

From:
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To: submissions@iraqinquiry.org.uk
Cc:
Subject: Evidence on the build up to War 2001-3
Attachments: Iraq Report to 03 GThird.doc; mks Chilcot evidence 2001-2003 final.doc

Dear Sir/Madam

EVIDENCE TO THE CHILCOT INQUIRY

If it is not too late, I should like to submit evidence to the Inquiry. I asked Sir Lawrence Freedman informally, if as a mere backbench MP my evidence could be useful, and he was encouraging.

My evidence contains personal recall, but more importantly as explained in the Introduction makes use of a complete archive of the relevant Parliamentary Labour Party Briefings & e-mails for the period 2001-3. These are significant not only for having influenced MPs, but as probably reflecting more accurately how the Government leadership was wishing to influence them at any particularly time, than official documents.

I have also attached a chronological compilation of these briefings, made by my then senior researcher, in case it is useful for reference [236 pages with much repetition, so not ideal for printing out], and could supply computer files of the original documents if required.

Yours sincerely

MP for
Non-Proliferation

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Security and

The lead up to the Iraq War 2003

Evidence from

Introduction

This document contains personal recall which may be relevant to the circumstances of the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003, but more importantly makes use of an archive of all the Parliamentary Labour Party [PLP] Briefings relating to Iraq from mid-2001 to mid-2003².

These briefings were regularly sent to Labour MPs, Lords and their staff. They are significant because they may have influenced MPs votes as much or more than Governmental and Parliamentary statements. They may also more accurately reflect how the Labour Government's leadership was thinking and wishing to influence its Parliamentarians at any given time, than official Governmental statements and documents. I had formed that impression in relation to missile defence, in January 2001 there were media reports that the Prime Minister had done a deal with George W Bush to give support to the President's proposals. Official Government and Parliamentary responses denied that there had been any decision or change of policy for nearly two years, but PLP briefings started very soon to speak progressively more favourably about both missile defence and the abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

My constituency office manager and senior researcher, _____, had filed all PLP briefings on our office computer, so I asked him to extract all the relevant files. He also collated a summary of the briefings up to the outbreak of war, which accompanies this document.

In preparing this document I have assumed that both conversations and written communications, which I would have originally treated as confidential,

¹ MP for _____
Proliferation

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Security and Non-

² Which can be sent to the Inquiry if required.

should no longer be so regarded, given the passing of time and primarily the importance of the issues.

Summary of Parliamentary Labour Party Briefings up to February 2002

Prior to "9/11" Iraq is mentioned in briefings only in relation to missile defence.

After 11 September 2001 concentration is initially solely on Afghanistan, and on Thursday 4 October a dossier was produced on the justifications for action against the Taliban.

The first reference to action beyond Afghanistan is on Thursday 11 October and refers to non-military measures:

Action beyond Afghanistan.

We have always made clear that action will be in two phases, both of which have full support by the coalition.

The first is to eliminate the terrorist threat on Afghan soil.

The second, more long-term process, is to disrupt the financing and movement of terrorist organisations throughout the world.

The first reference to Iraq is on Friday 12 October:

Iraq

Secretary Colin Powell, Jack Straw and the PM have repeatedly made the point that they have seen no evidence linking Iraq with culpability for what happened in the US on September 11th.

On Thursday 8 November Iraq is mentioned in a section on **Diplomatic Action** but just in relation to a visit by Putin:

Regarding reports of President Putin visiting Iraq, we are not aware that any visit has been confirmed. This is matter for the Russians. However, we would hope that any contacts with the regime would be used to deliver tough messages about the need for Iraq to comply with UNSCRs.

The following week there was reference to the nuclear threat but in relation to Pakistan:

2.25 Labour Party Briefing – US terrorist attacks: Wednesday 14th November 2001

Nuclear Threat

There is no doubt that Osama bin Laden would obtain or use a nuclear weapon if he could but there is no evidence of any specific nuclear threat. Even so, we and the rest of the world take the threat very seriously. Pakistan, for example, has arrested nuclear scientists suspected of being dangerously close to the Taliban regime.

On Wednesday 28, Thursday 29, Friday 30 and Monday 3 December there were similar or identical messages:

Extension of action

Our current military action is focused on Afghanistan and on the primary task of bringing Osama Bin Laden, Al Qa'ida and the Taliban to justice. The UK has no evidence of Iraqi or other non-Al Qa'ida involvement in the 11 September attacks.

However the following day there was a dramatic change:

Labour Party Briefing – US terrorist attacks: Tuesday 4th December 2001

Extension of action

Our current military action is focused on Afghanistan and on the primary task of bringing Osama Bin Laden, Al Qa'ida and the Taliban to justice. The UK has no evidence of Iraqi or other non-Al Qa'ida involvement in the 11 September attacks.

However, as the PM has been clear from the outset - this is a campaign with two phases - firstly focussing on Afghanistan and then looking at the different aspects of international terrorism. We will proceed in consultation with our Coalition allies, as you would expect. The precise methods of action and other such questions will be a matter for deliberation.

Which was expanded two days later [my highlight]:

Labour Party Briefing – US terrorist attacks: Thursday 6th December 2001

Extension of action

Our current military action is focused on Afghanistan and on the primary task of bringing Osama Bin Laden, Al Qa'ida and the Taliban to justice. The UK has no evidence of other non-Al Qa'ida involvement in the 11 September attacks.

However, as the PM has been clear from the outset - this is a campaign with two phases - firstly focussing on Afghanistan and then looking at the different aspects of international terrorism. We have long-standing concerns about Iraq's record of support for terrorism but we will proceed in consultation with our Coalition allies, as you would expect. The precise methods of action and other such questions will be a matter for deliberation.

The same wording is used in briefing of Monday 10th December. Extension of action is not mentioned in the briefing of Tuesday 11th and on Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th, it reverts to:

Extension of action

Our current military action is focused on Afghanistan and on the primary task of bringing Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaida and the Taliban to justice. The UK has no evidence of other non-al-Qaida involvement in the 11 September attacks. However, as the PM has been clear from the outset - this is a campaign with two phases - firstly focusing on Afghanistan and then looking at the different aspects of international terrorism. The precise methods of action and other such questions will be a matter for deliberation.

The briefing for Friday 15th concentrated entirely on supporting US decision to withdraw from the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty and proceed with missile defence, briefings on Monday 17th and Tuesday 18th December repeated the paragraph [above] on extension for the 12th and 13th.

Speculation on the basis of this evidence seems tenuous but there does seem to be a shift in December to being more open to action against Iraq.

According to such sources as Woodward, on 21 November G W Bush authorised Rumsfeld to focus on the possibility of attacking Iraq and that was advanced during the next few days, and as the press report for 5 December quoted in Gordon Third's report shows, comments in Washington had caused concern abroad.

From the start of 2002 the title of the Briefings changes from "US terrorist attacks" to "International situation update". The briefing for Tuesday 8th, Thursday 17th, Friday 18th and Tuesday 29th January 2002 contain similar/identical wording:

Extension of action

Our current military action is focused on Afghanistan and on the primary task of bringing Osama Bin Laden and the al-Qaida terrorist network to justice. The UK has no evidence of other non-al-Qaida involvement in the 11 September attacks. However, this is a campaign with two strands - firstly focusing on Afghanistan and then looking at the different aspects of counter-terrorism, including investigation, tracing and seizing of funds and other actions.

From the start of February there is a clear change following the State of the Union address:

Labour Party Briefing – International situation update: Friday 1st Feb 2002

Key messages

- The UK and coalition partners are committed to the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- The UK is leading the International Security Assistance Force, whose mandate is to provide security assistance to the Interim Authority in Kabul and its surrounding areas.
- As we have always said, our wider objectives in defeating international terrorism include taking action to deter states from supporting, harbouring or acting complicity with international terrorist groups.
- We said we were in this for the long haul and we are.

Extension of military action

Our operations in Afghanistan have once again demonstrated the skills, capabilities and flexibility of our Armed Forces. We are not prepared to speculate about what further military action we might take. Our military action is focused on Afghanistan but terrorism is a wider problem. We will take action as a world community on its financing, weapons capability and the movement of terrorists, wherever we can. Nor are we prepared to speculate about whether future military operations in the campaign against international terrorism will affect any particular country.

Military action

While much has been achieved, there is still more to do to rid Afghanistan of foreign terrorists, to eliminate al-Qaida cells around the world, and to wipe out the scourge of terrorism that threatens us all. Military operations will continue in Afghanistan while the Coalition's objectives of bringing Osama bin Laden and his associates to justice and preventing the al-Qaida network prevented from posing a continuing terrorist threat are pursued.³

Winning the war on terrorism

President Bush made clear in his State of the Union address on Tuesday, that while coalition action has achieved a great deal in shutting down terrorist networks in Afghanistan, America will continue to fight the war on terrorism. Speaking in his first State of the Union Address, the President said, "What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning...If we stop now – leaving terror camps intact and terror states unchecked – our sense of security would be false and temporary."

We and our coalition partners share US objectives on the war on terrorism; the twin goals of firstly, shutting down terrorist camps, disrupting terrorist plans and bringing terrorists to justice, and secondly, interdicting terrorists and regimes who seek to threaten global security with weapons of mass destruction.

Labour Party Briefing – International situation update: Monday 4th Feb 2002

³ PLP Briefings are repeated verbatim including errors.

Key messages

- Bringing terrorists to justice remains one of the international coalition's main objectives in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11.
- Al- Qaida suspects currently detained by the US in Guantanamo Bay are being treated humanely and consistent with the principles of the Geneva Convention. They receive full medical treatment and there is no interrogation during the treatment.
- As we have always said, our wider objectives in defeating international terrorism include taking action to deter states from supporting, harbouring or acting complicity with international terrorist groups.
- We said we were in this for the long haul and we are.

Extension of military action

[Identical to 1st February]

Military action

[Identical to 1st February]⁴

Winning the war on terrorism

While coalition action has achieved a great deal in shutting down terrorist networks in Afghanistan, the international coalition campaign against terrorism continues. As President Bush said in his State of the Union Address, "What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning...If we stop now – leaving terror camps intact and terror states unchecked – our sense of security would be false and temporary." (29/01/02)

We and our coalition partners share US objectives on the war on terrorism; the twin goals of firstly, shutting down terrorist camps, disrupting terrorist plans and bringing terrorists to justice, and secondly, interdicting terrorists and regimes who seek to threaten global security with weapons of mass destruction.

3.9 Labour Party Briefing – International situation update: Wednesday 6th Feb 2002

Key messages

- As we have always said, our wider objectives in defeating international terrorism include taking action to deter states from supporting, harbouring or acting complicity with international terrorist groups.
- We said we were in this for the long haul and we are.
- Bringing terrorists to justice remains one of the international coalition's main objectives in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11.

⁴ Uncorrected

- Al-Qaida suspects currently detained by the US in Guantanamo Bay are being treated humanely and consistent with the principles of the Geneva Convention. They receive full medical treatment and there is no interrogation during the treatment.

Extension of military action beyond Afghanistan

Our operations in Afghanistan have once again demonstrated the skills, capabilities and flexibility of our Armed Forces. We are not prepared to speculate about what further military action we might take.

Our military action is focused on Afghanistan, but terrorism is a wider problem. We will take action as a world community on its financing, weapons capability and the movement of terrorists, wherever we can. Nor are we prepared to speculate about whether future military operations in the campaign against international terrorism will affect any particular country.

Parliamentary Recess February 2002

There was a recess from Thursday 14 to Monday 25 February, shortly before which I was invited by the political staff at the US Embassy to meet with a visiting member of the Bush administration during the break.

the All-Party Parliamentary Group [APPG] on Global Security and Non-Proliferation I knew the Embassy staff as frequent attenders at our meetings and had regularly been asking if there was any possibility of their being able to persuade any visiting member of the administration to speak at our APPG. I was happy to accept their invitation, and when they asked me to lunch and if I would like to bring a guest, asked if the Clerk to the APPG could come.

I was also asked by the BBC programme if I would record an interview with them during the recess (primarily on missile defence but also on the possibility of military action against Iraq) and agreed to do so.

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., US Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs accompanied by Joshua Hanson from the State Department, and David Noble [First Secretary] and Mort Dworkin [Minister Counselor for Political Affairs] from the Embassy met the APPG clerk and myself in Parliament on Monday 18 February, and took us across to the Footstool Restaurant under St John's Church, Smith Square for lunch.

On the way to the restaurant Lincoln Bloomfield stressed the importance the US placed on the "special relationship" with the UK. Over the meal he first said that despite any appearance to the contrary that the Bush administration was

united. He told us that the President had summoned the top political tiers of the different Departments - Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, Under Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries (?) – and said to them that they could argue publicly and robustly with each other about future policy until he made a Presidential decision, but then they must all fall into line.

Mr Bloomfield then devoted most of the time trying to persuade me of the necessity of a war of regime change against Iraq. After lengthy discussion which did not convince me, he drew attention to the new proposals by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for a Middle East Peace Process, which he indicated that the US regarded as constructive.

Discussing the meeting shortly afterwards, the APPG Clerk and I agreed Lincoln had impressed us throughout as courteous, moderate and very reasonable, in contrast to some of the “hawks” in the Bush administration. It was in subsequent discussion, and partly with the benefit of hindsight, that we agreed that the focus of discussion had all been on the importance of British support for a war of regime change on Iraq, to a degree that implied that at least to some extent a Presidential decision had been taken. Indeed this was consistent with the emphasis on the “special relationship”, Administration decision making, Iraq and even the Middle East Peace Process. For it became apparent that one of the ways that was used to persuade Labour MPs to support an Iraq war, was to link it to resolving the Israel-Palestine issue. It was an argument to which I was impervious, because though I cared deeply about Palestine, if war was unjustified it could not be made just by linking to an unconnected objective.

in the final Iraq debate, **18 Mar 2003 : Column 817**: “It is not a matter of trade-offs: this will not become a just war simply because we say as a trade-off that we will do something about the middle east peace process or that we will tidy up in the aftermath in a very decent way.”

Shortly after the meeting with Bloomfield the TV interview: “On The Record” was broadcast on Sunday 24 February. Douglas Henderson, Joyce Quin, Donald Anderson and I expressed reservations about attacking Iraq and/or missile defence. Interestingly Conservative MP Bernard Jenkin, who had just returned from a week in Washington and was more gung-ho about Iraq, claimed “Tony Blair has left Washington in no doubt that when the crunch comes he’ll be there”. That Sunday evening a friend informed me that a news

bulletin had said that Downing Street had issued a press release criticising Labour back-benchers for opposing a possible attack on Iraq.

I might have been less surprised if I had kept up-to-date with latest Labour Party Briefings –

“3.11 Labour Party Briefing – International situation update: Thursday 14th and Tuesday 19th Feb 2002

Iraq

We have made clear from the outset that the campaign against international terrorism would have two phases, first focusing on Afghanistan, then on differing aspects of international terrorism, including consideration of issues such as weapons of mass destruction. We have no wish to add to speculation on the precise course of action.

During military offensive operations in Afghanistan, the United States consulted extensively with its Allies. The UK anticipates that before any major operation in Iraq, this would also be the case. As US Secretary of State Colin Powell made clear in his interview with the Financial Times concerning the actions of President Bush: “He acts after considering all the alternatives. He acts after listening to all his advisers. He acts after consulting with his friends and allies. I think our European friends will continue to see him acting in that regard.” (The Financial Times, 14/02/02)

By the following Tuesday this had developed to:

“International situation update: Tuesday 26th Feb 2002:

1. Extension of military action

We have made clear from the outset that the campaign against international terrorism would have two phases, first focusing on Afghanistan, then on differing aspects of international terrorism, including consideration of issues such as weapons of mass destruction. We have no wish to add to speculation on the precise course of action.

If asked about Iraq

We know of no plans to attack Iraq. That said, during the military offensive operations in Afghanistan, the United States consulted extensively with its Allies. The UK anticipates that before any major operation in Iraq, this would also be the case.

Everything we have seen of the so-called Iraqi offers to allow its weapons to be inspected suggests they fall short of UN requirements. The UN requires full and unfettered access for weapons inspectors. We cannot accept an inspections regime that would allow Iraq to evade detection of its weapons.

These offers are ruses to make Iraq appear reasonable. It is significant that they have been made to the international media rather than to the UN.

UK position on Iraq

- Iraq poses a unique threat to the security of the Gulf region and the rest of the world;
- Saddam Hussein is the only dictator to have used weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against his own people and neighbours;
- He is prepared to use any means in pursuit of regional domination;
- He will use his weapons against the West too if he thinks he can get away with it;
- He is in breach of his international obligations: refusing to co-operate with the UN's efforts to help the Iraqi people and refusing to allow independent and impartial inspections of his weapons;
- Out of 27 separate obligations imposed on Iraq by the international community, Iraq is in breach of at least 23;
- Our quarrel is with Saddam Hussein, not the Iraqi people;
- Saddam Hussein has no respect for human life, or Islam;
- He is a brutal, secular tyrant;
- We are giving him every chance to comply with UN resolutions, but if he does not do so we shall have to consider other ways of dealing with the threat he poses.

Then as Clare Short recounts:

Inter viewed at a Commonwealth Conference in Australia on 3 March 2002, Blair insisted that Saddam Hussein was developing weapons of mass destruction and was capable of using them. Blair indicated that there was a case for dealing with Iraq as a matter of urgency. Asked if this meant war was imminent Blair replied, 'Let us wait and see exactly what happens, but it's clear we need to deal with the issue.'⁵

This was followed by The PLP Briefing Dossier of the 5th March, which was referred to in Ross Carne's evidence to the Committee, and which John Kampfner⁶ says Jack Straw's special assistant, Dr Michael Williams was requested to produce by Downing Street and Labour Party HQ.

I would suggest that this section of evidence could support evidence elsewhere that in early February or late January 2002, George W Bush became significantly more committed to a war of regime change with Iraq. This could

⁵ An Honourable Deception?, p127

⁶ Blair's Wars, p165

be supported by the report that even Colin Powell, who seemed deeply unhappy about that, shortly after the "Axis of Evil" speech gave evidence to the Senate Budget Committee in the following terms:

"With respect to Iran and with respect to North Korea, there is no plan to start a war with these nations," Secretary Powell said. In contrast, in discussing Iraq, he delivered a stern message.

"With respect to Iraq, it has long been, for several years now, a policy of the United States government that regime change would be in the best interests of the region, the best interests of the Iraqi people," he said. "And we are looking at a variety of options that would bring that about."⁷

Seymour Hersh claims:

There was little doubt among some White House insiders about what the President wanted to do, and about when he made his decision. "I arrived at the White House in early 2002, and began attending N.S.C. meetings with the President" a former National Security Council member told me. "Whenever the President would talk about Iraq, it was always something we knew we wanted to happen". White House talking points always noted that no decision had been made, the N.S.C. staff member added, but all involved knew it was a done deal. As of February 2002, he said, "the decision to go to war was taken."⁸

From February 2002 the Labour Party Briefing documents seem to indicate that the Prime Minister was more committed to a war of regime change than he suggested to Parliament or the people. The close correlation in time, and the lack of evidence of new British intelligence,⁹ could suggest that Mr Blair's decisions were influenced more by a desire to stay close to the Bush administration, than by any realistic threat to the UK.

According to Robin Cook possible military action against Iraq was first raised in Cabinet on Thursday 28 February, at the initiative of David Blunkett and not properly discussed until the following Thursday 7 March. Robin quotes Tony as concluding the discussion that day:

⁷ [NYT February 13, 2002, A NATION CHALLENGED: IRAQ; POWELL SAYS U.S. IS WEIGHING WAYS TO TOPPLE HUSSEIN, By MICHAEL R. GORDON and DAVID E. SANGER]

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/13/world/a-nation-challenged-iraq-powell-says-us-is-weighing-ways-to-topple-hussein.html?scp=2&sq=Gordon+Sanger+Powell&st=nyt>

⁸ Chain of Command , p188

⁹ "Post 9/11, the prevailing FCO view is summed up in a minute from the Political Director to the Foreign Secretary on 22 March 2002 to the effect that the assessment of Iraq's WMD capability had not changed over recent years, but that the UK *reaction* to that assessment had changed." [Ross Carne's statement of evidence to the Inquiry, para 20]. See also The Butler Report, para 427f.

'I tell you we must steer close to America. If we don't we will lose our influence to shape what they do. That is understood in Europe. I have spoken to both Jospin and Schroder, and they both understand we cannot oppose the Americans'.¹⁰

Chris Mullin records that at the Parliamentary Committee the previous day Wednesday 6 March:

On Iraq, the Man said nothing was planned in the immediate future. He would be seeing Bush in April. 'We have to tread carefully. It depends on what's proposed. Weapons of mass destruction is the real issue. The latest intelligence is very strong.'

However later Blair continues:

'I say to you very privately' he replied, 'that my strategy is to get alongside the Americans and try to shape what is to be done and that won't be done by grandstanding.' He added that this strategy had worked in Afghanistan. 'Things were done differently as a result of our involvement.'¹¹

A passage in John Kampfner's "Blair Wars" seems to corroborate suggestions made in this section of my evidence:

Within the Labour Party, concerns were mounting. Chris Smith, the former Culture Secretary, had been a friend of Blair's for years. He had been part of the leadership team in 1994. Even after being reshuffled out of the Cabinet in June 2001, he spent a day with the Blairs at their holiday villa in south-west France that August. They had had a long walk in the garden, talking politics. Blair told him that day he had three priorities for his second term of office: to improve public services in the UK; to take Britain into the Euro; and to show he could work with the Republicans. He was irked by the neocons' links with the Tory party. He was determined to do everything possible to prevent them driving a wedge between New Labour and the Republicans.

Smith kept his thoughts mainly to himself, and was reluctant to criticise Blair. But on 24 March 2002 he went on television to warn that many of his party colleagues 'would be worried if there were something being contemplated which was an all-out invasion of Iraq simply going on the coat-tails of an American unilateral decision.'

The next day Smith received a call from Blair's diary secretary, inviting him in for a chat. Smith told Blair he was seriously worried about the build-up to war – the military feasibility, the humanitarian consequences, the impact on the Middle East and the damage to the coalition against terror. Blair told him these were all entirely valid points, and that if he were not satisfied he had an answer to them, he would not go ahead. Blair assured him no decisions had been taken. And yet Smith thought, from the body language and his tone of voice, that the Prime Minister had already taken the decision.¹²

¹⁰ Point of Departure, p115

¹¹ A View from the Foothills, p265

¹² John Kampfner, Blair's War, pp167f. Kampfner expresses the view that a decision was made later. Tony Blair's concern in August 2001 at the possibility of the Conservative Party getting nearer to the Republicans would have increased next month, following the election as Leader of Ian Duncan Smith, who had long standing close relations with the US far right.

Further corroboration could be seen in the March memos from Sir David Manning and Sir Christopher Meyer indicating that they were assuring the US of UK support for "regime change".

Easter 2002

During the Easter recess I received an invitation to speak at a conference on international affairs at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and subsequently to accompany Professor Clifford Singer from that University to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Conference at the UN in New York. I was in the USA during the Bush-Blair meeting at Crawford.

Informal discussion at the University on Iraq was informative. Particularly a senior officer of the US armed forces, who was on study leave doing post-doctoral research, informed me that the senior echelons of both the US military and security services were deeply unhappy about the push towards war, which was being driven by the politicians. The Catholic chaplain advised me that US policy in the Middle East was being distorted not just by a powerful right wing Jewish lobby but by the fundamentalist "Christian Right", some of whom had very worrying interpretations of the Old Testament prophets and Revelation in relation to Israel, Armageddon and the Second Coming.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group [APPG] on Global Security and Non-Proliferation in conjunction with the United Nations APPG, the APPG for World Government and UNA-UK had for some time been trying to persuade Kofi Annan to speak at a joint meeting of our Groups in Parliament, so I arranged to discuss this with a senior member of the Secretary-General's staff while I was at the UN. During discussion it was mentioned that Kofi had addressed joint meetings of the Parliaments in other European countries and hinted that that possibility might be investigated. I indicated that that was 'way beyond my pay-grade' but would try to make discreet inquiries.

On returning to the UK on Thursday 11 April, I immediately arranged an appointment with Robin Cook that afternoon, as Leader of the House he had relevant responsibilities and in many ways I regarded him as sympathetic. Robin confirmed that as I had suspected there would be many protocol

problems, a very wide range of different top-level consultations necessary and as it would be a formal ceremonial occasion, restrictions on what Kofi could say, and suggested that a joint meeting of APPGs would be preferable.

More significantly Robin said that a joint meeting of both Houses would require Prime Ministerial approval, and he felt sure Tony Blair would block a visit by Kofi Annan, at least until he had fulfilled his intentions in relation to Iraq. Robin clearly believed that Tony was already strongly committed to a course of action which he knew would be opposed by the United Nations¹³ – or at least the Secretary-General.

The day before Tony had been responding to questions on Iraq at PMQs and after making a Statement on Crawford, while Robin recorded that on the morning of 11 April:

At Cabinet, Tony reported in full on his visit across the Atlantic to spend the weekend with President Bush. The core of his message was captured in his statement of personal credo: 'I do believe in this country's relations with the US.'¹⁴

Robin reported that both he and Patricia Hewitt raised the importance of the UN and that:

Tony characteristically refused to be boxed in by an explicit commitment to a possible roadblock. He regards the UN process as important, but 'we should not tie ourselves down to doing nothing unless the UN authorised it.' Rather more alarmingly he said, 'The time to debate the legal basis for our action should be when we take that action.' This suggests a worryingly low priority for respect to international law when we come to a decision on whether to take action.¹⁵

¹³ A phrase in his report of a discussion with Tony Blair eleven days later – 22 April - may indicate what he already feared the Prime Minister was contemplating "next spring we will only just be finished fighting a war against Iraq", [The Point of Departure, pp138f] This also tallies with what Robin subsequently said: "It's perfectly plain from the events that Tony Blair probably committed himself to an invasion back in Spring of 2002, he could never openly admit to that, he could never be frank that his main motivation was to demonstrate Britain was the closest ally to a Republican President of the United States." [Robin Cook interview in "Iraq, Tony and the Truth", BBC1, 20 March 2005.]

¹⁴ Point of Departure , p135

¹⁵ Point of Departure , p135f

Credit is often claimed for the role Tony Blair played in persuading the US to go the UN route, against the opposition of “hawks” in the Bush administration. A more complex picture is suggested by an article in the “New Yorker” [1 April 2002], which I bought during my US visit. Nicholas Lemann based his article on interviews with leading hawks.

This spring, the Administration will be talking to other countries about the invasion, trying to secure basing and overflight privileges, while Bush builds up a rhetorical case for it by giving speeches about the unacceptability of developing weapons of mass destruction. A drama involving weapons inspections in Iraq will play itself out over the spring and summer, and will end with the United States declaring that the terms that Saddam offers for the inspections, involving delays and restrictions, are unacceptable. Then, probably in the late summer or early fall, the enormous troop positioning, which will take months, will begin. The Administration obviously feels confident that the United States can effectively parry whatever aggressive actions Saddam takes during the troop buildup, and hopes that its moves will destabilize Iraq enough to cause the Republican Guard, the military key to the country, to turn against Saddam and topple him on its own. But the chain of events leading inexorably to a full-scale American invasion, if it hasn't already begun, evidently will begin soon.¹⁶

This scheme, which bears similarity to subsequent events - with slight slippages of time-table, implies that Vice-President Cheney's opposition to the UN route was not shared by other hawks. “A drama involving weapons inspections in Iraq ...” suggests that the UN was to be used, but not to promote a peaceful solution.

Lemann also offers a different insight into Tony Blair's assertion that “11 September made a difference to the way America views such things”.¹⁷ Lemann's interview with Condoleeza Rice would imply that it was used to promote previous prejudices:

Rice said that she had called together the senior staff people of the National Security Council and asked them to think seriously about “how do you capitalize on these opportunities” to fundamentally change American doctrine, and the shape of the world, in the wake of September 11th.¹⁸

¹⁶ [N Lemann, The Next World Order, New Yorker (April 1, 2002), p48]
http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/04/01/020401fa_FACT1

¹⁷ Hansard, 24/11/2002, c22 & similar remarks at the Inquiry

¹⁸ N Lemann, The Next World Order, New Yorker (April 1, 2002), p44

During a discussion I had with Gerald Kaufman on Iraq some time after Easter 2002, we mentioned Lemann's article, and Gerald said that he had had a conversation about it with the Prime Minister, who had also read it.

Summer to Autumn 2002

During the next few months, there is little that can be added that is relevant to the Inquiry and not already on the record. PLP Briefings halted at the Summer recess.

Two personal anecdotes might merit brief mention.

One weekend I had been invited as local MP to speak at Aberdeen University Islamic Society on the Middle East Peace Process. It was an open meeting, and the audience crowded into a large lecture theatre included non-University people and non-Muslims. There was one other speaker, who was a visiting Islamic scholar. He was reasonably restrained when we were making our opening speeches, but during questions he launched into a very emotional description of the suppression and sufferings of the Palestinians and other Muslims, and led on to praise suicide bombers as martyrs, and call for the establishment of an Ummah, a continuous Islamic state from India to North-West Africa, which would swallow up the whole of Israel. The earlier part of speech had gained substantial applause, but disturbingly a significant section of the audience was enthused by his conclusion. I started my response, by saying that I thought the meeting was to discuss a peace process and that 'Islam' meant 'the way of Peace'¹⁹ before urging moderation, which seemed to gain audience support. At the end of the meeting the organisers, who I think were post-graduate students and junior academics, told me that they had not realised how extreme his views were and said they were grateful to me for responding. However they warned me, that as I had seen there were elements within Muslim community who, because of recent events, were becoming increasingly responsive to such views, and they expressed the fear that an invasion of Iraq would inflame that situation.

¹⁹ Incorrectly as I learned some time later, it is more accurately 'the way of submission', though *s'lam* is the root of the word 'peace' in Arabic and Hebrew

Making a brief visit to the Commons during the Summer recess, I was chatting to a colleague in the corridor, when the Chief Whip, Hilary Armstrong came past. I expressed concern to her that recent comments had implied we might be drifting towards military conflict. The brusque response was “Surely you trust Tony”. Despite the worrying trend to personality cults in politics, I was surprised at the suggestion that in a matter as serious as war, MPs should just trust the leader.

Recall and the September Dossier

Shortly before the Government published the 24 September Dossier, the International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS] published its assessment of Iraq’s WMD. Shortly afterwards on 10 October, the Carnegie Endowment published “Iraq’s WMD Programs: A Comparison of Assessments” which compared these two studies with the report from the US Director of Central Intelligence and Carnegie’s own “Deadly Arsenals”. On 16 October the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Security and Non-Proliferation held a meeting on “Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction” to provide Parliamentarians with an additional basis for objective judgement. The speakers were Dr Gary Samore, Senior Fellow for Non-Proliferation, IISS, & editor of the IISS Dossier *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: a Net Assessment* and Dr Wyn Bowen, Defence Studies Department, King’s College, London and a former UN weapons inspector in Iraq.

At the time and compared with the other assessments, much of the UK Dossier seemed reasonable. It did not contain wildly mendacious claims – like the Bush administration’s assertion that Saddam had a fleet of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles which could attack the USA with WMD. The map of missile ranges resembled the illustrations in Heritage Foundation publications hyping the need for missile defence. The assertion that Iraqi missiles could hit British bases in Cyprus was highly dubious. It was unlikely they had missiles of this range, particularly if they were carrying a payload, and their longer range missiles had been very inaccurate in the Gulf War. Moreover what conceivable reason would Iraq have for trying to do so? It provided the excuse for headlines that there was a threat to British territory, as the “45 minute” claim did for the immediacy of the risk. There were suspicions even then that there

had been a tendency to overestimate and exaggerate in several areas. There did not seem dramatic new grounds for considering invading Iraq.

Robin Cook²⁰ refers to an intervention I made after the Prime Minister addressed the PLP on the morning of 16 October. The gist of my comments was:

Prime Minister, with regard to Iraq, on a number of occasions you have posed the question "Why now?" Some of us have read the Dossier and listened to your arguments, and with respect Prime Minister, still find ourselves asking "Why now?"

We wonder if there is a different answer to the question "Why now?" Would we be considering war with Iraq if Al Gore had been recognized as the winner of the US Presidential election? Would we be considering war if George Bush had not appointed to key positions leading right wing hawks who had been urging war with Iraq for years?

The leadership wants us to be loyal and many of us want to be loyal to the leadership – not least because we believe that division put us in opposition for eighteen years. But loyalty is a two-way street. We want to work with a leadership that is loyal to our country, our party and our principles.

November-December 2002

On 8 November the UN resolution, UNSCR 1441, seemed to provide a reasonable basis for peaceful progress if it was reasonably interpreted and if Saddam was forced into reasonable compliance.

On 19 November meeting of the APPG on Global Security with Dr Richard Perle, Chair of the US Defense Policy Board, "Current security controversies: a US perspective", it was a packed and lively meeting with vigorous questioning. It left little doubt that a very influential voice in Washington was not likely to treat UNSCR 1441 reasonably, would not believe inspectors' reports if they indicated Iraq had disarmed and, as Peter Kilfoyle was reported in the press as saying, seemed set on war.

Late in 2002, the Prime Minister agreed to a request from Mohammed Sarwar and me for a meeting with Scottish Labour MPs who were concerned over Iraq. The group we brought along were 'loyalists', who mostly had never broken the whip. Tony Blair was typically welcoming and charming, and listened to each

²⁰ Point of Departure, p227

of us in turn before responding. During his response, in which he assured us that he was looking for a peaceful outcome, he told us with almost evangelical fervour that he could not impress on us enough how much he admired George W Bush. This seemed particularly surprising because Tony was usually so adept at suiting his message to his audience, and this comment was liable to alienate most of us. It seemed to sincerely reflect how important his relationship to the President had become to him.

2003 The Dodgy Dossier

On 3 February the Prime Minister indicated that there was a new Dossier:

As the report we published at the weekend makes clear, and which I placed in the Library of the House, there is a huge infrastructure of deception and concealment designed to prevent the inspectors from doing their job.

He went on to say:

We issued further intelligence over the weekend about the infrastructure of concealment. It is obviously difficult when we publish intelligence reports, but I hope that people have some sense of the integrity of our security services. They are not publishing this, or giving us this information, and making it up. It is the intelligence that they are receiving, and we are passing it on to people. In the dossier that we published last year, and again in the material that we put out over the weekend, it is very clear that a vast amount of concealment and deception is going on.

Later that week Channel 4 News revealed that the bulk of the document had been downloaded from the internet, without correcting grammatical errors, but altering certain words and phrases to make them more extreme e.g. altering "aiding oppositionist groups" to "supporting terrorist groups".²¹

On 10 February several Labour and Conservative MPs raised points of order about this, as these were coming to a noisy conclusion Peter Lilley called out that the Minister responsible should resign and meeting him on the way out of the Chamber, I said 'you realise who the Minister responsible is?'

²¹ Alastair Campbell claimed to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, that the alterations were made by "experts within government" [25 June 2003, Q1013]. Dr Rangwala in his memorandum to the Committee reveals who these "experts" were, as well as providing a comprehensive critique of the Dodgy Dossier. [FAC 9th Report, The Decision to go to War in Iraq, Vol II, Ev30-33]. The non-plagiarised parts of the Dossier read less like intelligence than propaganda: "It reveals that [UN weapons] inspectors are outnumbered by Iraqi intelligence by a ratio of 200 to 1" in the front page summary, and on p2 "This is a ratio of 200:1" (Their underlining).

'Resign' can be called lightly in the House on occasion, but misleading the House about intelligence to promote war could hardly be more serious. However coming to believe that your own Prime Minister should resign is awesome. I hoped Tony would provide an adequate explanation and apology, but he merely claimed the 'Dodgy Dossier' was "accurate".

It would be possible to recount other details from the last few weeks before the conflict, such as, some of the dubious ways some colleagues were persuaded to vote for war, or the construction of cross-Party co-operation on questioning the rush to pre-emptive war. However it is unclear how relevant this would be to the Inquiry. It seems better to finish with brief observations from the viewpoint of a backbencher who was and remains sceptical.

Concluding Comments

"Weapons of Mass Destruction" was always the supreme reason the Prime Minister gave for the war. The term has often been criticised for blurring the distinction between the devastating effects of nuclear weapons, and the horrible but more restricted effects that chemical or biological weapons can currently have, particularly if they do not have very sophisticated weaponisation. The IAEA inspectors made clear before the conflict that there was no evidence of a renewed Iraqi nuclear programme. UNMOVIC consistently showed that the sites – some 300 sites - which the US and UK had identified in the Iraq as related to biological or chemical weapons were wrong. It was widely still believed that Iraq retained some old BCW, but that they had a large and growing capacity, which was the *casus belli*, was increasingly incredible by the outbreak of war. That there was really a threat so urgent as to justify a precipitate rush to war, without giving more time for inspections was even less believable.

Compliance with UNSCR 1441 was significant. Under the pressure of the threat of military force Iraq submitted to the inspections regime to a substantial degree. Comparisons with South Africa, which voluntarily gave up its nuclear capacity, were unrealistic. In Northern Ireland, Tony Blair tolerated prevarication from the paramilitaries over decommissioning, unfortunately in Iraq he was not in charge of the time-table.

Terrorism linked to “WMD” was rightly identified as a terrible threat, however as Tony Blair said shortly after 9/11, what distinguished al Qa’eda from most political and regional terrorists groups was an absolutism which would seek death on such a vast scale. As the UK said throughout, Iraq had no connection with 9/11. At the Liaison Committee on 21/01/2003 Tony Blair made fairly clear that there was no real evidence of a link between al Qa’eda and Saddam, but used a phrase, which was not necessarily misleading in context:

but it would not be correct to say there is no evidence whatever of linkages between al-Qaeda and Iraq.

He repeated the phrase on several occasions, when it could have been taken to mean that there was evidence of a link. Iraq did have links with regional, political terrorist groups. Shortly before the war, Mr Blair adopted the argument that, whatever current relationship Saddam and al Qa’eda might have, enemies can make unlikely alliances – presumably hinting at the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. A doctrine of pre-emptive war, based on weapons that might be built in future and unlikely future pacts with enemies, could give carte blanche for aggression against any country.

Intelligence was an area, where Parliament was dependent on the then Prime Minister. Before, during and after the war, Mr Blair claimed to have compelling intelligence evidence which later proved to be unfounded. When the Prime Minister says he has been “briefed in detail” and uses phrases like “I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt”, Parliament has the right to assume that he is not just expressing subjective emotions held in ‘good faith’, but that he has subjected the intelligence to rigorous objective scrutiny. That is hardly consistent with, for instance, on the “45 minute” claim, (emphasised in the Executive Summary, the Foreword, the PM’s speech and the PLP Briefing) saying that he did not know or ask to what it related. “The Dodgy Dossier” was exposed so quickly that it might be tempting to disregard it, but it surely strengthens an impression of a cavalier attitude to intelligence – and even truth. Material downloaded wholesale from the internet and then tampered with is not “accurate”, because it is purely fortuitous whether it is true or not.

France and Russia were both fiercely criticised by the UK. Graham Allen circulated the French statement to MPs and another colleague arranged a confidential briefing by Mr Ivanov. Their positions seemed completely reasonable; including more time for inspections and tighter future containment if confirmed disarmament was achieved.

Pre-emptive War was the policy of hawks in or near the Georg W Bush administration. Some of us were particularly concerned that Iraq was intended to be the first of a series of pre-emptive wars. Immediately after the start of conflict Richard Perle and others at the American Enterprise Institute were calling for “regime change” in Iran and Syria.²²

“Regime Change” was explicitly and repeatedly rejected as a justification for war by Tony Blair in parliamentary and public statements before the conflict. In his final speech before the war, he said: “I have never put the justification for action as regime change”.²³ That is not consistent either with British representatives indicating that they had assured the US of support for regime change in confidential memos, or with Tony Blair’s repeated post-war mantra ‘Iraq is better off without Saddam Hussein’.

The Justifications for War

Weapons of Mass Destruction

As mentioned above, this was given as the UK’s grounds for war, however Tony Blair told the Inquiry that now we know there were no WMD, he still believes the invasion was justified because the Iraq Survey Group [ISG] said that Saddam would have wanted to resume a WMD programme if international pressure eased. The ISG was not an independent objective organisation like UNMOVIC it was appointed by George W Bush, it gave as the reason that it believed Saddam would want WMD was to deter Israel and Iran not to threaten UK or USA, and if containment clearly had worked, why could it not continue? Furthermore if Mr Blair says war was justified despite there being

²² Financial Times 22 March 2003

²³ Hansard, 18 March 2003, Vol 401, c772.

no WMD, that could raise questions as to whether the UN inspections process was used in good faith.

The Terrorist Threat

Military and intelligence resources were diverted from al Qa'eda, and from Afghanistan and the Pakistan border, contributing to the current difficulties. Al Qa'eda and related groups have a significant presence in Iraq, which they did not have previously. Intelligence agencies and research institutes agree that recruitment to extremist terrorism has increased, and that the threat to the UK and other countries from indigenous and international terrorism has risen significantly.

Human Rights

Human rights were not used before the war by either the UK or the USA as an official justification. Saddam had committed appalling atrocities, but mostly in earlier years – and sometimes when US architects of the war were selling him arms or trying to deflect the blame from him over Halabja. Human rights organisations estimated that he was responsible for “scores” of dead in the year before the invasion, that should be set against the literally - and deliberately - unnumbered dead since. Additional fatalities caused by the military, insurgency and terrorism, and criminal murder in anarchic conditions rank in six figures (i.e. over a hundred thousand and possibly much more) on conservative estimates. There is the further misery of the injured, the bereaved, the insecure, the homeless and the refugees.

Upholding the United Nations

Claims in Britain that the war was fought to uphold the authority of the UN are scarcely compatible with the views of the main advocates of the invasion in the US. The second resolution had the support of only four of the fifteen members of the UN Security Council. “I think that’s an absurdity that here a minority of the Council goes to war to uphold the authority of a majority that is against it” [Hans Blix]²⁴

²⁴ An interview in “Iraq, Tony and the Truth”, BBC1, 20 March 2005.