wouldn’t ...”²⁶³

695. Asked whether Mr Blair was more forward leaning about getting rid of Saddam Hussein than his principal advisers, including Sir David himself, Sir David responded that, in terms of Mr Blair’s position as a very prominent actor on the international stage:

“Iraq fits into a pattern ... interventionism in the Balkans ... Kosovo ... Sierra Leone ... Afghanistan, he’s very much an activist ... much more inclined to push and take the bold action than probably other members of his Cabinet.”²⁶⁴

696. Asked if Mr Blair would have listened to a contrary opinion if one had been “argued powerfully” at the Chequers meeting, Sir David told the Inquiry that Mr Blair would have listened but:

“... he was somebody who was very comfortable with his own convictions ... believed he had a capacity to influence the international system in quite profound ways, had a quite a lot of success doing this ... he had a sense that he could actually act for the good, he could change things, and that this was absolutely a role that he felt he could command.”²⁶⁵

697. Sir David added:

“I don’t want to suggest he’s not open to argument ... He was absolutely up for argument and didn’t hold it against you. But I think this is part of a deep conviction that there are moments when you can change things, you’ve got to have the courage to do it, and he was up for that.”²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 31.

²⁶⁴ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 32-33.

²⁶⁵ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 32-33.

²⁶⁶ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 33.

698. Sir David described Mr Blair’s objectives at Crawford as:

“I think it was to find out where Bush was going [on Iraq] ... What did Bush really think and what were Bush’s intentions [...]

“... he said to me afterwards ... Bush is interested in going the international route and he’s not simply going to become – I can’t remember his wording – the creature of the American right or something like this.”

“He came away ... reassured that it was quite possible to persuade Bush to use the international system, rather than to bypass it.”²⁶⁷

699. Sir David Manning did not believe that in April and May 2002 Mr Blair:

“... made his mind up he was going to send troops. I think he was always ready to do it, but he always hoped he wouldn’t have to ... I certainly didn’t feel [Crawford] was a moment of decision, no.”²⁶⁸

700. Sir David added that the discussion at Crawford had been “evolutionary” but it had “crystallised the sense that we had that American thinking had gone up a gear”.

701. Sir David stated:

“But I think the reality, as far as the ... international politics were concerned, that the Americans were focused on Iraq, and the issue was how we were going to manage this.”²⁶⁹

702. Asked where the UK emphasis was on the policy options when he joined No.10 in February 2002, Mr Matthew Rycroft, one of Mr Blair’s two Private Secretaries for Foreign Affairs, told the Inquiry:

“From my recollection by the time I joined Downing Street the British Government had essentially decided that continued containment was not going to work ... we were on a track of ... dealing with Iraq’s WMD ... what dealing meant was to be determined by the policy over the coming months.”²⁷⁰

703. Mr Rycroft told the Inquiry:

“Undoubtedly the thought was in the Prime Minister’s mind that if at the end of this we were going to go down the military intervention route, then ... the aftermath would be many years.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 37-38.

²⁶⁸ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 39.

²⁶⁹ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 66.

²⁷⁰ Private hearing, 10 September 2010, page 3.

²⁷¹ Private hearing, 10 September 2010, page 12.

704. Mr Rycroft added that Mr Blair would have seen the advice he had received from the Defence and Foreign Secretaries as “caution verging on sort of unnecessarily pessimistic”.²⁷²

Mr Blair’s evidence

705. Mr Blair set out his position on the preparations for Crawford and the position he adopted in his discussions with President Bush in his evidence to the Inquiry in 2010 and 2011, and in his memoir in 2010.

706. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that, after the Cabinet Office ‘Options Paper’ in March 2002, there were “a whole series of government discussions about smart sanctions”.²⁷³

707. Asked how the options on Iraq had been identified and reviewed, Mr Blair told the Inquiry that a decision had been taken after 11 September:

“... that this issue had to be confronted ... It could be confronted by an effective sanctions framework. It could be confronted by Saddam allowing the inspectors back in to do their work properly and compliance with the UN resolutions, or, in the final analysis ... if sanctions could not contain him and he was not prepared to allow the inspectors back in, then the option of removing Saddam was there.”²⁷⁴

708. Asked whether he had had a meeting to discuss the ‘Options Paper’ and take decisions on it, Mr Blair told the Inquiry he had talked to Mr Straw and Mr Hoon, there had been a meeting of “the key people to decide where we were then going to go”, and the meeting at Chequers had been a “very structured debate”.²⁷⁵

709. Mr Blair confirmed that the ‘Options Paper’ had not been discussed in Cabinet.²⁷⁶

710. Mr Blair subsequently told the Inquiry:

“Well, the ‘Options Paper’ really said two things. It said you can either go for containment. We can’t guarantee that that’s successful. He will probably continue to develop his programmes and be a threat, but nonetheless that is one option. The other option is regime change.”²⁷⁷

711. Mr Blair added:

“... there’s nothing in those papers ... that wasn’t surfaced as part of the discussion ... [which] all the way through was: what is the judgment? ... That was certainly part of the discussion that was going on in Cabinet. Now you can say, and I would be perfectly happy if you did say, look it is better to disclose all those or give everybody

²⁷² Private hearing, 10 September 2010, pages 12-13.

²⁷³ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 14.

²⁷⁴ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 18-19.

²⁷⁵ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 21-22.

²⁷⁶ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 23.

²⁷⁷ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, page 12.

a copy of those papers. I certainly didn't say they shouldn't be, but the content of those papers, that is something that was very, very adequately discussed and the issue was clear in the end. There was not a great dispute about what we thought about the facts. The facts were he is continuing to develop WMD. He has the intention of doing that. It is crucial to his regime. On the other hand, so far we have contained him."

712. Asked what Admiral Boyce had advised (at Chequers), Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the concern was to make sure that the UK "got alongside" any US planning and "did it [the military campaign] as quickly as possible".²⁷⁸

713. Mr Blair described the Chequers meeting in his memoir as a meeting:

"... with senior army officers ... not specifically in preparation for Crawford, but to kick around the basic questions of what military action might entail. There had been discussion about whether our aim was focused on WMD or regime change. I had emphasised that the two were linked, and also that it was hard at this point to say that the nature of the WMD threat specific to Iraq had changed demonstrably in the last few years. It was the assessment of risk that had."²⁷⁹

714. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that, after the meeting at Chequers and before the meeting with President Bush, there had been "quite an intensive interaction on this whole issue ... smart sanctions, because I needed to get a sense of whether this policy ... was really going to be a runner or not".²⁸⁰

715. Asked whether by the time of the meeting at Crawford he had reached the point of regarding the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime as a valid objective of UK policy, Mr Blair responded:

"No, the absolutely key issue was the WMD issue ..."²⁸¹

716. Asked what he intended to achieve at Crawford, Mr Blair replied he intended:

"... to get a real sense from the Americans as to what they wanted to do, and this would be best done between myself and President Bush, and really to get a sense of how our own strategy was going to have to evolve in the light of that."²⁸²

717. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that "nothing was actually decided at Crawford", and explained the importance of a "close and strong relationship" between a British Prime Minister and the President of the US and being able to discuss what the issues were "in a very frank way". His conversation with President Bush had been "less to do with the specifics about what we were going to do on Iraq" or the Middle East. The principal

²⁷⁸ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 38.

²⁷⁹ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

²⁸⁰ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 36-37.

²⁸¹ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 25.

²⁸² Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 40.

part of the conversation had been about his view that “dealing with the various different dimensions” of the “whole issue ... to do with unrepresentative extremism within Islam in a different way”. He “wanted to persuade President Bush, but also get a sense from him where he was on that broader issue”.²⁸³

718. Mr Blair added:

“The only commitment I gave, and I gave this very openly, at the meeting was a commitment to deal with Saddam.”²⁸⁴

719. Asked whether he and President Bush were agreed on the ends but not the means, Mr Blair replied:

“We were agreed on both ... we were agreed that we had to confront this issue, that Saddam had to come back into compliance with the international community, and ... the method is open ...

“... one major part of what President Bush was saying to me was just to express his fear ... that if we weren’t prepared to act in a really strong way, then we ran the risk of sending a disastrous signal to the world.”²⁸⁵

720. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that he could not “explain how people have come to the view that there was some different commitment given”. What he had said to President Bush was “we are going to be with you in confronting and dealing with this threat”, as he had said at the subsequent press conference.²⁸⁶

721. Asked what conclusions President Bush would have taken from the meeting about his commitment to deal with Saddam Hussein through military action, Mr Blair replied:

“I think he took ... exactly what he should have taken, which is that, if it came to military action because there was no way of dealing with this diplomatically, we would be with him ... because, as I had set out publicly ... we had to confront this issue, it could be confronted by a sanctions framework that was effective ... we didn’t have one. It could be confronted by a UN inspections framework ... or, alternatively, it would have to be confronted by force ... We had been through this with Saddam several times ... the fact is that force was always an option. What changed after September 11 was this, if necessary, and there was no other way of dealing with this threat, we were going to remove him.”²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 40-41.

²⁸⁴ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 42.

²⁸⁵ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 42-43.

²⁸⁶ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 43-44.

²⁸⁷ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 47-48.

722. Asked whether the commitment had been given for tactical reasons, Mr Blair replied:

“It wasn’t so much for tactical reasons ... I believed if you wanted to make a real change to this whole issue – this is very important to understanding ... my strategic thinking ...

“What I believed we confronted was a new threat ... based, not on political ideology, but on religious fanaticism ...

“What I was trying to set out, not for tactical reasons, but for deep strategic reasons, is: what did we need to do to make a successful assault on this ideology that was so dangerous? Therefore, the Middle East Peace Process was absolutely fundamental ... to dealing with this issue.”²⁸⁸

723. Asked if there was an identity of view at the meeting on how to deal with Iraq, Mr Blair replied:

“We were of course pushing the UN route ... the American view was regime change ... because they didn’t believe Saddam would ever, in good faith, give up his WMD ambitions or programmes.”²⁸⁹

724. Asked if his view of the means to achieve the objective was different from the US because it was not keen on the UN route, Mr Blair replied:

“We did have to persuade them [the US], although I think it is fair to say that, even at that meeting [Crawford], President Bush made it clear that America would have to adjust policy if Saddam let the inspectors back in and the inspectors were able to function properly.”²⁹⁰

725. Addressing the key messages in his speech at College Station, Mr Blair drew the Inquiry’s attention to his argument that the international community should not shrink from confronting regimes which were “engaged in terror or WMD”. Some could be offered “a route to respectability” but, in relation to Iraq the point he was making was that:

“... the issue was very simple ... the need to make absolutely clear that from now on you did not defy the international community on WMD.”²⁹¹

726. Mr Blair added that when a regime was brutal and oppressive it was a bigger threat when it possessed WMD than “otherwise benign” regimes.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 48-49.

²⁸⁹ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 50.

²⁹⁰ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 50.

²⁹¹ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 27-28.

²⁹² Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 29.

727. Mr Blair said that Iraq posed a “conjoined” threat, “it was an appalling regime and we couldn’t run the risk of such a regime being allowed to develop WMD”.²⁹³

728. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the American position, after the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act in 1998, was “for regime change” because it did not “trust he [Saddam Hussein] is ever going to give up his WMD ambitions”. The UK position was: “We have to deal with WMD ambitions. If that means regime change, so be it.” Mr Blair’s view was that they were “different ways of expressing the same proposition”.²⁹⁴

729. In his memoir, Mr Blair wrote that “planning was inevitable and right, not because war was inevitable but because it was an option and ... had to be planned for”. The meeting in Crawford was “the first time we got to grips with it [Iraq] properly”.²⁹⁵

730. Mr Blair continued:

“From my standpoint, by this time, I had resolved in my own mind that removing Saddam would do the world, and most particularly the Iraqi people, a service. Though I knew regime change could not be our policy, I viewed a change with enthusiasm not dismay.

“In my Chicago speech of 1999, I had enunciated the new doctrine of a ‘responsibility to protect’, i.e. that a government could not be free grossly to oppress and brutalise its citizens. I had put that into effect in Kosovo and Sierra Leone.

“... because war should be the last not the first resort, I had come to a firm conclusion that we could only do it on the basis of non-compliance with UN resolutions. Tyrant though he was, Saddam could not be removed on the basis of tyranny alone.

...

“... I was clear about two things.

“The first was that Saddam had to be made to conform to the UN resolutions ...

“The second was that Britain had to remain ... ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with America. This is not as crude or unthinking a policy as it sounds. It didn’t mean we sacrificed our interest to theirs; or subcontracted out our foreign policy. It meant that the alliance between our two nations was a vital strategic interest and, as far as I was concerned, a vital strategic asset for Britain.

“It implied we saw attacks on the US as attacks on us ... It argued for an attitude that did see us genuinely as at war together, with a common interest in a successful outcome ... our job as an ally ... should be to be with them in their hour of need.

²⁹³ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 35.

²⁹⁴ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 36.

²⁹⁵ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

I know all this can be made to sound corny or even ... self-deceiving in terms of our effect on US decision-making. I was well aware that ultimately the US would take its own decisions in its own interests. But I was also aware that ... Britain and Europe were going to face a much more uncertain future without America ... our alliance with the US mattered ...

“So when they had need of us, were we really going to refuse; or, even worse, hope they succeeded but could do it without us? I reflected and felt the weight of an alliance and its history, not oppressively but insistently, a call to duty, a call to act, a call to be at their side, not distant from it, when they felt imperilled.”²⁹⁶

731. In his memoir, Mr Blair wrote:

“We needed to get alongside that [US] planning and be part of it. Of course, as ever, that presented a dilemma: If you wanted to be part of the planning, you had to be, at least in principle, open to being part of the action early on, because I could see ... this might have to end with Saddam’s forcible removal, I resolved to be part of the planning. From around April, we were then fairly closely involved even in the early stages of US thinking.

“None of this meant that war was certain. It wasn’t and indeed a constant part of the interaction between George and myself through those months, probably up to around November, was acute anxiety that since we were planning for the possible, that meant in the media mind that it was inevitable. We had the basic concepts ironed out: Saddam had to comply with the UN resolutions and let the inspectors back in: he couldn’t, on this occasion, be allowed to mess about – his compliance had to be total; and if he refused we were going to be in a position where we were capable of removing him. So the diplomacy and the planning proceeded along separate but plainly at certain points connected tracks.

“It made domestic politics, however, highly uncomfortable. Naturally people were reading the reports, assuming everything was decided and taking positions accordingly. If we said that war was not agreed, they asked if we were planning; if we accepted we were doing some form of planning, that meant war was indeed agreed. The notion of a contingency was too subtle. And, to be fair, many of the noises emanating from parts of the US system did suggest that there was only one direction in which policy should go.”²⁹⁷

732. In his account of the discussions with President Bush, Mr Blair wrote:

“Behind closed doors ... our talk was more nuanced. We shared the analysis about the nature of the Saddam government, its risk to security and also the wider problems of the region. My concern then and subsequently was to locate

²⁹⁶ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

²⁹⁷ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

the question of Saddam in the broader context of the Middle East as a region in transition. Even then, though less clearly than today, I saw the disparate issues as essentially part of the same picture. Therefore I made a major part of my pitch to George the issue of the Israeli-Palestine peace process. To me this was the indispensable soft-power component to give equilibrium to the hard power that was necessary if Saddam was to be removed.”²⁹⁸

733. The Inquiry asked Mr Blair if there was “an explicit, recorded statement of what the UK’s objectives were in April 2002”, and how they had been agreed.²⁹⁹ It also asked:

- what the UK objectives were in September 2002 and what process had been used to revise those objectives between April and September;
- how the US had interpreted comments in his meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld on 5 June and in his Note to President Bush on 28 July; and whether he had any concerns that that “pre-empted collective discussion” with Cabinet colleagues.

734. In his statement Mr Blair chose to address those points together, writing:

“Though the meeting at Crawford provides a convenient breakpoint for the purposes of the narrative, I want to stress it did not result in an alteration of policy. The policy had been clear since 9/11: we wanted to take a tougher line altogether on terrorism and WMD globally, and sought to bring Saddam into compliance with UN authority ... [T]he Crawford meeting was ... a chance to explain how best to implement it ... Prior to the visit I had studied the Cabinet Office Options Paper, together with recent JIC reports. I had also had the Chequers meeting with CDS and read-outs of the military interaction with Washington.

“The objectives of our policy were not secret. They were set out in numerous statements by myself and other Ministers ...

“The objective never changed between April and September 2002. It remained ... to bring Saddam back to full and unconditional compliance with UN resolutions in respect of which he had been in breach for over a decade. It was absolutely clear that we were going to be with the US in implementing this objective. There can be no-one who was in any doubt about my determination on that score. I expressed it publicly. I made it clear also to President Bush I would be with him in tackling it ... I could not and did not offer some kind of ‘blank cheque’ in how we accomplished our shared objective ... I would never engage in any military campaign our military thought unwise or unachievable. What I was signalling was there would be no withdrawal of support for something we thought right and do-able, simply for reasons of political pressure, i.e. I was going to be steadfast as an ally ... I sent this signal both because I believed in the substance and because we would be right alongside the US thinking from the outset.

²⁹⁸ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

²⁹⁹ Inquiry request for a witness statement, 13 December 2010, Q2 page 1.

“My public pronouncements – especially at Crawford ... and in the speech the next day, could have left no-one in any doubt as to my position.”³⁰⁰

735. In his statement, Mr Blair wrote that there had been “a full Cabinet discussion” after the visit on 11 April “where we set out our objectives”, and that:

“The issues were regularly debated in Cabinet. I was answering questions on it, giving press interviews. It was a dominant news issue. I was constantly interacting on it, therefore, with colleagues, MPs and the media, and in the most plain terms.”³⁰¹

736. Asked if the meeting with President Bush at Crawford had been a turning point, Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

“It wasn’t a turning point. It was really that all the way through we were saying this issue now has to be dealt with. So Saddam either comes back into compliance with UN resolutions or action will follow.”³⁰²

Conclusions

737. As a means to sustain international support for a policy of containment and improve its effectiveness, the UK continued to pursue agreement to measures for implementation of the smarter economic sanctions regime, agreed in November 2001, in the first months of 2002.

738. But continuing divisions between Permanent Members of the Security Council meant there was no agreement on the way forward on the re-admission of weapons inspectors and establishing the verification and monitoring regime identified in resolution 1284 (1999). Without inspections, there was no route for Iraq to secure the lifting of economic sanctions.

739. There were clear signals from Washington that the US Administration was determined to deal with Iraq and key figures were contemplating military action to achieve regime change.

740. The JIC assessment of 27 February and the Cabinet Office ‘Options Paper’ of 8 March concluded that a large scale ground invasion was the only sure way to remove Saddam Hussein.

741. In public statements at the end of February and in the first week of March 2002, Mr Blair and Mr Straw set out the view that Iraq was a threat which had to be dealt with.

³⁰⁰ Statement, 14 January 2011, pages 3-4.

³⁰¹ Statement, 14 January 2011, page 4.

³⁰² Public hearing, 21 January 2011, page 8.

742. Iraq needed to disarm or be disarmed in accordance with the obligations imposed by the UN; and that it was important to agree to the return of UN inspectors to Iraq.

743. The focus on Iraq was not the result of a step change in Iraq’s capabilities or intentions.

744. Although the possibility of future military action provided the context for the discussion at Cabinet on 7 March, Mr Blair and Mr Straw emphasised that no decisions had been taken and Cabinet was not being asked to take decisions.

745. The discussion was couched in terms of Iraq’s need to comply with its obligations and future choices by the international community on how to respond to the threat which Iraq represented.

746. Cabinet endorsed the conclusion that Iraq’s WMD programmes posed a threat to peace and a strategy of engaging closely with the US Government in order to shape policy and its presentation. But it did not discuss how that might be achieved.

747. Mr Blair sought and was given information on a range of issues before his meeting with President Bush. But no formal and agreed analysis of the issues and options was sought or produced; and there was no collective consideration of such advice.

748. The advice offered to Mr Blair by Mr Straw, Mr Hoon and Mr Powell assumed that the US objective would be regime change and that the UK would be likely to support US-led military action in some circumstances if that could be shown to be necessary to eliminate Iraq’s WMD.

749. At Crawford, Mr Blair offered President Bush a partnership in dealing urgently with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. He proposed a strategy based on an ultimatum calling on Iraq to permit the return of weapons inspectors or face the consequences.

750. Mr Blair’s approach reflected the thinking in Mr Straw’s advice of 25 March. Proposing that the US and UK should seek an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein to readmit weapons inspectors provided a route for the UK to align itself with the US without adopting the US objective of regime change.

751. President Bush agreed to consider the idea but there was no decision until September 2002.

752. It was subsequently reported that, in his discussions with President Bush, Mr Blair set out a number of considerations in relation to the development of policy on Iraq, which were subsequently described by others as “conditions” for action (see Section 3.3).

753. Following his meeting with President Bush, Mr Blair stated that Saddam Hussein had to be confronted and brought back into compliance with the UN.

754. The statements made in public by Mr Blair clearly implied the use of force in the event that Saddam Hussein failed to comply with an ultimatum.

755. The acceptance of the possibility that the UK might participate in a military invasion of Iraq was a profound change in UK thinking. Although no decisions had been taken, that became the basis for contingency planning in the months ahead.