

SECTION 6.1

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MILITARY OPTIONS FOR AN INVASION OF IRAQ

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Introduction and key findings

1. This Section addresses the UK planning for a military invasion of Iraq and the decisions:

- on 31 October 2002 to offer ground forces to the US for planning purposes for operations in northern Iraq; and
- in December to deploy an amphibious force, including 3 Commando Brigade.

2. This Section does not address:

- The decision in mid-January 2003 to deploy a divisional headquarters and three combat brigades for potential operations in southern Iraq and the commitment of those forces to a combat role in the initial stages of the invasion of Iraq. That is addressed in Section 6.2. That Section also sets out the principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) governing the conduct of military operations, including control of targeting decisions.
- The campaign plan for the invasion which is addressed in Section 8.
- The roles and responsibilities of the Defence Secretary, the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), the Permanent Under Secretary (PUS), and other key military officers and civilians, and the way in which advice was prepared for Ministers and decisions taken in the MOD in 2002 and 2003. They are set out in Section 2.
- The decisions on the wider UK strategy and options in relation to Iraq which are necessary to understand the wider context surrounding military deployments. Those are addressed in Section 3.
- The UK's assessments of Iraq's chemical, biological, nuclear and ballistic missile programmes and its intentions to retain and conceal its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities. They are addressed in Section 4.
- The consideration of the legal basis for military action, which is addressed in Section 5.
- The preparations to equip the force for operations in Iraq, and the implications of the decisions between mid-December 2002 and mid-January 2003 to increase the size of UK combat forces and be ready to take an earlier role in the invasion in support of US forces. They are addressed in Section 6.3.
- The funding for the operation, which is addressed in Section 13.
- The planning and preparations for the UK military contribution post-conflict, including decisions on the UK's Area of Responsibility (AOR) for UK military forces. They are addressed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

Key findings

- The size and composition of a UK military contribution to the US-led invasion of Iraq was largely discretionary. The US wanted some UK capabilities (including Special Forces) to use UK bases, and the involvement of the UK military to avoid the perception of unilateral US military action. The primary impetus to maximise the size of the UK contribution and the recommendations on its composition came from the Armed Forces, with the agreement of Mr Hoon.
- From late February 2002, the UK judged that Saddam Hussein's regime could only be removed by a US-led invasion.
- In April 2002, the MOD advised that, if the US mounted a major military operation, the UK should contribute a division comprising three brigades. That was perceived to be commensurate with the UK's capabilities and the demands of the campaign. Anything smaller risked being compared adversely to the UK's contribution to the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.
- The MOD saw a significant military contribution as a means of influencing US decisions.
- Mr Blair and Mr Hoon wanted to keep open the option of contributing significant forces for ground operations as long as possible, but between May and mid-October consistently pushed back against US assumptions that the UK would provide a division.
- Air and maritime forces were offered to the US for planning purposes in September.
- The MOD advised in October that the UK was at risk of being excluded from US plans unless it offered ground forces, "Package 3", on the same basis as air and maritime forces. That could also significantly reduce the UK's vulnerability to US requests to provide a substantial and costly contribution to post-conflict operations.
- From August until December 2002, other commitments meant that UK planning for Package 3 was based on providing a divisional headquarters and an armoured brigade for operations in northern Iraq. That was seen as the maximum practicable contribution the UK could generate within the predicted timescales for US action.
- The deployment was dependent on Turkey's agreement to the transit of UK forces.
- Mr Blair agreed to offer Package 3 on 31 October 2002.
- That decision and its potential consequences were not formally considered by a Cabinet Committee or reported to Cabinet.
- In December 2002, the deployment of 3 Commando Brigade was identified as a way for the UK to make a valuable contribution in the initial stages of a land campaign if transit through Turkey was refused. The operational risks were not explicitly addressed.
- Following a visit to Turkey on 7 to 8 January 2003, Mr Hoon concluded that there would be no agreement to the deployment of UK ground forces through Turkey.
- By that time, in any case, the US had asked the UK to deploy for operations in southern Iraq.

MOD Defence Planning Assumptions

3. The Armed Forces' capacity to deploy and sustain expeditionary operations was determined by decisions in the 1998 *Strategic Defence Review*.

4. Defence Planning Assumptions (DPAs) were developed by the MOD to convert policy into detailed guidance that could be used by military planners.¹ They outline the levels of activity the Armed Forces plan to be able to undertake, and the contexts in which they are expected to operate. They are used to identify and resource the planned force structure, capabilities and equipment of the Armed Forces.

5. The DPAs extant in 2002-2003 were those defined in the 1998 *Strategic Defence Review* (SDR 98). It identified eight **Missions** which the Armed Forces could be expected to undertake, which were further divided into 28 **Military Tasks**. The Planning Assumptions defined the required level of forces, or **scale of effort**, allocated to each Military Task.

6. In relation to the ability to deploy forces to deal with overseas crises, SDR 98 stated that the objective was to “be able to make a reasonable contribution to multi-national operations” in support of the UK’s “foreign and security policy objectives”. On that basis “broad benchmarks” had been set for planning that the UK should be able to:

“– respond to a major international crisis which might require a military effort and combat operations of a similar scale and duration to the Gulf War when we deployed an armoured division, 26 major warships and over 80 combat aircraft.

“or

“– undertake a more extended overseas deployment on a lesser scale (as over the last few years in Bosnia) while retaining the ability to mount a second substantial deployment – which might involve a combat brigade and appropriate naval and air forces – if this were made necessary by a second crisis. We would not, however, expect both deployments to involve war fighting or to maintain them simultaneously for longer than six months.”²

7. SDR 98 determined that the UK’s land forces should include two “deployable divisions” and six deployable brigades, three “armoured” and three “mechanised”, together with two “lighter and more specialised deployable brigades, an airmobile brigade and the Royal Marine Commando Brigade”.³

¹ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, July 1998.

² Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, July 1998, page 23.

³ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Supporting Essays*, July 1998. Supporting Essay 6, Future Military Capabilities.

8. The principal scales of effort defined in SDR 98 were:

- **small scale:** “a deployment of battalion size or equivalent” such as the Royal Navy ARMILLA patrol in the Gulf, the British contribution to United Nations Forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP), and the Royal Air Force operations enforcing the No-Fly Zones (NFZs) over northern and southern Iraq;
- **medium scale:** “deployments of brigade size or equivalent” for warfighting or other operations, such as the UK contribution in the mid-1990s to the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia;
- **large scale:** deployments of division size or equivalent, the “nearest recent example” being the UK contribution to the 1991 Gulf Conflict, “although on that occasion the British division deployed with only two of its three brigades”. That was “the maximum size of force we would plan to be able to contribute to peace enforcement operations, or to regional conflicts outside the NATO area”; and
- **very large scale and full scale:** all the forces that would be made available to NATO to meet a major threat such as significant aggression against an ally. The difference between the two reflected the time available for preparation – “warning time”, and the size of the threat.

9. The Planning Assumptions also defined:

- **endurance:** the likely duration of individual Military Tasks. The force structure for each Service needed to be able to sustain tasks for the required period, including where necessary by rotating individual units deployed and, where units were deployed on operations, allowing units a period of respite between each deployment as set out in the “Harmony Guidelines”⁴ of each Service.
- **concurrency:** the number of operations of a given scale of effort and duration that could be sustained by the force structure. SDR 98 concluded that “not to be able to conduct two medium scale operations at the same time would be an unacceptable constraint on our ability to discharge Britain’s commitments and responsibilities. It would, for example, oblige us to withdraw from an enduring commitment such as Bosnia in order to respond to a second crisis.”⁵

10. The Defence Strategic Plan (DSP), a confidential MOD document, included greater detail than was published in the SDR report.⁶ It identified specific readiness criteria in relation to operations against Iraq, stating:

“... we need to maintain the ability to respond within short warning times to an Iraqi threat, and to build up forces thereafter. This again requires us to hold capabilities needed to mount a medium scale deployment at high readiness (30 days). For a

⁴ Harmony guidelines are explained in Section 16.1.

⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Supporting Essays*, July 1998. Supporting Essay 6, Future Military Capabilities.

⁶ Ministry of Defence 1998, ‘Defence Strategic Plan 1998’.

large scale deployment we need to plan on a framework division being ready within 90 days.”

11. The Defence White Paper 1999 stated:

“The assumptions made in the SDR were not intended to be an exact template for everything we have been called on to do. They were intended rather as a guide to the long term development of our forces without prejudicing the size of an actual commitment in particular contingencies ... But the SDR provided us with a demonstrably sound and robust basis for planning and operations of all kinds.”⁷

12. General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of the General Staff from February 2003 to August 2006, told the Inquiry that the Planning Assumptions were:

“... not just a bit of [an] intellectual experiment ... they drive force structures, they drive stocks, they drive equipment.”⁸

The possibility of military invasion emerges

The impact of 9/11

13. After the attacks on the US on 9/11, the UK was concerned that the US might take immediate military action against Iraq.

14. The discussion in the UK about what to do about Iraq in the wake of the attack on the US on 9/11 and the “war against terrorism”, and the limitations on what the UK knew about US thinking and military operations, is addressed in Section 3.1.

15. The UK took the view that the status quo on Iraq was no longer acceptable and that Iraq’s defiance of the international community would need to be addressed. But the UK sought to steer the US away from unilateral military action.

16. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush by telephone on 3 December 2001.⁹ The conversation was primarily about the position in Afghanistan.

17. In a discussion on future options in relation to Iraq, Mr Blair told President Bush that Sir David Manning, Mr Blair’s Foreign Policy Adviser and Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat (OD Sec), and Sir Richard Dearlove, Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), would be in Washington later that week. That would be an opportunity to share thinking on “how the next phase might proceed”.

18. The record of the conversation was sent to Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary and Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), amongst others.

⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper*, 20 December 1999.

⁸ Public hearing, 28 July 2010, page 7.

⁹ Letter Tatham to McDonald, 3 December 2001, ‘Telephone Conversation with President Bush’.

19. Mr Blair sent President Bush a paper, 'The War Against Terrorism: The Second Phase', on 4 December.¹⁰

20. The paper comprised an overview of the possible approaches to potential terrorist threats in seven countries¹¹ and a 'Strategy for Confronting Islamic Extremism' in moderate Muslim states.

21. In relation to Iraq, the key points were:

- Iraq was a threat because: "it has WMD capability; is acquiring more; has shown its willingness to use it; and can export that capability". Iraq was in breach of UN Security Council resolutions 687 (1991), 715 (1991) and 1284 (1999) and Saddam Hussein supported certain Palestinian terrorist groups and used terror tactics against Iraqi dissidents.
- Any link to 11 September and Al Qaida (AQ) was "at best very tenuous".
- Although "people want to be rid of Saddam", international opinion outside the US and the UK would "at present" be "reluctant" to support immediate military action.

22. Mr Blair suggested that a "strategy for regime change that builds over time" was needed "until we get to the point where military action could be taken if necessary" without losing international support and "facing a choice between massive intervention and nothing".

23. Although the UK was aware in December 2001 that the US was conducting a full review of all its options, there are no indications in the papers seen by the Inquiry that the UK was aware that President Bush had commissioned General Tommy Franks, Commander in Chief US Central Command (CENTCOM), to look at military options for removing Saddam Hussein; and that that would include options for a conventional land invasion.

24. Mr Kevin Tebbit, the MOD Permanent Under Secretary (PUS), visited Washington from 6 to 7 December where his meetings with a range of contacts included discussions on Afghanistan and the next stage of the "war against terrorism".¹²

25. While he was in Washington, an attempt was made by a senior Republican close to the Pentagon to persuade Mr Tebbit that the Iraqi National Congress (INC) could be a force to be reckoned with which would be sufficient to cause an Iraqi response and enable the US to take supportive military action.¹³

¹⁰ [Paper Blair \[to President Bush\], 4 December 2001, 'The War Against Terrorism: The Second Phase'](#).

¹¹ Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Philippines, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

¹² Telegram 1684 Washington to FCO London, 8 December 2001, 'Tebbit's Visit to Washington: Wider War Against Terrorism'.

¹³ Minute Wilson to PS/CDI, 13 December 2001, 'Iraq: Is there a "Northern Alliance"?'.

26. Mr Tebbit commissioned an analysis of that thesis, which he expected would “show it to be flawed”.

27. On 19 December, Mr Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary, held a meeting with Adm Boyce, Mr Tebbit and others, to discuss the sustainability of operations in the No-Fly Zones and implications for plans for the defence of Kuwait, in the light of reduced patrolling following the invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁴

28. Mr Hoon asked, in the context of the changed political environment since 9/11, for further advice “detailing the current state of operations over Iraq and the political and military implications of continuing with the current patrolling patterns” and “options for future action together with their political, legal and military implications”. The options could be part of “a discrete operation” or “a wider campaign”, and could range from fewer patrols, maintaining current operations, to an incremental increase and “a significant large scale operation”.

29. It is now public knowledge that President Bush had asked for military options for action in Iraq to be reviewed in autumn 2001; and that he had been briefed by Gen Franks on 28 December 2001 and 7 February 2002.

30. The MOD had some knowledge of that debate, but it was not fully aware of all aspects of the discussions.

31. Admiral the Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that “there was no contingency planning or thinking about Iraq, so far as the Ministry of Defence was concerned, in 2001”.¹⁵

32. Lord Boyce subsequently told the Inquiry that discussions between the UK and US about the conduct of joint operations to enforce the No-Fly Zones had continued.¹⁶

33. Lord Boyce stated:

“We were flatly saying we are not considering or contemplating military action in Iraq. We were really quite strongly against that. We were certainly not doing any thinking about ... military adventures into Iraq in the early part of 2002, other than maintaining our No-Fly Zone capabilities and so forth.”¹⁷

34. General Sir John Reith, Chief of Joint Operations (CJO) from August 2001 to May 2004, told the Inquiry that CENTCOM had had plans in place for the invasion of Iraq after 1991.¹⁸

¹⁴ Minute Williams to Cholerton, 21 December 2001, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁵ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 5.

¹⁶ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 2.

¹⁷ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 6.

¹⁸ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 4.

35. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that he had been “quite surprised” when later on the US “started planning as quickly as they did in Iraq, that they were doing so before they sorted out Afghanistan”.¹⁹

36. **The MOD view in late January 2002 about the wisdom of taking any military action was cautious. It identified an opportunity to influence US thinking, which was far from settled.**

37. On 24 January 2002, Dr Simon Cholerton, Assistant Director in Secretariat (Overseas) (Sec(O)), wrote to Mr Hoon, setting out the risks of taking action against Iraqi air defences in response to Iraqi violations in the No-Fly Zones.²⁰ That would require careful handling to avoid being seen as the next phase of “the war on international terrorism”.

38. Dr Cholerton discussed the possibility of wider action against Iraq. He emphasised that neither the MOD nor the FCO had seen any “detailed US planning”. Work on policy options, at both military and political levels, was continuing in the US but “little, if anything has been shared with the UK”.

39. The case against Iraq, as “a candidate for ‘Phase 2’ in the GWOT [Global War on Terrorism]”, would be based on the threat to US national security posed by Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programme in the absence of any evidence of Iraqi involvement in the 9/11 attacks. US thinking was far from settled and there “should be a window of opportunity to influence the US position”.

40. Dr Cholerton also advised that the “initial assessment of the efficacy (never mind the legality) of military action to effect regime change is that it is poor”. He drew attention to the work commissioned by Mr Tebbit in December 2001, which had addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the INC. That had concluded that there was “no Northern Alliance equivalent ... who could take advantage of precision bombing” in Iraq.

41. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that the “long experience of patrolling the No-Fly Zones” was “a significant factor” in subsequent discussions about military intervention in Iraq:

“There was increasing concern about the risks involved in these operations and the consequences for example if a British or American aircraft was shot down. It was certainly speculated at the time that this could lead to military intervention to rescue downed personnel; and that such operations could lead to a wider engagement.”²¹

¹⁹ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 4.

²⁰ Minute Cholerton to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 24 January 2002, ‘Iraq: No Fly Zones’.

²¹ Statement, 2 April 2015, paragraph 11.

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

42. President Bush's State of the Union speech on 29 January 2002 referred to Iraq, Iran and North Korea as "an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world".²²

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

44. The UK's response, discussions between No.10 and the White House, and the advice commissioned by No.10, including a paper analysing the options on Iraq and a paper for public consumption setting out the facts on WMD, are addressed in Section 3.2.

45. Sir David Manning was assured by Dr Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's National Security Advisor, that no decisions would be taken before the planned meeting between Mr Blair and President Bush at Crawford in early April.²³

46. No.10 commissioned a number of papers to inform preparations for Mr Blair's meeting with President Bush.²⁴

47. By late February, US military action to achieve regime change in Iraq later that year was seen as a serious possibility.

48. The Chiefs of Staff were informed on 19 February that:

"A sustained bombing campaign combined with internal opposition forces plus US covert action would not be sufficient to effect a regime change. Any ground invasion if it was perceived to be against the Sunni hegemony rather than that of Saddam himself, would incur greater resistance ... [T]he US would not be in a position to project such a force until autumn 02. Basing in the region would be problematic ...

"US intent appeared to be to stem the creeping tide of WMD. Given that neither arms control or leverage were working, a line had to be drawn on the issues and in the case of Iraq, the line had been reached ... The US also had to consider the possibility of Saddam retreating to the North of Iraq and the consequences that this could have to maintaining another leader in Baghdad ... COS [Chiefs of Staff] needed to be more in tune with US planning and on message when speaking to their colleagues abroad. COS therefore requested regular updates as the FCO/MOD/US dialogue unfolded."²⁵

49. The thinking in the MOD at the time, about the position in Iraq and the US military options, is set out in more detail in the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) paper issued on 5 March, which is addressed later in this Section.

²² The White House, 29 January 2002, *The President's State of the Union Address*.

²³ Letter Manning to McDonald, 14 February 2002, 'Conversation with Condi Rice: Iraq'.

²⁴ Public hearing, 19 January 2011, page 34.

²⁵ Minutes, 19 February 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

JIC ASSESSMENT, 27 FEBRUARY 2002: 'IRAQ: SADDAM UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT'

50. The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) Assessment of 27 February reached the view that, without direct intervention on the ground, the opposition would be unable to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime.

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

52. At the request of the JIC, an Assessment, 'Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight', was produced on 27 February.²⁶ 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".

53. The Key Judgements included:

- "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."
- 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.
- "The Special Republican Guard (SRG) remains closely tied to Saddam's regime and is likely to resist any attempt to overthrow him. The Republican Guard ... would be relatively resilient under attack but its loyalty in dire straits is more open to question than the SRG. Other elements of the Iraq military are more liable to crack if subjected to a strong attack."
- The "opposition" was "militarily weak and riven by factional differences. They will not act without visible and sustained US military support on the ground. A coup or military revolt is only a remote possibility."

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

55. Elaborating the final Key Judgement, the Assessment stated:

"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."

²⁶ [JIC Assessment, 27 February 2002, 'Iraq: Saddam Under the Spotlight'](#).

56. The JIC considered that 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 Hussein 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”.

THE MOD PERSPECTIVE

57. **The MOD advised Mr Hoon that the UK should not rule out military action against Iraq; and that it should think through the options in more depth to improve the “prospects for influencing the US towards a successful outcome”.**

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

59. 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.”

60. 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”.

61. 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 ...”

62. Mr Webb’s detailed advice on the risks from Iraq’s WMD is addressed in Section 4.1.

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

63. 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.

64. Mr Webb stated:

“If specific military options start to be considered in the US, we would of course seek his [Mr Hoon’s] guidance on whether the UK should participate in planning.”

65. Mr William Ehrman, FCO Director International Security, 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 William Patey, FCO, Head, Middle East Department (MED), on what the MOD considered to be the “valid options for military operations in some specific scenarios against Iraq”.²⁸ 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.

66. A DIS paper on the possible US military options for removing Saddam Hussein was issued on 5 March.

67. The paper provides insights into some of the judgements in the JIC Assessment of 27 February, the Cabinet Office Options Paper of 8 March, and the thinking within the MOD which informed subsequent analysis and military planning, including uncertainty about what regime might replace Saddam Hussein.

68. At the request of Air Marshal Joe French, Chief of Defence Intelligence (CDI), the DIS produced a paper examining “US military” options for removing Saddam Hussein over the next 12 months on 5 March.²⁹ That did not “look at longer-term options, such as a covert action programme designed to achieve regime overthrow”. The paper did, however, consider Saddam Hussein’s options and likely intentions as he was “well aware of the possibility of action against him”.

69. Addressing the feasibility of action to topple Saddam Hussein, the paper stated that:

- Perception of US intent was critical to all three broad options for regime change.
- Assassination or direct targeting of Saddam Hussein and the senior regime leadership was “unfeasible”.
- Sustained airstrikes alone would not convince the Iraqi populace of US determination to overthrow the regime. Airstrikes and a widespread insurgency with US covert action on the ground was a “feasible option”, but it would not “guarantee success”.

²⁸ Letter Ehrman to Webb, 27 February 2002, ‘Axis of Evil’.

²⁹ [Paper DIS, 5 March 2002, ‘Politico Military Memorandum, Removing Saddam’](#).

- Internal forces could only remove Saddam Hussein with the involvement of a Sunni strongman; but such an individual would be acting to preserve Sunni hegemony. That was “unlikely to be acceptable to Kurdish and in particular, Shia insurgents”.
- The UK intelligence community had consistently assessed that “the only viable, long term successor to Saddam will come from within the Sunni security/military structure”. He would be “unlikely to command popular support” and would be “forced (and probably inclined) to run Iraq along autocratic lines”. Iraq would “remain a unitary state”, but its long-term problems “would not disappear with Saddam”.
- A “sustained air campaign combined with a ground invasion” would topple the regime.

70. Addressing Iraq’s defences, the DIS wrote:

- The disposition of Iraqi forces was “defensive”.
- Saddam Hussein would not take offensive action against the Kurds – he knew that would “definitely provoke US action”.
- Equipment was “increasingly obsolescent” and US air supremacy was “certain”. Key units might fight, “but the regime could fall quickly”.
- “If softened by an air campaign, and facing US ground forces”, the collapse of Iraqi Regular Army (RA) units “could be as swift as it was in 1991, particularly given the lack of a viable air force. The regime would quickly lose control of the South ...”
- If the RA and the Republican Guard Forces Command (RGFC) “decided that they [were] defending the Iraqi homeland and Sunni dominance rather than just Saddam Hussein” they were “more likely to offer a tenacious and protracted resistance”.

71. Addressing the possibility of Iraq using WMD, the DIS wrote that it had “no definitive intelligence” on Iraq’s concepts for the use of WMD:

“Iraq did not employ WMD against coalition forces ... [in 1991], nor against the subsequent internal uprisings. We judge that Saddam wished to avoid regime-threatening retaliation from the coalition. Hence the use of WMD will be linked to perception of regime survivability. Were the regime in danger of imminent collapse, Saddam might consider use of WMD against internal opposition, US forces or Israel.”

72. Other points made by the DIS included:

- The US would need three to four months to assemble a force capable of taking military action. It was “conceivable” that it could be ready to begin the first phase of an air campaign in May (when the UN was next due to review Iraq) “but late summer would be better, not least to avoid ground operations in the summer heat”.

- Turkey would be wary of any regime change plan that encouraged or created the conditions in which Kurdish separatism may grow in strength. It wanted a stable, unitary and secular Iraq.
- Iraq would remain a unitary state but many of the structural problems would remain and: “We should also expect considerable anti-Western sentiment among a populace that has experienced ten years of sanctions.”
- “A US attempt to create a more equitable long-term distribution of power in Iraq would require massive and lengthy commitment. Modern Iraq has been dominated politically, militarily and socially by the Sunni. To alter that would entail re-creation of Iraq’s civil, political and military structures. That would require a US-directed transition of power (ie US troops occupying Baghdad) and support thereafter. Ten years seems a not unrealistic time span for such a project.”

73. The paper was sent to Mr Hoon, the Chiefs of Staff, Sir Kevin Tebbit,³⁰ Mr Webb, Lieutenant General Sir Anthony Pigott, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments), and a small number of other individuals. It was also sent to Mr John Scarlett, the Chairman of the JIC, the Assessments Staff, Mr Tom Dodd, OD Sec, Dr Amanda Tanfield, FCO Head of Iraq Section, Middle East Department, and SIS.

74. The paper was subsequently included in the pack of reading material on Iraq for Mr Blair, sent to No.10 by Mr Scarlett on 1 August (see Section 3.4).

75. On 6 March, the Chiefs of Staff were informed that Iraq was “sliding rapidly up the scale of interest and a degree of strategic planning was essential at some point in the near future, given the lead times necessary to shape pol/mil thinking effectively”.³¹

76. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that Air Chief Marshal Sir Anthony Bagnall, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS), who was chairing the meeting in CDS’s absence, should “refresh” work on Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs) to ensure that it was not left “too late”.

77. The process of identifying and agreeing UORs to equip UK forces deployed to Iraq later in 2002 is addressed in Section 6.3.

78. Discussions with the Treasury on funding for operations in Iraq are addressed in Section 13.

CABINET, 7 MARCH 2002

79. Cabinet on 7 March was assured that no decision to launch military action had been taken and “any action would be in accordance with international law”.

³⁰ Sir Kevin Tebbit was appointed KCB in the 2002 New Year Honours List.

³¹ Minutes, 6 March 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

80. Mr Blair and other Ministers had not received any considered, cross-government advice on the policy issues or options before the Cabinet discussion.

81. The Cabinet Office 'Iraq: Options Paper' of 8 March was prepared as a background paper by relatively junior officials. It contained no recommendation and was not intended to provide the basis for decisions. It was not formally considered and approved by senior officials.

82. From late February 2002, Mr Blair and Mr Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, began to set out the argument that Iraq was a threat which had to be dealt with in articles in the press and public statements which are described in Section 3.2.

83. In addition, a briefing paper on Iraq for the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) was prepared, at Mr Straw's request, by his Special Adviser, Dr Michael Williams.³²

84. Mr Straw's Private Office signed a letter to members of Cabinet on 6 March suggesting that they might find the paper on Iraq "useful background".³³

85. In Cabinet on 7 March (see Section 3.2), several Ministers expressed concern about the possibility of US military action against Iraq and its implications.

86. Cabinet was assured that no decision to launch military action had been taken and "any action would be in accordance with international law".

87. Mr Blair concluded that the right strategy was to engage the US Government closely to shape policy and its presentation.

THE CABINET OFFICE 'IRAQ: OPTIONS PAPER'

88. A collection of "background briefs" in preparation for his meeting with President Bush in early April was sent to Mr Blair on 8 March.³⁴

89. The papers included a Cabinet Office 'Iraq: Options Paper',³⁵ together with two FCO papers, 'Iraq: Legal Background'³⁶ and the 'Military Action against Iraq: Attitudes of Selected Third Countries'.³⁷ The Cabinet Office paper and its origins are addressed in detail in Section 3.2.

³² Statement, Lord Williams of Baglan, 9 January 2011, page 5.

³³ [Letter Sedwill to Rycroft, 6 March 2002, 'Iraq: Cabinet Discussion'](#).

³⁴ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 8 March 2002, 'Briefing for the US'.

³⁵ [Paper Cabinet Office, 8 March 2002, 'Iraq: Options Paper'](#).

³⁶ [Paper FCO, \[undated\], 'Iraq: Legal Background'](#).

³⁷ Paper Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 2002, 'Military Action against Iraq: Attitudes of Selected Third Countries'.

90. The Cabinet Office paper did not make any recommendations but analysed two broad options: toughening the existing containment policy, and regime change by military means. The points made in the paper included:

- 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.
- Some of the difficulties with the existing policy would, however, still apply and the US had lost confidence in containment.
- 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.
- Internal regime change in Iraq was likely to result in government by another Sunni military strongman.
- If the US and others committed to nation-building for many years, "a representative broadly democratic government" was possible but the paper concluded it would be Sunni-led.
- 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.
- No legal justification for an invasion currently existed.
- A staged approach, establishing international support, should be considered.

91. Dr Cholerton sent a copy of the Cabinet Office and FCO papers to Mr Hoon on 8 March.³⁸

92. Dr Cholerton advised that the text had not been agreed by the MOD and that, at the request of the Cabinet Office, the paper had not been circulated within the MOD. Copies of the minute and papers were sent only to Adm Boyce, Sir Kevin Tebbit, Mr Webb and Mr Desmond Bowen, MOD Director General Operational Policy.

93. Mr Hoon asked for further advice on the US legal justification for both a military attack on Iraq and regime change in Iraq, and how practicable action was against states breaking sanctions.³⁹

94. Dr Cholerton's response of 26 March:

- set out the MOD's understanding of the UK and US legal position; and
- the difficulties of controlling trade between Iraq and its neighbours and other countries in the region.⁴⁰

³⁸ Minute Cholerton to APS/SofS [MOD], 8 March 2002, 'Iraq: OD Secretariat Options Paper'.

³⁹ Minute Williams to Cholerton, 12 March 2002, 'Iraq: OD Secretariat Options Paper'.

⁴⁰ [Minute Cholerton to APS/SofS \[MOD\], 26 March 2002, 'Iraq: OD Secretariat Options Paper'](#).

95. Military liaison officers with CENTCOM in Tampa, Florida, focused on operations in Afghanistan and the No-Fly Zones over Iraq, were aware that a policy of 'NOFORN' (no disclosure of information to anyone who was not a US citizen; a foreigner) planning on Iraq was under way. Rumours about CENTCOM planning on Iraq had been reported to Lt Gen Pigott on 8 March:

"It is clear that planning is being conducted, and enablers are being put in place for a major air and land campaign in Iraq. It is clear that no political decisions have yet been made. Furthermore, temperatures over the summer and an apparent 6 month+ timescale for reconstitution of ... stocks suggest a start date not before Oct[ober] 02."⁴¹

96. General Reith told the Inquiry that he had "about 40 people ... working with CENTCOM, about 20 as embedded staff and 20 with my liaison team."⁴²

97. The UK's deployments to Afghanistan in early 2002 are addressed in the Box below.

Deployments to Afghanistan in early 2002

The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1386 on 20 December 2001.⁴³ That recognised that the responsibility for providing security and law and order throughout Afghanistan resided with the Afghans themselves. The resolution noted the reported request from the Afghan authorities for a United Nations authorised international security force, and authorised the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan for six months. It also welcomed the UK offer to lead in organising and commanding the Force.

ISAF's role was to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas.⁴⁴ The British contribution was known as Operation VERITAS.⁴⁵

The Force was initially commanded by Major General John McColl and became fully operational from 18 February 2002.⁴⁶ The UK provided an infantry battlegroup based in Kabul and, until March 2002, a subordinate headquarters provided by 16 Air Assault Brigade.

On 18 March, the Force comprised more than 4,600 personnel from 18 nations, including some 1,600 UK troops deployed on Operation VERITAS.

In addition, and in response to a formal US request for forces to join military operations against Al Qaida and the Taliban, Mr Hoon announced the separate deployment of a further battlegroup, built around 45 Commando Royal Marines, of up to 1,700 personnel

⁴¹ Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 8 March 2002, 'CENTCOM Planning on Iraq'.

⁴² Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 2.

⁴³ UN Security Council resolution 1386 (2001).

⁴⁴ UN Security Council Press Release, 20 December 2001, *Security Council Authorises International Security Force for Afghanistan; Welcomes United Kingdom's Offer to be Initial Lead Nation*.

⁴⁵ The National Archives, [undated], *Operation Veritas – British Forces*.

⁴⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 March 2002, columns 38-39.

which would be ready to commence offensive operations by mid-April. The battle group would join a US-led brigade for military operations. The Brigadier commanding 3 Commando Brigade and his headquarters would also deploy to join the headquarters of CENTCOM at Bagram airbase.

Mr Hoon stated that the operation was being conducted in self-defence in accordance with the UN Charter, “against those elements of Al Qaida and the Taliban that continue to threaten the United Kingdom and other countries”.⁴⁷ It was the “largest military deployment for combat operations since the Gulf Conflict” in 1991.⁴⁸

The deployment was discussed in Cabinet on 21 March.⁴⁹

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.”

Turkey took over lead responsibility for ISAF on 20 June 2002.⁵⁰

The same day, Mr Hoon confirmed that the Task Force based on the 45 Commando battlegroup would return to the UK on successful completion of Operation JACANA.⁵¹

Drawdown was completed on 31 July 2002.⁵²

MR HOON’S ADVICE, 22 MARCH 2002

98. Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 22 March emphasising the importance of a counter-proliferation strategy in the Middle East.

99. 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 military planning.

100. Mr Hoon also stated that a number of issues would need to be addressed before forces were committed, including the need for a comprehensive public handling strategy to explain convincingly why such drastic action against Iraq’s WMD was needed now.

⁴⁷ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 March 2002, column 43.

⁴⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 March 2002, column 40.

⁴⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 21 March 2002.

⁵⁰ UN Security Council resolution 1444 (2002).

⁵¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 20 June 2002, column 407.

⁵² The National Archives, [undated], *Operation Veritas*.

101. As the detailed analysis in Section 4.1 shows, the assumption that Saddam Hussein had retained some WMD and the ability to use it and that he was now actively seeking to enhance those capabilities, despite the disarmament obligations imposed by the UN Security Council after the Gulf Conflict in 1991, was deeply embedded in UK thinking by March 2002.

102. That was reinforced by the JIC Current Intelligence Group (CIG) Assessment of the status of Iraq's WMD programmes issued on 15 March to aid policy discussions on Iraq.⁵³

103. In the context of a discussion about US concerns, relating to Al Qaida's pursuit of WMD, the need for action to deal with the threat posed by Iraq and the potential link between terrorism and WMD, Mr Blair told Vice President Dick 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".⁵⁴

104. Policy discussions with the US during March, including Mr Blair's discussion with Vice President Cheney and Sir David Manning's visit to Washington, are addressed in Section 3.2.

105. Mr Hoon discussed Mr Webb's advice of 27 February at a meeting on 19 March, at which AM French "and others" were present.⁵⁵

106. In relation to the options for military action, Mr Hoon was advised that, if a UK contribution to US military action against Iraq were to be sought, it:

"... might be a 'division minus', ie the largest of the options [for the deployment of UK ground forces] foreseen in the SDR [1998 Strategic Defence Review]."⁵⁶

107. Mr Hoon was also told that a "key issue would be the size of any continuing military presence required to sustain a post-Saddam regime".

108. Mr Hoon requested advice on the "likely resilience of Iraq's resistance to a ground operation".

109. Mr Hoon concluded that, if the US were to pursue a military option and seek UK involvement, "it would clearly be undesirable" for the UK to find itself "facing a plan about which we had reservations". It would, therefore, be "advantageous to seek representation in the UN planning process". He would write to Mr Blair suggesting he should raise that possibility in his discussions with President Bush.

⁵³ [CIG Assessment, 15 March 2002, 'The Status of Iraqi WMD Programmes'](#).

⁵⁴ Letter Manning to McDonald, 11 March 2002, 'Conversation between the Prime Minister and Vice President Cheney, 11 March 2002'.

⁵⁵ [Minute Watkins to Policy Director, 20 March 2002, 'Axis of Evil'](#).

⁵⁶ The Planning Assumptions, agreed in SDR 1998 and described earlier in this Section, stated that the UK should be able to deploy a division of up to three brigades in response to crises outside the NATO area. During the Gulf Conflict in 1991, the UK deployed an armoured division comprising two combat brigades; 4 Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade (Ministry of Defence, *Statement on the Defence Estimates – Britain's Defence for the 90s*, July 1991, Cm 1559).

110. In the context of advice about Iraq’s ability to develop a nuclear weapon (see Section 4.1), AM French commented in a minute to Mr Webb that, “Despite the work going on in the Pentagon”, he could “not see a significant possibility of a large-scale military attack on Iraq taking place this year”.⁵⁷

111. In AM French’s view, the US would be “taking a calibrated approach”:

- “The ‘axis of evil’ could be considered as the start of an IO [information operations] campaign.”
- “The US would respond to international opinion by giving UNMOVIC [UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission] another chance, but with a much more intrusive regime.”
- The IO campaign was “part of a move to foment opposition to Saddam Hussein inside Iraq”.
- “The US would consider the selective use of military force, air strikes, to aid a coup, which must come from inside the country.”
- “If all the above fail then consideration would have to be given to large-scale military action.”
- Large-scale military action would come “into play quickly should Iraq be shown to be complicit in terrorist attacks using WMD”.

112. The minute was also sent to Adm Boyce.

113. In response to Mr Hoon’s request at his meeting on 19 March, the DIS advised that a ground offensive from Kuwait through Basra and coalition destruction of regime security organs in southern Iraq, calls for a democratic Iraq, or the attempted imposition of a government in exile, were all likely to increase resistance to a coalition attack.⁵⁸ As long as he was seen as defending Sunni hegemony in Iraq, that was Saddam Hussein’s greatest strength.

114. Mr Hoon sent a minute to Mr Blair on 22 March, which included Mr Hoon’s assessment that Saddam Hussein was “only one unpleasant dimension” of the “key strategic problem” of the spread of WMD, and that a more active counter-proliferation strategy was needed for the region as a whole. That is addressed in Sections 3.2 and 4.1.⁵⁹

115. In relation to possible military action, 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.

⁵⁷ [Minute CDI to Policy Director, 21 March 2002, ‘Iraq – Nuclear Weapons’.](#)

⁵⁸ [Minute PS/CDI to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 26 March 2002, ‘Axis of Evil: Iraq’.](#)

⁵⁹ [Minute Hoon to Prime Minister, 22 March 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

- 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.”

116. Mr Hoon wrote that the UK “should support President Bush and be ready for a military contribution” in Iraq. The UK had “made some progress at getting inside the Pentagon loop”, but he 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 ...”

117. Finally, Mr Hoon proposed that Mr Blair might raise with President 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”.

118. Mr Hoon’s letter was copied to Mr Straw and to Sir Richard Wilson, the Cabinet Secretary.

119. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry:

“The point of asking for access ... was if the Americans were going to start ... down a route of planning for military operations in Iraq, and if the Prime Minister was going to indicate ... that might be something ... we would be involved in, then the earlier we got involved ... the earlier we would get an understanding of what might be required of us.”⁶⁰

120. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that “there was no such thing at that stage as military planning”. It was “quite clear” that some in the US were pushing for military action to deal with WMD proliferation, “not just against Iraq, but against other countries too”. The “background papers” produced for Mr Blair’s visit to Crawford were “policy papers rather than military planning documents”. Those papers helped to inform Mr Blair’s thinking but there were “no recommendations”.⁶¹

121. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that, if there was a possibility of the US taking military action to which the UK might make a military contribution, the MOD:

⁶⁰ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 4.

⁶¹ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 7-9.

“... needed to be inside the process, both to influence it, but equally to understand what was happening, so that if, later on, there was such a request, we knew the nature of that request and why it had been made.”⁶²

122. On 25 March, Mr Straw wrote to Mr Blair 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.⁶³

123. Mr Straw’s minute, which is addressed in Section 3.2, does not appear to have been sent to anyone outside No.10.

Mr Blair’s meeting at Chequers, 2 April 2002

124. 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.

125. The meeting was clearly intended to inform Mr Blair’s approach in his discussion with President Bush.

126. Mr Blair’s meeting at Chequers on 2 April is addressed in Section 3.2. No formal record was made of the discussion, or who was present.

127. Accounts given by participants suggest that Adm Boyce, Sir Kevin Tebbit (representing Mr Hoon who was unable to attend), Lt Gen Pigott, Lieutenant General Cedric Delves (senior UK liaison officer at CENTCOM), Sir Richard Dearlove, Mr Jonathan Powell (Mr Blair’s Chief of Staff), Sir David Manning and Mr Scarlett were present.

128. In relation to the military advice provided at the meeting, Lt Gen Pigott produced a set of briefing slides at the meeting.⁶⁴ 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.”

129. 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.

⁶² Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 16.

⁶³ [Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 25 March 2002, ‘Crawford/Iraq’.](#)

⁶⁴ [Email DCDS\(C\)/MA2 to CDS REGISTRY-5 and PS/PUS \[MOD\], 28 March 2002, ‘Iraq Briefing Slides’.](#)

130. Dr Cholerton provided Sir Kevin Tebbit with advice including a copy of the Cabinet Office ‘Iraq: Options Paper’ and Mr Webb’s minute of 27 February.⁶⁵ Dr Cholerton wrote:

“... 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.”

131. Lord Boyce initially told the Inquiry:

“We had started thinking of what our capability would be. I was not involved in the briefing of the Prime Minister just before going to Crawford.”⁶⁶

132. In his later statement, Lord Boyce said:

“There was a meeting with the Prime Minister on 2 April just prior to his visit to Crawford to discuss, amongst other things such as Afghanistan, a wide range of options about how to deal with Iraq, from containment and sanctions to conceptual military action. There was no discussion on the detail of military action or military options.”⁶⁷

133. Adm Boyce told the Inquiry that his “presence at Chequers on that particular occasion was simply if there were questions coming up about what could be done militarily, what was our capability should we be asked to do something”; and that “no particular preparations were made for that” meeting.⁶⁸

134. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that Sir Kevin Tebbit had attended the meeting on his behalf, and that he “knew that there were quite detailed discussions about what was going to happen at Crawford”.⁶⁹

135. The MOD has been unable to locate any record of Sir Kevin’s report to, or discussion with, Mr Hoon.⁷⁰

136. Mr Blair wrote in his memoir that Admiral Boyce and:

“... [Lt Gen] Pigott who had studied the military options, gave a presentation. They warned it could be a bloody fight and take a long time to remove Saddam. The US

⁶⁵ Minute Cholerton to PS/PUS [MOD], 8 April 2002 [sic], ‘Iraq: Meeting with Prime Minister at Chequers’.

⁶⁶ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 10-11.

⁶⁷ Statement Boyce, 27 January 2011.

⁶⁸ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 3.

⁶⁹ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 18.

⁷⁰ Letter MOD Iraq Inquiry Unit to Iraq Inquiry Secretariat, 23 May 2012, [untitled].

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 ...”⁷¹

137. The most detailed account of the meeting is in the diaries of Mr Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair’s Director of Communications and Strategy. He described the meeting as:

“... a repeat of the smaller meeting we’d had on Afghanistan. Boyce ... mainly set out why it was hard to do anything ...

“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 appeared to be trying to shape the meeting towards inaction, constantly pointing out the problems, the nature of the [US] Administration, only Rumsfeld and a few others knew what was being planned, TB may speak to Bush or Condi [Rice] 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 ... Cedric [Delves] ... said Tommy Franks 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.

⁷¹ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

“C [Dearlove] said that the Presidential Finding, based on an NSC [National Security Council] 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 ...”⁷²

138. Sir Richard Dearlove's evidence on the meeting and a press report about the Presidential Finding are described in Section 3.2.

Mr Blair's meeting with President Bush at Crawford, April 2002

139. When Mr Blair met President Bush in early April, the US was not ready to agree UK access to US military planning.

140. Lt Gen Pigott and Mr Bowen travelled to Washington on 2 April primarily to discuss Afghanistan-related matters.⁷³

141. Lt Gen Pigott also took the opportunity to ask what the US aims were for Iraq, and whether they were centred on regime change, WMD or both. He was reported as indicating some:

“... close-hold interagency thinking was beginning in London ... We [the UK] would welcome some engagement with the US on these broad questions. Discussion of military plans was for later.”⁷⁴

142. US officials were reported to have given a mixed response to his approach.

143. Mr Peter Watkins, Mr Hoon's Principal Private Secretary, sent a report of the visit to Sir David Manning, on 4 April.⁷⁵

144. Mr Watkins wrote:

“The impression they formed was that serious debate of the issues, let alone options, had not got off the ground ... (The Chairman [of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers] would presumably have to persuade Donald Rumsfeld [US Secretary of Defense] of the desirability of this joint activity.) Mr Hoon strongly endorses the need to get close to Pentagon thinking on the possible approaches in order to get the framework right before any military planning starts. He hopes that the President and Prime Minister can agree to set this Pentagon/MOD work in hand.”

⁷² Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

⁷³ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, page 5.

⁷⁴ Telegram 461 Washington to FCO London, 4 April 2002, 'US Policy on Iraq: Visit of Lt Gen Pigott'.

⁷⁵ Letter Watkins to Manning, 4 April 2002, 'Iraq'.

145. 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."⁷⁶

146. In a separate minute to Mr Blair, Sir David wrote:

"We need to start US/UK military planning (ie access for UK military planners in Washington and CENTCOM – the point CDS [Adm Boyce] made at Chequers)."⁷⁷

147. Mr Blair met President Bush at Crawford, Texas, on 5 and 6 April. The discussion and Mr Blair's subsequent statements – in a press conference with President Bush, the speech at College Station on 7 April, in Parliament on 10 April, and to Cabinet on 11 April – are addressed in Section 3.2.

148. 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 Simon McDonald, Mr Straw's Principal Private Secretary, which was sent only to Mr Watkins (for Mr Hoon), Admiral Boyce, Sir Michael Jay (FCO Permanent Under Secretary), Sir Richard Dearlove, Sir Christopher Meyer (British Ambassador to the US) and Mr Powell.⁷⁸

149. In relation to military action, Sir David Manning recorded that the meeting on Saturday morning was informed that:

- 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.

150. 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

⁷⁶ Manuscript comment Manning on Letter Watkins to Manning, 4 April 2002, 'Iraq'.

⁷⁷ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 4 April 2002, 'Crawford Checklist'.

⁷⁸ Letter Manning to McDonald, 8 April 2002, 'Prime Minister's Visit to the United States: 5-7 April'.

- 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.

151. 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.

152. 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.

153. The record contained no reference to any discussion of the conditions which would be necessary for military action.

154. 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.⁷⁹

155. A minute from Mr Powell on 11 April suggested to Mr Blair:

“... in particular we need to bank his agreement that our military can be involved in joint planning once they have got pa[s]t the conceptual stage.”⁸⁰

156. 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.⁸¹

157. Mr Powell told the Inquiry that he did not “recall ... any sort of discussion of military options” at Crawford.⁸²

158. Asked what Mr Blair had told him about his discussions with President Bush at Crawford, Mr Hoon replied:

“I don’t think he told me anything directly. I saw a record of the meeting ...”⁸³

159. Subsequently Mr Hoon stated:

“My recollection of those events is that ... we were a little disappointed after Crawford that we hadn’t immediately received a request from the United States to send someone to Tampa.”⁸⁴

160. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that he had told President Bush the UK would be with him “in confronting and dealing with this threat”.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 11 April 2002.

⁸⁰ Minute Powell to Prime Minister, 11 April 2002, ‘Follow up to Bush’.

⁸¹ Letter Meyer to Manning, 15 May 2002, ‘Your visit to Washington’.

⁸² Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 24.

⁸³ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 29-30.

⁸⁴ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 35.

⁸⁵ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 43.

161. Mr Blair subsequently confirmed that included if it came to military action.⁸⁶

162. Mr Blair also said that there had been “a general discussion of the possibility of going down the military route”.⁸⁷

163. Asked whether the UK would have made the request to be involved in US planning if military action had not been regarded as a serious possibility, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry:

“... it behoves any responsible military planner to make sure he is considering all the options that might come in the future. If the Americans were going to go down the route of taking military action in Iraq ... it was very important for us to understand what was going on at the earliest possible stage rather than being brought in at a late stage where we wouldn't have had any opportunity to say what our capabilities are or how we would shape our capabilities ... to fit in with whatever plan was being produced.”⁸⁸

Initial consideration of UK military options

MOD contingency planning in April and May 2002

164. After Crawford, the MOD began seriously to consider what UK military contribution might be made to any US-led military action and the need for a plausible military plan for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime.

165. The MOD's initial thinking focused on the deployment of an Army division.

166. Mr Hoon was advised that Cabinet-level agreement to decisions to deploy UK Armed Forces to Iraq would be required.

167. In early April, thinking in the MOD on possible options for a UK contribution to military operations in Iraq moved into a higher gear.

168. Following the meeting at Chequers on 2 April, Sir Kevin Tebbit asked Mr Trevor Woolley, MOD Director General Resources and Plans, on 3 April 2002 for advice on the implications of deploying a “Division minus (25-30,000 with enablers)” to Iraq.⁸⁹

169. Sir Kevin's request, the advice he received, the fact that a division would require a minimum of six months lead time and ideally longer, and arrangements for Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs), are addressed in Section 6.3.

⁸⁶ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 48.

⁸⁷ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 59.

⁸⁸ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 7.

⁸⁹ Minute Tebbit to DG RP, 3 April 2002, 'Iraq Pre-contingency Mind Clearing'.

MR WEBB'S ADVICE, 12 APRIL 2002

170. Following Mr Blair's visit to Crawford, Mr Hoon discussed Iraq with Adm Boyce and Sir Kevin Tebbit on 8 April.⁹⁰

171. Mr Hoon "emphasised that no decisions had been taken on military action" but it was "important that No.10 and others understood the practical steps and (additional) costs which would be involved". Therefore as a "precaution against the possibility that military action might have to be taken at some point in the future", exploratory work should be put in hand, conducted "on a very close hold", to provide:

- "... a clearer picture of the potential specific military options – including the possible UK involvement"; this should indicate the "likely scales of effort and force generation/deployment timelines".
- "Clarification of what military capability we could deliver on the basis of the ... budgets for 2002/03 and what more might be required to deliver the options" identified.
- "Identification of the additional specific equipment requirements (UORs) necessary to deliver these options ... Equipment – rather than personnel – was likely to be on the critical path in terms of deployment timelines."

172. Mr Hoon asked to discuss the emerging findings and "the 'think piece'" the following week.

173. On 12 April, following consultation with Sir Kevin Tebbit and Adm Boyce, Mr Webb sent Mr Hoon a think piece entitled "Bush and the War on Terrorism".⁹¹ Mr Webb's minute provided formal advice on the possible scale of any UK military contribution and a draft letter to Mr Blair.

174. Mr Webb's paper explored potential end states for military action in Iraq in the context of Mr Blair's "commitment to regime change ('if necessary and justified')" in his speech at College Station on 7 April.

175. Mr Webb added:

- "Commitment on timing has been avoided and an expectation has developed that no significant operation will be mounted while major violence continues in Israel/Palestine".
- "Both Crawford and contacts with the Pentagon confirm that US thinking has not identified either a successor or a constitutional restructuring to provide a more representational regime:
 - "Various ideas for replacements have been aired over the years and none so far look convincing ..."

⁹⁰ Minute Watkins to PSO/CDS & PS/PUS [MOD], 8 April 2002, 'Iraq'.

⁹¹ [Minute Webb to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 12 April 2002, 'Bush and the War on Terrorism'.](#)

176. Mr Webb’s view was that “the prospects for finding a stable political solution” were “poor in the short term”; and that a coalition might be left “holding the ring for a significant period”. Securing a mandate for a UN interim administration “could be tricky” so there would be a “need to cater for some kind of sponsored interim administration”.

177. Mr Webb added that “without proper access to US planning”, the options were “speculative” but:

“Potential US scenarios could embrace:

- A. A clandestine/Special Forces operation on a limited scale ...
- B. A local revolution, possibly supported by SF and a major air campaign (on a Northern Alliance analogy, though the circumstances are very different).
- C. A major military operation to secure centres of power such as Baghdad ...”

178. Mr Webb advised that the US had “sufficient forces to undertake a military operation ... without anyone else’s help”; but:

“To achieve a successful regime change, the UK would need to be actively involved (one might also argue that the Prime Minister has effectively committed us).”

179. If the US mounted a major military operation, a UK contribution of only Special Forces, cruise missiles and/or air support “would be seen as only token ... confer no significant influence on US planning (and would be adversely contrasted with Britain’s contribution during the [1990/91] Gulf War).”

180. Setting out the MOD’s thinking on military issues, Mr Webb wrote:

- “The fundamental building block for [a UK contribution to] a major US ground force operation is a division. Only on that scale (requiring 3 brigades as our planning base) would UK have significant influence over how the operation was developed and conducted: an independent brigade does not fit into the US structure and would in any case need substantial divisional scale enablers in order to be safe for high intensity operations ... Such a deployment would be at the extreme end of the UK’s capacity after the SDR: it was the scenario against which the ‘large’ option was scaled.”
- The UK “should seek only to make a respectable large contribution that we can sustain properly”.⁹²

⁹² In a handwritten amendment to the draft letter Lt Gen Pigott suggested amending the sentence “Without access to US planning, which is only now beginning ...” to “Without formal access to US planning ...” He also recommended inserting “a 3 brigade division” in the description of the potential UK force contribution of a division.

181. Mr Webb added:

“... there could be advantage in the MOD doing some discreet internal strategic estimating. This should help us think through what would be the key strategic objectives and the end states and the ‘centre of gravity’ of the situation we need to tackle ... When the time came for discussion with the US, our pre-thinking and ability to offer a well thought-through force contribution (up to a division, though obviously less if possible) would give us clout: and also a respectable position from which to judge whether their proposals offer adequate return for risk.”

182. On the way forward, Mr Webb wrote:

“Despite the massive scale of commitment, there are arguments that preventing the spread of WMD should be given the highest priority in coming years ... [I]t remains the greatest risk to Middle East and international stability in the medium-term; and in the long-term countries like Iraq and Iran are on course to threaten Europe and UK direct. It is arguable that preventing this spread by making an example of Saddam Hussein would do more for long-term stability than all the displaced [military] activities combined ...

“By demonstrating our capacity for high intensity warfare at large scale the UK would also send a powerful deterrence message to other potential WMD proliferators and adversaries.

“... There would come a point at which preparations could apply some valuable pressure on Saddam; or be seen as a natural reaction to prevarication over inspections. In general ... until that point ... we should keep a low profile ...”

183. Mr Webb concluded:

“Even these preparatory steps would properly need a Cabinet Committee decision, based on a minute from the Defence Secretary. The FCO are content for activity to be centred on MOD, to preserve the best prospect for dialogue with US DOD [Department of Defense] ...”

184. At a meeting on 18 April to discuss Mr Webb’s minute, Mr Hoon found the analysis “generally persuasive”; but asked for further work to examine the feasibility of making a smaller contribution.⁹³ He sought options “short of participation in a full ground offensive”.

185. Mr Hoon said that more thought needed to be given to the legal aspects as:

“Prima facie, the best legal foundation for any operation to displace Saddam’s regime was that it would remove the threat posed by his WMD. However it was

⁹³ [Minute Watkins to Policy Director, 18 April 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

conceivable that any new Iraqi regime – and, in particular, one led by another ‘strong man’ – would wish to have WMD to meet the perceived regional threat from Iran ...”

186. Mr Hoon stated that he was content for thinking to continue, but decided it should be kept on “a very close hold until Ministers agreed otherwise”. For him, “the key question was: how far ahead of a decision to deploy would we have to start any necessary preparatory action”.

187. Mr Webb explained to the Inquiry that the way he had posed the issues in his minute was a means of finding out from Mr Hoon if he knew or could find out what the position was:

“This was commissioned as a think piece. But ... my duty is to say to my Secretary of State, you need, we need to have a feel for whether the Prime Minister has committed us here, because it affects what we do next.”⁹⁴

188. Mr Webb added that he had not got an explicit response on that point.

189. Mr Hoon did not formally write to Mr Blair setting out possible options for a UK contribution to military operations until 31 May.

190. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that after Crawford the MOD “started ramping up our ... thinking on ... what we could provide”.⁹⁵

191. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that it should not assume that the MOD was looking for the military option at that point. Rather, if the military was to be in a position to produce a military option “at a much later date”, a “very long planning process [was] required” and it had to start thinking about the issues “as early as possible”. The work was “very, very preliminary ground clearing”.⁹⁶

192. Sir Kevin subsequently told the Inquiry that, to produce a large scale option on the ground, serious planning had to start six months earlier.⁹⁷ The military papers and records would “indicate clarity of intent, when in fact what there was, was a determination to provide the politicians with the option”.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE “PIGOTT GROUP”

193. The MOD established an informal inter-departmental group of senior officials, the “Pigott Group”, to identify the issues which might need to be addressed if military action was taken in Iraq.

194. The discussions of the Group were not recorded.

⁹⁴ Private hearing, 23 June 2010, page 11.

⁹⁵ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 11.

⁹⁶ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 14-16.

⁹⁷ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, pages 10-11.

195. Lt Gen Pigott told Mr Hoon on 18 April that a small, senior group had been put together “including ... representatives from other interested Departments” to “brainstorm the options”.⁹⁸

196. Mr Peter Ricketts, FCO Political Director, described the role of the group, which became known as the “Pigott Group”, to Mr Straw on 25 April as to think about the issues that would be involved in any military operation in Iraq.⁹⁹ Its establishment was:

“... a sensitive exercise. Participation is being tightly restricted and paperwork will be kept to the minimum.”

197. Mr Ricketts advised Mr Straw that the first meeting of the Group had discussed how the objective or “end state” of a military operation should be defined. That is addressed in Section 3.3.

198. The minute stated that senior officials from the Cabinet Office and the Agencies, as well as the FCO, would be involved.

199. Sir Peter Ricketts told the Inquiry that the role of the Pigott Group was to discuss “the implications of military planning for other departments’ activities” rather than to “discuss military planning as such”.¹⁰⁰

200. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that the Group “was constrained, to a very small group of people ... in London in the MOD, it didn’t actually go outside into any of the outposts ... in the MOD”.¹⁰¹

201. Lt Gen Pigott told the Inquiry that the role of the Group was:

“... to do some scoping work ... Not to do ... planning ... What could we be dealing with here? What might be the big issues? ... the what, when, where. What were they beginning to look like ...”¹⁰²

202. Mr Tom McKane, Deputy Head of OD Sec from September 1999 until early September 2002, told the Inquiry that the Group “met a number of times in the early summer” of 2002.¹⁰³ The meetings were “not minuted” and were “very informal ... the focus was on precisely what was the US emerging plan”. At that stage there was “great uncertainty about that”, and British access to American thinking had been “pretty limited”.

203. Mr Webb told the Inquiry that the Group had worked out the shape of the options which he had then discussed with Mr Douglas Feith, US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ [Minute Watkins to Policy Director, 18 April 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

⁹⁹ [Minute Ricketts to Private Secretary \[FCO\], 25 April 2002, ‘Iraq Contingency Planning’.](#)

¹⁰⁰ Public hearing, 1 December 2009, pages 20-21.

¹⁰¹ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 11.

¹⁰² Public hearing, 4 December 2009, pages 17-18.

¹⁰³ Public hearing, 19 January 2011, page 60.

¹⁰⁴ Private hearing, 23 June 2010, page 15.

204. The Strategic Planning Group (SPG), a planning team working for Lt Gen Pigott, supported the Pigott Group.

205. Lieutenant General Sir James Dutton, Adm Boyce's liaison officer to the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff until the middle of March 2002 and subsequently head of the SPG until taking up his appointment as Commander, 3 Commando Brigade in July 2002, told the Inquiry that, in view of his recent experience in Washington as CDS's liaison officer, he had been asked to lead the team, reporting weekly to Lt Gen Pigott.¹⁰⁵

206. Lt Gen Dutton said that the work was best described as "prudent military contingency planning on what we might be able to do if there were a political directive to do so". Force packages were not yet being discussed:

"If there were to be a political decision made to do something in Iraq, what might the Americans do, what might we be able to do ... if that decision were made and ... how would the various bits of Whitehall contribute to that and what might be the longer-term aim. So it was very much conceptual thinking ..."

MOD ADVICE TO MR HOON, MAY 2002

207. The MOD advised Mr Hoon in early May that the US had decided to pursue regime change. The question was when. The MOD thought it could be at "the turn of the year".

208. The US was likely to continue to hold the UK military at arm's length until options had been considered by President Bush.

209. Lt Gen Pigott identified two key issues which would need to be addressed: the impact of the potential courses of action and the contribution the UK might make.

210. Gen Franks visited the UK as part of a wider overseas visit in late April 2002.

211. Mr Hoon's diary indicates that he met Gen Franks at RAF Brize Norton on 25 April.¹⁰⁶

212. The MOD has not been able to locate any record of the discussion.¹⁰⁷

213. The discussion on Iraq at the Chiefs of Staff meeting attended by Gen Franks and Air Marshal Brian Burrige, Deputy Commander in Chief Strike Command, on 26 April was recorded separately and circulated on very limited distribution.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Public hearing, 12 July 2010, pages 4-5.

¹⁰⁶ Diary, SofS [MOD], 25 April 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Letter MOD Iraq Inquiry Unit to Iraq Inquiry Secretariat, 23 May 2012, [untitled].

¹⁰⁸ Minute SECCOS to PS/SofS [MOD] and others, 30 April 2002, 'Record of CINCCENTCOM meeting with COS – 26 April 2002'.

214. The minute of the discussion records that the Chiefs of Staff were told that the US was thinking deeply about Iraq and possible contingencies; but was not currently planning a military operation to overthrow the Iraqi regime. There were a significant number of questions about the use of force including timing and the need for proof of WMD and a legal underpinning.

215. Recent difficulties with the No-Fly Zones were also discussed.

216. Mr Jim Drummond, Assistant Head of OD Sec (Foreign Policy), who attended the Chiefs of Staff meeting, advised Sir David Manning that:

“... the mood [in the US government] was ‘when not if’, but the list of unintended consequences was long and policy makers were still grappling with them ... Activity in Washington mirrored that in London. Small groups of senior staff thinking through strategy options.”¹⁰⁹

217. Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge told the Inquiry that Gen Franks had visited London in “mid-May”; and that he had said something about Iraq along the lines of “it is not if but when, and that was really the first time I had heard him say anything with that degree of certainty”.¹¹⁰

218. From the records of the 26 April Chiefs of Staff meeting, the Inquiry concludes ACM Burridge was recalling that discussion. There is no evidence that Gen Franks was in London in mid-May.

219. Lt Gen Pigott told the Inquiry: “I had an extremely close relationship with the key players in the joint staff. It was very much professional friends over the years”. If approached, they would say: “Yes ... we are doing a bit more on this”, but that was “not the American Government”, it was “an individual senior officer in the American Government”.¹¹¹

220. Major General David Wilson, who replaced Lt Gen Delves as Senior British Military Adviser (SBMA) at CENTCOM in April 2002, told the Inquiry that he received no information about Iraq planning when he arrived:

“Nothing. I didn’t find anything, because the shutters were firmly down. I and my people were in the foreign exclusion category ... there was no sort of nodding and winking, that’s the way it was.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Minute Drummond to Manning, 26 April 2002, ‘Meeting with General Franks’.

¹¹⁰ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 6.

¹¹¹ Public hearing, 4 December 2009, page 11.

¹¹² Public hearing, 4 December 2009, pages 8-9.

221. Lt Gen Dutton told the Inquiry:

“... we were all interested to know whether there was any planning going on for other potential operations. I used to ask that question of the J-3, General Newbold ... and he would be quite honest in saying that they were doing staff checks for any number of contingencies and, if asked specifically about Iraq, he would not deny that they were looking at what they could do, if asked ...”¹¹³

222. Lt Gen Pigott sent Mr Hoon an update on the work of the SPG on 10 May.¹¹⁴

223. Lt Gen Pigott stated:

“Any thinking we do about joining the US in military operations against the Iraqi regime needs to be informed by our thinking in two key areas: the impact of potential courses of action open to a coalition and the capability the UK might contribute to such a coalition.”

224. The SPG had concluded that the US had decided to pursue regime change; the question was when, including whether to pursue weapons inspections before a military build-up. The MOD’s “best guess” was that the recommendation would be for action at “the turn of the year” but it did not expect to be “exposed” to US planning until advice had been put to President Bush, probably in late May. The UK would “need to be ready to discuss Iraq with the Americans as soon as they share planning with us”.

225. Work had been commissioned on the capabilities the UK might aim to provide within periods of three to four and six to eight months; setting out the key decision and deployment points.

226. Lt Gen Pigott suggested that this could lead to “a note to the Prime Minister setting out these and the financial implications of taking contingency action now”. The advantage of characterising this work as “contingency planning and considering generic force packages” was that it offered “the possibility of wider debate and scrutiny in the department than would be available if we were to consider specific courses of action, for operational security reasons”. The work needed to be supported by “thinking on what ‘end state’ HMG is seeking to achieve and about the legal basis on which action would be taken forward”.

227. Mr Hoon noted Lt Gen Pigott’s advice and asked for a meeting to discuss the work and when it would be appropriate to convene a meeting with Mr Blair and Mr Straw.¹¹⁵

228. In a letter the same day as Lt Gen Pigott’s update on wider issues, which is addressed in Section 3.3, Mr Webb told Mr Ricketts:

¹¹³ Public hearing, 12 July 2010, pages 2-3.

¹¹⁴ [Minute DCDS\(C\) to APS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 10 May 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹¹⁵ Minute Williams to DCDS(C), 13 May 2002, ‘Iraq’.

“... we have proposed to the Defence Secretary we take forward rapidly two distinct pieces of work, one on military *contingency planning* ... and the other on *coalition options* which will need to factor in legal considerations. Rather than submitting our Ministers’ conclusions to the Attorney General for his approval, we should prefer the usual approach of his putting advice to colleagues as part of a collective decision.”¹¹⁶

229. The letter was sent to Lt Gen Pigott, Sir David Manning and SIS.

230. By mid-May, the perception that the UK might provide an armoured division for military operations had already gained currency in the US.

231. There is no evidence that such a suggestion had been authorised.

232. In the absence of an agreed avenue for dialogue between the US and UK and the sensitivities about the issue on both sides of the Atlantic in the spring of 2002, informal conversations between the US and UK military and between civilian officials to explore each other’s positions to inform thinking and the development of advice to Ministers were unavoidable.

233. Mr Webb visited Washington in mid-May and discussed draft objectives for a military operation with US officials (see Section 3.3).¹¹⁷

234. Mr Webb explained the UK military timelines as:

“... 7 to 9 months for a major contribution of division minus plus air wing etc, shorter for a smaller package. If they [the US] wanted UK participation this would have to be factored in.”

235. Mr Webb also reported his impression that momentum in Washington “had flagged” since his last substantive discussions in February.

236. In the context of those discussions, Mr Webb told the Inquiry:

“... once you get into the level of military planning, it doesn’t make a big difference whether your policy is to remove WMD, and that means Saddam has to go, or whether you are going to change the regime and take the opportunity to remove WMD ... [I]t’s very important in legal and policy terms ...”¹¹⁸

237. In preparation for Sir David Manning’s visit to Washington, Sir Christopher Meyer sent a personal letter to Sir David on 15 May.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ [Letter Webb to Ricketts, 10 May 2002, \[untitled\]](#).

¹¹⁷ [Letter Webb to Ricketts, 16 May 2002, ‘Iraq: Objectives’](#).

¹¹⁸ Private hearing, 23 June 2010, page 16.

¹¹⁹ Letter Meyer to Manning, 15 May 2002, ‘Your Visit to Washington’.

238. In relation to military planning, Sir Christopher reported that he had been told by a senior official in the State Department that:

- The timeframe discussed between Mr Blair and President Bush was still valid: the first quarter of next year was “realistic” for action against Saddam Hussein.
- CENTCOM was hearing from British military sources that we were contemplating contributing an armoured division.

239. In discussions with Dr Rice on Iraq, Sir David Manning was assured that the UK would be brought into the planning process at a very early stage, once such planning got under way.¹²⁰

240. One significant and potentially awkward fact emerged from a meeting with Mr Richard Armitage, US Deputy Secretary of State, when Sir David Manning was told that a report that “a UK officer at Tampa had said that the UK would provide an armoured division” was “dropped into the conversation” of the most senior US policy-makers.¹²¹

241. On the record of the meeting in the Chief of the Defence Staff files, a handwritten comment to Adm Boyce said: “This could unstitch your line with the PM tomorrow.”¹²²

242. Mr Hoon’s Private Office sent a note to Adm Boyce’s office on 21 May, recording that the Defence Secretary was “surprised and concerned” by this report:

“Given the very close hold under which contingency planning for Iraq has been conducted and the fact that no options have yet been presented to Ministers, the Secretary of State would be grateful for any light which can be thrown upon this story. Is the UK team in Tampa party to the current work on Iraq?”¹²³

243. Adm Boyce’s office replied that “the UK team in Tampa is not party to current MOD work on Iraq” and:

“... our investigations indicate that there has been no authenticated or officially recorded message passed to General Franks, or anyone else at Tampa, that the UK ‘would’ provide a division. We can only assume that this is speculation based on UK’s contribution to the Gulf War 1991 which has been misinterpreted.”¹²⁴

244. A manuscript note to Mr Hoon on the document states “we can assume the point has been made”.

¹²⁰ [Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 18 May 2002, ‘David Manning’s Visit to Washington, 17 May; Iraq’.](#)

¹²¹ [Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 18 May 2002, ‘David Manning’s Visit to Washington, 17 May Iraq’.](#)

¹²² Manuscript comment [unattributed] on [Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 18 May 2002, ‘David Manning’s Visit to Washington, 17 May Iraq’.](#)

¹²³ [Minute Williams to PSO/CDS, 21 May 2002, ‘David Manning’s Visit to Washington 17 May – Iraq’.](#)

¹²⁴ [Minute Shirreff to APS/Secretary of State, 31 May 2002, ‘David Manning’s Visit to Washington 17 May – Iraq’.](#)

245. Sir Kevin Tebbit wrote on his own copy of the document “Rubbish!”¹²⁵

246. Asked about his meeting with Mr Armitage and the fact that Mr Armitage had been told that Mr Blair had discussed with President Bush at Crawford the question of a British armoured division taking part in the invasion, Sir David Manning told the Inquiry: “Yes I didn’t know that.”¹²⁶

247. Asked, in the context of an offer of a division, whether the military planners were getting ahead of the policy, Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that he was “surprised they had said that”. It “didn’t seem logical”; Mr Blair had refused in July to indicate what the military contribution might be.¹²⁷

248. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry: “Let me absolutely assure you that no-one was authorised to make such an offer. In fact, quite the contrary.”¹²⁸ He added: “we were unable to find out who this person was. So I don’t believe there was such a person.”

249. Two key strands of MOD thinking had clearly emerged by the end of May 2002.

250. First, work on options in the MOD focused on identifying the maximum contribution the UK could make to any US-led operation in Iraq, even though the UK was still unsure about the objectives and validity of the plan, the legal basis for action or the precise role the UK would play.

251. Second, the desire to secure “strategic influence” across all environments of a military campaign.

252. The record of Mr Blair’s meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on 21 May, when a range of wider defence issues was discussed, noted on Iraq: “The two main questions were: Do the US have a sensible concept? If so how could the UK contribute?”¹²⁹

253. A paper produced by the SPG on 24 May, ‘Contingency Thinking: Force Generation and Deployment for the Gulf’, was sent to the Chiefs of Staff and a limited number of named MOD addressees.¹³⁰

254. The aim of the paper was to provide sufficient information:

“... to judge what the UK’s maximum level of commitment could be in the event of a contingent operation against Iraq, together with appropriate costs and timings, and to provide data on other smaller coherent force packages as a comparator.”

¹²⁵ Manuscript comment Tebbit and Hoon on [Minute Shirreff to APS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 31 May 2002, ‘David Manning’s visit to Washington 17 May – Iraq’](#).

¹²⁶ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 38.

¹²⁷ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 40.

¹²⁸ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 19-20.

¹²⁹ Note Rycroft, 21 May 2002, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Chiefs of Staff’.

¹³⁰ Paper [SPG], 24 May 2002, ‘Contingency Thinking: Force Generation and Deployment for the Gulf’.

255. The paper identified a number of key assumptions:

- Any operation would be US led and might involve other active coalition partners, but would be “predominantly enabled by US/UK forces”.
- The UK would provide only coherent, self-supporting force packages ... and would operate within the framework of a coalition concept of operations.
- The UK would scale its contribution so that the force would “make a meaningful difference to a coalition effort” and would not be a “token contribution that attracts no influence or provides insignificant combat power. A small scale of effort would therefore only be appropriate if the coalition concept of operations demanded small scale contributions.”
- Operations would not commence before autumn 2002.
- Decisions would not be taken incrementally because that would “add to timelines by making force generation increasingly complex and costly”.
- Enhancements would be needed to enable units to operate in the Gulf. That would expose preparations from an early stage given the significant number of contracts that would be required with industry.
- It might be necessary to maintain force elements in theatre for policing, stabilisation or humanitarian operations. That had the potential to add considerably to the costs and commitments burden, depending on the end state of the campaign.

256. Three broad levels of effort in line with the MOD’s DPAs were examined:

- the maximum the UK could provide (a large scale contribution);
- a “credible” medium scale package; and
- a small scale package.

257. Reflecting the UK’s existing military commitments and the most recent MOD budgetary planning round, the SPG advised that the UK could realistically produce a “maximum contribution ... at the lower end of large scale ... medium scale (minus) for maritime (about 10 major warships), and medium scale for air (about 60 fast jets)”.

258. The force mix might not be evenly balanced (in terms of scale of effort) across the sea, land and air environments; but the UK would “always seek to achieve strategic influence across the three environments such that UK influence is in place throughout the joint environment”.

259. Also on 24 May, the emerging findings from the SPG analysis were presented to Mr Hoon to report to Mr Blair before a planned meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld in early June.¹³¹

¹³¹ [Minute DCDS\(C\) to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 24 May 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

260. Lt Gen Pigott advised that, “until there is greater visibility and clarity of US intent our work on potential approaches to an Iraq campaign remains speculative; this work is advancing but will lack definition until we engage with the US”. There were “potential differences in US and UK views on the outcomes” being sought “in terms of governance and WMD”.

261. In relation to “military contingency planning”, the “key assumption” was that the largest US-led coalition would be “along the lines of Desert Storm and that the UK would want to contribute”.

262. Three broad options (“force packages”) had been identified, which were “illustrative of the maximum potential ... contribution” that the UK might be able to make available for any offensive operations within given time periods:

- a. **Three months’ warning:** Deployment of a medium scale joint force – 10 warships including a carrier, an armoured brigade, about 60 fast jets and associated support. That was described as at risk of being a “token contribution”. The cost, including “essential” UORs for equipping the force, was estimated at £500m-£800m. A brigade, rather than a division, would require integration into an allied formation, which would “substantially” reduce the UK’s influence on control of the campaign. That would be “less than our Gulf War contribution” and “would be dwarfed by the likely scale of the overall effort”.
- b. **Six months’ warning:** Deployment of a large scale, war-fighting force in addition to the medium scale maritime and air components, which would be “comparable to the 1990/1991 conflict”, and “confer significant influence on the control of the campaign”. Though the land element would be “capable of limited independent war-fighting” there would be sustainability issues. Large numbers of vehicles could become “unserviceable” and there would be reliance on others to supply ammunition and other stock. There would not be enough time for “the procurement and fitting of *all* UOR equipment considered to be essential for operations in the Gulf (such as the desertisation of all armoured vehicles)”, which would generate further operational risks and result in the degradation of the “credibility of the UK’s contribution as [the] campaign unfolded”. That option would require the call-out of 5,000-10,000 reservists and cost £800m-£1.1bn. A decision would need to be taken immediately for operations to begin in December 2002.
- c. **Nine months’ warning:** The force package would be the same as (b) but would be better prepared and carry fewer risks, as a result of additional training and equipment. The package would have “enough capability and sustainability to be a credible contribution to any coalition”. The cost would be £100m higher because of a greater volume of UORs.

263. Deployment and campaign costs would be additional to the costs identified for each option.

264. Lt Gen Pigott explained that current commitments in Afghanistan and subsequent recovery and deployment times would “limit the UK’s ability to contribute significantly to any offensive operations in the region until November at the earliest”.

265. If it was “likely that the UK would wish to contribute” to US action “when the call came”, there was a “need to consider what action” was needed “now to reduce risks and as far as possible readiness times”.

266. Mr Hoon was asked to agree further work to refine contingency planning, to be submitted in mid-June; and was informed that “proper preparations” would require wider involvement in the MOD and discreet approaches to industry.

267. In a meeting with Sir Kevin Tebbit, ACM Bagnall, Mr Webb, Mr Bowen, and others, on 27 May, Mr Hoon agreed that the best approach would be to explain the practical constraints the UK faced in assembling a useful force package to Secretary Rumsfeld.¹³²

268. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that he had thought the land option “quite a big ask, given our extensive involvement in Afghanistan at the time”; “it was undoubtedly the case” that the UK would be “taken more seriously if we were making a substantial contribution”, and that that influence would extend to shaping the policy.¹³³

Meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld, 5 June 2002

269. In preparation for a visit to the UK by Secretary Rumsfeld on 5 June, Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 31 May.

270. Mr Hoon advised that he and Mr Straw had agreed a preliminary objective to guide planning. Instead of calling directly for the elimination of Iraq’s WMD capability, it called on Iraq to abide by its international obligations on WMD. The objective did not explicitly mention regime change.

271. UK contingency planning had concluded that, for the UK to have influence on US planning, a significant military contribution would be needed. That was defined as at “division level” for land forces.

272. To take planning further, greater clarity on US thinking was needed.

273. Mr Hoon also identified that exposing the constraints on the UK’s ability to contribute forces before the end of 2002 could reduce its influence.

274. On 31 May, in advance of a visit by Secretary Rumsfeld, Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair, stating that there had been “no take up” of the offer “to help the US in its planning”, and setting out the “preliminary conclusions” from the MOD’s contingency planning.¹³⁴

¹³² Minute Watkins to MA/DCDS(C), 28 May 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹³³ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 19-20.

¹³⁴ [Minute Hoon to Prime Minister, 31 May 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

275. The minute was also sent to Mr Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr Straw and Sir Richard Wilson.

276. Mr Hoon wrote that he and Mr Straw had agreed a “preliminary objective” to “guide the work”:

“A stable and law-abiding Iraq within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or international security, abiding by its international obligations on WMD.”

277. The MOD had looked at what it might be able to contribute “were the US to assemble a coalition along the lines of that assembled for Operation Desert Storm”, the US-led operation (to liberate Kuwait) in 1990-1991. The “key message” from that work was:

“... if we wish to be able to contribute meaningfully to any operation our Armed Forces would need plenty of warning time, much more than we think the US would need themselves. We are clear that, for the UK to have influence on detailed planning, the US would require a significant contribution to any large-scale operation. Our own analysis indicates that this would have to be at division level for land forces. (It is possible that the objective could be achieved by a more rapid blow, but we cannot count on that.)”

278. Mr Hoon also stated that “to plan properly” the UK needed to know:

- “what outcome” the US was seeking;
- “when the US might wish to take action”; and
- how long the US saw itself remaining in Iraq.

279. Mr Hoon added that the UK needed “to clarify the policy basis and legal justification for any action”.

280. Mr Hoon identified that the visit by Secretary Rumsfeld would provide the opportunity to clarify US thinking but the UK faced a dilemma:

“On the one hand, if we discuss the detail and timescales of a potential UK military contribution to a US-led coalition, it could send a misleading signal that we have decided to support a specific line of military action. (Such a signal could be used in Washington by the supporters of military action to promote their cause.) Equally if we are not clear with the US at this stage about our military constraints, we face the danger of our not being able to bring anything meaningful to the table at the right time and the consequent loss of influence that would bring. Finally, it could be precisely our readiness to participate that would allow you to counsel the President against proceeding if no convincing plan were to emerge.”

281. Mr Hoon recommended that rather than “simply” generally probing Secretary Rumsfeld on Washington thinking:

“... there would be more mileage in raising practicalities. I would make clear that our conditions for involvement in military action remain as you have set them out ...”

282. Mr Hoon added:

“Further, by raising in general terms, that our contingency planning has shown we need plenty of warning in order to be able to contribute to military action I would reinforce the need for the UK to be exposed fully to US thinking as soon as possible.”

283. Mr Blair wrote alongside the last point: “No, that will send a wobbly message.”¹³⁵

284. Mr Blair and Mr Hoon met Secretary Rumsfeld on 5 June.¹³⁶

285. Mr Blair’s statement that the UK would be with the US in any military action, and that would best be done by ensuring a broad coalition and avoiding unintended consequences, and wider issues of the policy towards Iraq, are addressed in Section 3.3.

286. Secretary Rumsfeld indicated that the US would begin discussions with the UK “at the military level” so that the UK was “informed of – and ‘to the extent appropriate’ involved in – US military planning”.

287. Mr Hoon spoke to Secretary Rumsfeld again on 17 June and asked him if he was in a position to authorise contact between General Myers and Adm Boyce on Iraq planning.¹³⁷

SPG paper, 13 June 2002

288. A paper identifying a concept for a campaign plan, with three illustrative military options, was prepared for a Chiefs of Staff discussion on 18 June.

289. The paper demonstrates that thinking was still at a very early stage, but it provides a useful insight into the assumptions being made at that time by the most senior official and military personnel who had access to the Pigott Group thinking.

290. As this Report shows, many of those assumptions underpinned subsequent policy advice.

¹³⁵ Manuscript comment Blair on [Minute Hoon to Prime Minister, 31 May 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

¹³⁶ Letter Rycroft to Watkins, 5 June 2002, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Rumsfeld, 5 June: Iraq’.

¹³⁷ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 17 June 2002, ‘Iraq: Telephone Call with Rumsfeld’.

291. One key assumption was that, although the objective for Iraq agreed by Mr Straw and Mr Hoon did not mention regime change, that would be necessary to secure the objective.

292. Other key elements of the thinking included the need to build international support for the UK effort, and judgements about Saddam Hussein's likely actions which were reflected in later JIC Assessments.

293. In preparation for a "Strategic Think Tank on Iraq", to be held by the Chiefs of Staff on 18 June, the SPG produced a paper on 13 June which, in the absence of access to US planning, identified key judgements encapsulating the thinking at the time in relation to components of a possible concept for military operations.¹³⁸

294. The "**Military/Strategic Implications**" and "**Key Judgements**" identified by the SPG included:

- Regime change was "a necessary step" to achieving the end state identified by the UK, and there was "no point in pursuing any strategy which does not achieve this".
- "Once it is obvious that the US is committed to regime change, she will have to prevail", so the UK needed to "plan for the worst case" and "be prepared to execute [that plan] if required".
- There was a "need to acknowledge" that there would be a post-conflict phase "with an associated commitment, manpower and finance bill", with "a spectrum of commitment where the worst case is a long period with a large bill".
- A "much more detailed level of intelligence" was required.
- "Although Iraq's nuclear capability (essentially a 'dirty' bomb)" could not be "dismissed", the "main threat" was from chemical and biological weapons.
- If regime survival was at stake, Saddam Hussein would "almost certainly use WMD, so there would be no deterrent equation as in 1991".
- "Establishing and maintaining support", from the international community and Iraq's neighbours, would be "the Coalition CoG [Centre of Gravity]".

295. The paper examined each of the components of the concept, including:

- Reviewing the internal politics in Iraq and the options for regime change. Iraq was "potentially fundamentally unstable", and "currently held together by the strong security apparatus", which would require "considerable force to break". Once it was broken, the regime would "shatter" because of its minority appeal.

¹³⁸ [Minute MA1/DCDS\(C\) to PSO/CDS, 13 June 2002, 'Supporting Paper for COS Strategic Think Tank on Iraq – 18 Jun' attaching Paper.](#) The paper was circulated to the Offices of the Chiefs of Staff, Sir Kevin Tebbit, Air Marshal French, Mr Webb and Mr Bowen.

- A judgement that:
 - The possibilities for a replacement regime were “very difficult to assess” and the UK “must be clear on what we do not want”.
 - It would be “difficult to apply force with sufficient precision to ensure a pre-determined outcome”.
- Removing the threat posed by Iraq’s WMD was “essential”. That would mean changing the “regime to one that renounces WMD”, or completely destroying Iraq’s capability and “remove [the] will to regenerate the capability, which implies regime change”. That would need “much better granularity of intelligence”.
- Managing the regional dimension would require the “footprint and duration” of the military operation to be minimised, “commensurate with assets to manage unintended consequences”.
- Identifying three phases leading to regime change:
 - **Phase 1:** While Saddam Hussein was unsure of the Coalition’s intentions, he would avoid providing a “casus belli”. He was “unlikely to take any significant military action” but it was “possible” that he would take other actions, including accelerating WMD development and weaponisation and admitting inspectors then obstructing or expelling them.
 - **Phase 2:** If Saddam Hussein was convinced the Coalition was determined to overthrow his regime, his response would be “unpredictable, ranging from benign/conciliatory ... to military aggression”, including pre-emptive attacks and the possible use of WMD, and mining “SPODs [Sea Points of Disembarkation] or approaches”. That phase would provide Saddam Hussein’s “best chance ... to fracture the will of the Coalition” and “speed and agility” would be “needed once the decision to act has been taken”.
 - **Phase 3:** In a conflict phase, Saddam Hussein would go “into full regime (and personal) survival mode, with no holds barred”. The most difficult action for the Coalition to deal with would be if Saddam withdrew to and defended urban areas. The Coalition plan would need to minimise that possibility which supported the idea of a “surprise attack”. The most dangerous response for the Coalition would be a WMD attack on Israel.
- Identifying the key “strategic and military principles” which would affect the design of the campaign:
 - an aim that was “clear and both publicly explainable and defensible”;
 - a choice of options given Saddam’s unpredictability; and
 - surprise and an aim to “**maximise strategic uncertainty** in Saddam’s mind”.
- Creating political, military and regional conditions which would “keep Saddam off balance” whilst preparatory activities were under way.
- The need to identify and prepare possible force packages.

296. The paper also set out three illustrative options for a military campaign, with a very high-level assessment of their advantages and disadvantages:

- **“Air and SF [Special Forces] Precision Strike”**: with the aim of generating “a ‘knock out’ blow of key installations and facilities” that would “shatter the regime and cause its downfall”. The option had “gained high level enthusiastic backing in Washington” although that might “now be waning”. It was “unlikely to be chosen as a discrete option” but elements would form parts of the other two options.
- **“Strategic ‘Coup de Main’”**: once “Saddam’s regime had been ‘squeezed’ by all the means at the Coalition’s disposal” – political, diplomatic, legal and economic – air assault forces would be used to seize “key regime power centres (mainly in Baghdad)” and “NBC weapons, sites and command and control nodes”. The option was “Politically attractive” but militarily “high risk” and would need strategic surprise.
- **“Conventional ‘Heavy Punch’”**: “essentially the re-run” of the 1991 Gulf Conflict, which provided the “safer military option”.

297. The MOD has been unable to locate any record of the “Think Tank” discussion.¹³⁹

298. Subsequent revisions of the paper before the end of 2002 are addressed later in this Section.

299. The development of SPG thinking on post-conflict issues is addressed in Section 6.4.

300. Mr McKane wrote to Sir David Manning describing the discussion at the “Think Tank” as “preparatory to military talks with the US ... at which Tony Pigott and Desmond Bowen would represent the UK”.¹⁴⁰

301. Mr McKane stated that he had been struck by two points:

“There is a huge amount of work to be done if the UK is to be in a position to participate in any operation against Iraq ...”

“We may need to confront the legal base for military action sooner rather than later. The MOD say that the US will not admit the UK to detailed joint planning unless we are able to agree that regime change is a legitimate and legal objective.”

302. Mr McKane recommended that Sir David should reply to Mr Hoon’s letter of 31 May seeking “further and better particulars on the time-lines and precisely what decisions incurring significant expenditure would be required now in order to keep open the possibility of a large scale deployment in six months time”.

¹³⁹ Letter MOD Iraq Inquiry Unit to Iraq Inquiry Secretariat, 23 May 2012, [untitled].

¹⁴⁰ [Minute McKane to Manning, 18 June 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

303. Sir David Manning commented to Mr Powell: “We certainly need much greater precision from MOD.”¹⁴¹

304. Mr Powell replied that he believed there was “a danger of getting ahead of ourselves here unless this is absolutely necessary to get us into detailed military planning with the US”. He recommended discussing the issue with Mr Blair.¹⁴²

305. Sir David Manning asked Mr McKane to “confirm that it is now absolutely necessary to get into the detailed planning with the US”. He added: “I suspect it is if we are to have a voice.”¹⁴³

306. Mr McKane’s advice on the legal issue and the UK position on the objective of regime change are addressed in Section 3.3.

Ministerial consideration of UK policy – July 2002

Formal military planning begins

307. The US agreed to discussions on military planning in late June.

308. Mr Blair asked for advice on the steps that would be needed to keep open the option of a making a large scale military contribution by the end of the year.

309. Gen Myers confirmed that he had received a “green light to set up the necessary mechanism for a UK input into Iraq planning” on 19 June.¹⁴⁴

310. Sir David Manning responded to Mr Hoon’s letter of 31 May on 25 June, recording that Mr Blair had:

“... asked for further advice on precisely what steps would have to be taken now, including financial commitments ... to keep open the possibility of deploying a large scale force by the end of the year – bearing in mind that we may not get six months’ warning”.¹⁴⁵

311. Sir David wrote that it was “encouraging that following the Rumsfeld visit, our military planners have now been invited to discussions with the US”. He added:

“It will be important, as the Defence Secretary acknowledged in his minute, to make clear the conditions for UK involvement in military action set out by the Prime Minister ...”

¹⁴¹ Manuscript comment Manning on [Minute McKane to Manning, 18 June 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

¹⁴² Manuscript comment Powell on [Minute McKane to Manning, 18 June 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

¹⁴³ Manuscript comment Manning on [Minute McKane to Manning, 18 June 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

¹⁴⁴ Minute Shirreff to PS/SofS [MOD], 27 June 2002, ‘Iraq Planning’.

¹⁴⁵ [Letter Manning to Watkins, 25 June 2002, ‘Iraq’](#).

312. Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning on 26 June reporting that the US was understood to be seeking:

- “• the removal of the Hussein regime;
- the neutralisation of WMD within Iraq;
- the elimination of a safe haven for terrorists;
- an acceptable new government.”¹⁴⁶

313. Mr Watkins stated that the US goals:

“... broadly align with the objective previously agreed by the Foreign and Defence Secretaries ... although Mr Hoon understands that Mr Straw, rightly, sees removal of Saddam as a way point – if necessary and justified – to the final outcome rather than an objective in its own right.”

314. Mr Watkins indicated that a small MOD team would be going to Washington and CENTCOM HQ in Tampa, Florida “immediately”.

315. The letter concluded that Mr Hoon believed Ministers would need clarity on:

- “• whether the Prime Minister’s conditions are likely to be met;
- the viability of the proposed military action;
- the policy and legal framework in which military action is justified;
- overall, whether the prospective outcome looked worth the risks, costs and losses.”

316. The draft planning order from CENTCOM was released to the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) on 25 June.¹⁴⁷ Lt Gen Reith was briefed by a US officer from CENTCOM on the state of US planning on 26 June.

317. Gen Reith told the Inquiry that he had been phoned by Maj Gen Wilson “on 4 or 5 June to say that we had been offered the opportunity to participate in the American planning for a potential invasion of Iraq”.¹⁴⁸ He had informed Lt Gen Pigott the following day. It was not until 25 June that he “got authority [through MOD] for planning with CENTCOM, but without commitment” and he “didn’t start any formal planning until 25 June”.

318. Lt Gen Pigott, AM French and Mr Bowen visited Washington and CENTCOM from 27 to 29 June 2002.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 26 June 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁴⁷ Minute Fry to MA/DCDS(C), 26 June 2002, ‘Comments on US Planning for Possible Military Action Against Iraq’.

¹⁴⁸ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, pages 7-8.

¹⁴⁹ Minute Fry to MA/DCDS(C), 26 June 2002, ‘Comments on US Planning for Possible Military Action Against Iraq’.

319. Before they left, Major General Robert Fry, Deputy Chief of Joint Operations (Operations) (DCJO(Ops)), provided a paper commenting on US planning, which at that stage offered two basic approaches:

- a “running start”, with extra forces being deployed as the initial attacks were under way, which would have the advantage of surprise and allow for operations as early as October 2002; and
- a “generated start” allowing full deployment before the beginning of operations, which was expected to require three months longer.

320. Maj Gen Fry wrote that the “running start” option carried considerably more risk and would be “much more manoeuvrist” than the type of operations which had been conducted in 1991. A number of issues for the UK were identified, including: the role and timing for a UK contribution; the need for very early decision-making; how to integrate into a complex US plan; levels of risk; UK participation in US exercises; and the likely US expectations that would result from UK involvement in the planning process.

321. On 1 July, Mr Watkins advised Mr Hoon on Mr Bowen’s visit to Washington.¹⁵⁰ Mr Bowen had reported that the Americans had a plan, including taking Baghdad, which they were confident would deliver regime change, but there was no clear direction on timing. That would be affected by the decision on whether to choose a “running start”. The plan would be heavily dependent on basing and overflight rights in the region and beyond. The view in Tampa was that it was very early in the planning process and too soon to talk about the UK’s contribution.

322. Mr Bowen’s view was that the US military were looking to the UK for a second opinion on their military planning, contributions in kind and influence with Washington on the overall campaign plan. The US military would want “the usual niche capabilities (Nimrod, etc). Whether we provide any more is up to you [Mr Hoon].”

323. Similar conclusions were reported by Maj Gen Wilson to Lt Gen Reith on 30 June.¹⁵¹ He wrote that UK influence and counsel was “almost as important, if not more so than what we would actually bring to the campaign militarily”; although he also cautioned that “UK ability to significantly influence operational design, if so minded, is limited”.

324. Maj Gen Wilson told the Inquiry: “... what I remember was said ... I think by General Abizaid, who was then the Director of Joint Staff in the Pentagon ... ‘We need your advice. We need your counsel ...’”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Minute Watkins to Secretary of State [MOD], 1 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁵¹ Minute Wilson to Reith, 30 June 2002, ‘Contingency Planning for Iraq – Report on DCDS(C) Visit to US 27-29 Jun 02’.

¹⁵² Public hearing, 4 December 2009, page 15.

325. Mr Bowen sought agreement for PJHQ to send a six-man team to Tampa to join US planning on 2 July.¹⁵³

326. Mr Hoon agreed the deployment, but asked Adm Boyce to ensure, before the team's departure, that Gen Myers:

“... understands when they meet tomorrow in Brussels that this is on the basis that no political decisions have been taken in the UK on our participation in an operation; and then follow up in writing.”¹⁵⁴

327. On 3 July, Adm Boyce met Gen Myers.¹⁵⁵ Gen Myers was reported to have “sympathised” with the UK government's condition, and agreed that Adm Boyce would write formally to him to reiterate the point.

328. Adm Boyce and Gen Myers discussed a northern option. There were differences of view within the US military about a possible attack from the North although the importance of control of the northern oilfields was recognised. Adm Boyce took the view that Gen Myers “showed his petticoat” in so far as he indicated that that was where the UK might be involved.

329. Adm Boyce also reported that “it appeared that military planning was taking place in a political void”.

330. On 4 July, Adm Boyce wrote to Gen Franks, stating:

“My Defence Secretary wishes me to record that our involvement in planning is on the basis that no political decisions have been taken in the UK on our participation in an operation against Iraq.”¹⁵⁶

331. Maj Gen Wilson informed the Inquiry that action through Turkey would have required the participation of the US European Command (EUCOM) in addition to CENTCOM.¹⁵⁷

332. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry: “It was made absolutely clear that every time we spoke to the Americans that no commitment was guaranteed until a political tick had been received.”¹⁵⁸

333. Lord Boyce added that:

“The reaction of the Americans was always ‘Yes, I hear what you say but come the day, we know you will be there’, until right towards the end.”

¹⁵³ Minute Bowen to PS/SofS [MOD], 2 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁵⁴ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 2 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁵⁵ [Minute MA/CDS to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 3 July 2002, ‘CDS Discussion with CJCS, General Myers – 3 Jul 02’.](#)

¹⁵⁶ Letter CDS to CJCS, 4 July 2002, [untitled].

¹⁵⁷ Public hearing, 4 December 2009, page 6.

¹⁵⁸ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 21.

JIC ASSESSMENT, 4 JULY 2002: 'IRAQ: REGIME COHESION'

334. A JIC Assessment on 4 July addressed regime cohesion in Iraq and how it would respond under pressure or attack.

335. Although it had only fragmentary intelligence about how the regime would deal with an attack including ground forces, the JIC assessed on 4 July that only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam Hussein

336. The JIC judged that disintegration of the regime would be most likely if Iraqi ground forces were being comprehensively defeated; if top military officers could be persuaded that their fate was not irrevocably tied to that of Saddam Hussein; or if Saddam were to be killed.

337. At the request of the MOD, the JIC issued an Assessment of “how cohesion of the Iraqi regime is maintained and how the regime would fare under pressure or attack” on 4 July.¹⁵⁹

338. The minutes of the JIC discussion of the draft paper described it as:

“... an important paper with a specific focus. It would be of interest to Ministers more because of its context, with decisions yet to be taken about what to do with Iraq, than because of its analysis, which was familiar rather than novel.

“Its key message was that although Saddam Hussein’s regime was remarkably resilient to pressure ... the demonstration of a real and overwhelming international determination and ability to remove the regime through military force was the likeliest way to bring it down ...

“Experience in Afghanistan had shown that generating expectations and influencing people’s perceptions of what might happen had considerable capacity to effect real and rapid change ...

“The paper needed to analyse and describe in more detail the nature of Saddam’s support ... The motives for each set of supporters were different ... These mattered because under pressure the different groups would behave differently.

“UK policy makers, and military planners, would be keen before too long to identify the point at which self-interested loyalty for Saddam might turn into disillusionment, fragility and fragmentation.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ [JIC Assessment, 4 July 2002, 'Iraq: Regime Cohesion'](#).

¹⁶⁰ Minutes, 3 July 2002, JIC meeting.

339. The JIC's Key Judgements were:

- Only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam. The regime expects a US attack [...].
- The clear prospect of a major attack would put the regime under unprecedented pressure. But regime cohesion is unlikely to collapse in the absence of a large scale invasion.
- Saddam relies on a mixture of patronage and extreme fear to retain power and contain opposition. Real loyalty and support for his regime is confined to the top of the hierarchy.
- The Special Republican Guard (SRG) and the Republican Guard Forces Command (RGFC) are more reliable than the Regular Army (RA). All would initially fight a US-led attack. Once the regime was perceived as doomed the military's will to fight on would be sorely tested.
- Regime disintegration would be most likely if Iraqi ground forces were being comprehensively defeated; if top military officers could be persuaded that their fate was not irrevocably tied to that of Saddam; or if Saddam himself were to be killed. Military units are more likely to suffer mass desertions than revolt as coherent units."¹⁶¹

340. The Assessment also stated:

"Saddam and his regime have proved durable ...

"The Iraqi military are aware of their vulnerability to air power, probably their greatest weakness; their main way of mitigating this is through dispersal, including into urban areas [...] We have only fragmentary intelligence indicating how the regime might deal with an all-out attack including ground forces. **But we assess that only massive military force could be guaranteed to topple Saddam.**"

341. Addressing the policy implications of the Assessment, the JIC stated: "Saddam and his regime must be convinced that any move to topple him is serious and likely to succeed before they begin to feel the pressure."

Mr Hoon's proposal for a collective Ministerial discussion

342. In early July, Mr Hoon proposed a collective Ministerial discussion, which Mr Straw supported.

343. On 2 July, Mr Watkins reported to Sir David Manning that "US military thinking is quite well advanced", but US planners were assuming offensive operations to overthrow Saddam Hussein "in a policy void".¹⁶² The US "end-state to be achieved after conflict"

¹⁶¹ [JIC Assessment, 4 July 2002, 'Iraq: Regime Cohesion'](#).

¹⁶² [Letter Watkins to Manning, 2 July 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

had not been identified, and there seemed to be no “overarching campaign strategy for dealing with Iraq”.

344. An updated plan would be briefed to President Bush in August, and the US planning was designed “to put CENTCOM in a position to be able to activate their plan from August 2002 onwards”. A “de facto invitation to the UK and Australia to participate” was “now on the table”. The plan would require availability of bases and support from Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey.

345. Mr Watkins reported that Mr Hoon intended to respond positively to the invitation for a small number of British planners to join US planning teams; that was “essential in helping to inform the MOD’s own thinking” so that Mr Hoon could make recommendations. But Mr Hoon was:

“... very conscious that decisions about a military contribution cannot be made in the absence of a coherent and integrated strategic framework. An agreed strategy will be key to taking matters forward, not simply to provide justification for military action, but to clarify timelines; to incorporate the Prime Minister’s conditions for UK participation; and to establish the framework for an information campaign. The draft public document, which you are currently considering, would ultimately form an important part of that campaign. He suggests that the Prime Minister may like to call an early meeting of a small group of colleagues to consider how best to get the US to address the strategic, as opposed to the narrowly military, dimension. The freestanding military option is not a viable political proposition.

“Meanwhile, officials from the MOD, FCO and Cabinet Office should do some more homework urgently to put the Prime Minister and you in a better position to influence the President’s and Condi Rice’s thinking ... before the updated CENTCOM plan is briefed to the President in the course of August. Mr Hoon will also review the possibilities for contact with the US Defense Secretary.”

346. The preparation and content of the draft public document on Iraq referred to by Mr Watkins, the “dossier”, is addressed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.

347. The Treasury’s reaction to Mr Hoon’s minute is addressed in Section 13.

348. Mr Straw wrote to Mr Blair on 8 July supporting Mr Hoon’s suggestion for an early Ministerial meeting.¹⁶³

349. Mr Straw stated that the report of US planning had raised several points which concerned him, including:

- There was “no strategic concept for the military plan”. US military planning had “so far taken place in a vacuum”.

¹⁶³ [Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 8 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Contingency Planning’.](#)

- “The support of key allies such as Kuwait cannot be counted on in the absence of some serious ground-work by the US.”
- “The key point is how to get through to the Americans that the success of any military operation against Iraq – and protection of our fundamental interests in the region – depends on devising in advance a coherent strategy which assesses the political and economic as well as the military implications.”

350. The advice from Mr Hoon and Mr Straw, and No.10’s reaction to the proposal for a Ministerial meeting, are addressed in Section 3.3.

351. Sir Kevin Tebbit wrote to Mr Hoon on 3 July setting out his concerns about the absence of a political context for the military plan and the dilemma for the UK that being drawn into US planning potentially posed.¹⁶⁴

352. Sir Kevin concluded that the UK could not count on a military campaign being unlikely or, if the US went ahead, that the UK could avoid being linked to the campaign.

353. Sir Kevin advised that a “credible political plan”, which addressed the conditions for UK participation and moved American planning into acceptable channels and slowed it down, was needed. That is set out in more detail in Section 3.3.

354. Sir Kevin Tebbit’s minute was sent after Mr Watkins’ letter to Sir David Manning had been sent. Mr Watkins marked the letter to Mr Hoon observing that the MOD did not know the views of Secretary Powell or Dr Rice; and there was a risk “that the PM’s conditions will be simply sidelined”.¹⁶⁵

355. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that getting involved in US planning in late June and early July had posed a dilemma because:

“... it was clear ... even at that stage, if one begins discussions with the United States on the military track, albeit without commitment, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep options open absolutely completely ... [W]e made it clear to them that our participation ... was purely to inform British Government thinking ...

“On the one hand, if one is drawn into discussion of timescales and details, we might give misleading signals of support for military action that was not present at that stage.

“On the other hand, if we continued to stand aside, it might be too late for us to influence events or meet the political requirement which might be placed on us.”¹⁶⁶

356. On 9 July, Sir Christopher Meyer advised that President Bush would have a military plan on his desk before he went on holiday in August.

¹⁶⁴ [Minute Tebbit to Secretary of State \[MOD\], 3 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁶⁵ Manuscript comment Watkins on [Minute Tebbit to Secretary of State \[MOD\], 3 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

¹⁶⁶ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 20-21.

357. On 9 July, Sir Christopher Meyer reported speculation in the US media and a number of recent discussions in Washington.¹⁶⁷

358. In a press conference on 8 July, President Bush had not attempted to challenge the veracity of a story about leaked military plans. Sir Christopher's contacts suggested that the aim was to have a reworked military plan on President Bush's desk before he went on holiday in August.

The MOD's assessment of US military plans

359. In mid-July, the MOD still had only scant information about US military plans and the Chiefs of Staff identified a number of areas of concern which needed to be addressed.

360. Political guidance was needed on how to implement the UK's intent and convey that intent to the US.

361. The SPG had pointed out that, once military forces were deployed, the US would have to see its policy through to a successful conclusion.

362. But that point does not seem to have been pursued in relation to what that might mean for UK policy.

363. Lt Gen Pigott issued 'Initial Planning Guidance for Possible Military Operations in Iraq' to Lt Gen Reith, AM French, the Director Special Forces, Air Commodore Mike Heath (Director Targeting and Information Operations), and Brigadier Andrew Stewart, the Army's Director of Overseas Military Activity, on 8 July.¹⁶⁸ The guidance considered the preparation of military strategic options ranging from regional influence to large scale war-fighting and assessed the CENTCOM plan.

364. Lt Gen Pigott made clear that the planning and contingency work conducted so far had not been subject to legal scrutiny. He also asked for "actionable intelligence" on WMD and an understanding of Saddam Hussein's options and the regime's fault lines and fragility.

365. A revised version of the SPG paper, 'UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq', was produced on 11 July for a "Strategic Think Tank" on Iraq the following week.¹⁶⁹

366. Much of the thinking underpinning the paper was unchanged but there were some significant additions, including:

- The US was aware of the dangers of failure and was planning for the "worst case".

¹⁶⁷ Telegram 926 Washington to FCO London, 9 July 2002, 'Iraq: US views'.

¹⁶⁸ Minute DCDS(C) to Various, 8 July 2002, 'Initial Planning Guidance for Possible Military Operations in Iraq'.

¹⁶⁹ [Paper \[SPG\], 11 July 2002, 'UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq'](#).

- The UK was not “well-balanced” to match US ability to escalate action rapidly and, if UK forces were to be deployed alongside the US, there was a “need to match US planning aspirations”.
- WMD, the composition and methods of the current Iraqi regime, and where the fracture lines existed in the current regime, were identified as the areas where a “much more detailed level of intelligence” was required.
- The UK “must accept” that it was “likely that our visibility of WMD may even deteriorate as Saddam prepares for conflict”.
- Any replacement regime would need to renounce WMD.
- A much more detailed analysis of the need for international support and the risks associated with the position of individual countries was required. Turkey would be a “critical” ally and would “call for a delicate political balance” which would “require ... military support”. Ensuring Turkey’s support would require identification of “credible political carrots”, enhanced military aid and “effective military links to Kurdish guerrilla groups”.
- Iraq provided a “balance” to Iran and needed “either ... to retain significant military capability or international guarantees”. The paper also asked whether Iran would be the “next candidate of axis of evil?”
- Saddam Hussein’s “best chance” would be “to prevent the deployment of coalition forces as once committed by presence, the US can only see the operation through to success ...”
- Information operations would play a key part in Phases 2 and 3 of the campaign.
- Taking military action during “Window 1” would require management of consequences after military action, “**Strike then Shape**”. “Window 2” would be “more deliberate”, and was characterised as “**Shape then Strike**”.
- There was a definition of possible UK contributions as Packages 1, 2 and 3 and the initial, high-level identification of key shortfalls in readiness.
- There was the identification of a fourth, “**Siege**” option for a military campaign, which would entail “seizing one or more pieces of territory (probably in the North and South) and, in effect, laying siege to the regime”. That had “received some support in the Press and from academics”. It could achieve the end state “with little fighting, but the political risks” were “high”.

367. PJHQ submitted an assessment of the CENTCOM plan on 12 July, which identified the possible scope and scale of a UK contribution as:

- enablers, including Special Forces;
- support of the US “Main Effort” through Kuwait with armoured forces up to a division (minus) and/or light forces at brigade strength; and

- a discrete contribution in geographical or functional terms – a second axis in the north, which needed more work to establish if it was feasible.¹⁷⁰

368. The paper outlined the two possible windows for military action:

- Window One between October 2002 and March 2003; and
- Window Two between October 2003 and March 2004.

369. The second was the preferred UK option, but PJHQ acknowledged that it was “undoubtedly less attractive to the US”.

370. The Chiefs of Staff were asked for guidance on the direction and nature of future planning.

371. Maj Gen Wilson advised Lt Gen Reith on 16 July that the UK was expected to present a statement of intent at a US CENTCOM planning conference in Tampa, Florida on 1 to 2 August.¹⁷¹

372. Maj Gen Wilson reported that it was expected that the UK capability “offered” would “deliver the northern option”, together with Special Forces, air (especially tankers), ships, command and control architecture and enablers. He concluded that there were “more questions than answers, with too many issues of substance either not yet addressed or ‘assumed away’”:

- On WMD use, the view remained that Saddam Hussein’s “ability to deliver ‘capability’ is unproven and widespread use thought unlikely”.
- Although there was “reasonable information upon which to target”, it remained “a critical information shortcoming”.
- It was not clear whether detailed work had been done to assess Iraqi “red lines”. There was uncertainty over what Israel would do by way of retaliation if attacked.
- The “Baghdad Stronghold” scenario was acknowledged but considered a “possibility rather than an eventuality”.

373. In relation to the recent announcement of a Turkish election on 3 November, Maj Gen Wilson reported that had “unsettled” the US, and US military planners had been asked to “assess the feasibility of plans in a ‘no Turkey scenario’”. He added:

“Whether it [the ‘no Turkey scenario’] becomes a show-stopper remains to be seen.”

374. Maj Gen Wilson’s advice was seen by Adm Boyce.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Paper PJHQ, 12 July 2002, ‘An Analysis of the CENTCOM Plan for Military Action Against Iraq’.

¹⁷¹ Minute Wilson to CJO, 16 Jul 2002, ‘Planning for Iraq – Record of Conversation with CENTCOM J3’.

¹⁷² Manuscript comment [unattributed] on Minute Wilson to CJO, 16 July 2002, ‘Planning for Iraq – Record of Conversation with CENTCOM J3’.

375. A briefing note prepared by Lt Gen Pigott for Adm Boyce focused on:

- the question of whether there was a winning concept;
- the comparative advantages and disadvantages of operations between October 2002 and March 2003 or one year later;
- the possible UK contribution; and
- the way ahead.¹⁷³

376. Lt Gen Pigott advised that the UK assessments of the plan were based on “scant information”, and that the key areas of concerns on the US plan included:

- a mismatch in the end states of the US and UK;
- the lack of a strategic framework;
- potentially optimistic assumptions about assessments of Iraqi weaknesses;
- insufficient knowledge of the WMD threat in many important respects; and
- a question about “to what extent” kinetic means could deliver strategic ends.

377. Lt Gen Pigott’s view was that the UK should encourage thinking to move towards action in 2003-2004 rather than in 2002-2003, which “had a better chance of success” given the challenges “including political red cards”. That was: “Not a recipe for delay, indeed quite the reverse.” It would be difficult for the UK to send land forces to participate in a “running start” but the UK thinking was “taking us towards a ‘distinctive’ (Package 3) role”. For any significant contribution, force preparation would need to start “now”.

378. The advice from Lt Gen Pigott and the SPG was discussed in a restricted Chiefs of Staff meeting on 17 July.¹⁷⁴

379. At the meeting, Adm Boyce emphasised the privileged nature of the UK access to US planning and the need for operational security. The points made in the discussion included:

- One key judgement which would affect planning would be whether an initial push would trigger regime collapse.
- Although the use of UK bases was critical to the US plan there was, from the UK viewpoint, no viable context within which it could participate in military action: “The legal basis was particularly fraught with difficulty.”
- A running start “was not currently viable for the UK without significant risk”.
- A UK contribution in the North that did not require integration into US land forces would “fix” Iraqi divisions in northern Iraq, “open up a second front, and safeguard the critical northern oilfields”.

¹⁷³ Minute DCDS(C) to DPSO/CDS, 17 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Summary of Key Issues’.

¹⁷⁴ Minutes, 17 July 2002, Chiefs of Staff (Restricted) meeting.

- It might take “up to nine months” to produce a division (minus), “although this was understood to be the ‘sensible worst case’”.
- Timings were critical and the UK could not wait to see if Window 2 was the preferred US option.
- There was a key judgement to be made about whether the UK should wait for an approach from the US, “or be more forward leaning and factor a UK ‘offer in principle’ into US planning at an early stage”.
- Iraq’s chemical and biological (CB) warfare capability and intent was a significant issue, “even a limited CB employment could cripple the battle plan”.

380. Adm Boyce concluded that “the UK needed greater visibility of US intent in a number of areas”. For the immediate future, “political guidance on how best to start implementing UK intent and to convey that intent to the US” was needed.

381. In preparation for a meeting to be held on 18 July, Mr Bowen outlined the MOD thinking in a minute to Mr Hoon on 17 July.¹⁷⁵

382. Mr Bowen drew attention to the US concepts of “running” and “generated” starts. He advised that the indications were that the US favoured the “running start” option (which could see US operations beginning during the course of 2002). That would achieve “strategic surprise”, but it went against “our expectation of [a] Desert Storm-style build up over months”.

383. Mr Bowen suggested:

“In the meantime, as we begin to explore possible UK contributions we need to identify what preparation – such as procurement for **urgent operational requirements** – could usefully begin now ...”

384. A minute from Mr Hoon’s Private Office to Mr Hoon stated that the Chiefs of Staff, notably General Sir Mike Walker, Chief of the General Staff, had been very sceptical about the US plan, which was seen as “optimistic in a number of areas”, including:

- the speed of advance over large distances;
- confidence that the regime would implode without direct action against the seat of power or Iraqi leaders;
- reliance on the isolation rather than the capture of Baghdad;
- little consideration of the practicality of the plan in a chemical/biological environment; and
- the lack of focus on the northern areas.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Minute DG Op Pol to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 17 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁷⁶ Minute [Williams] and [Watkins] to SofS [MOD], 17 July 2002, ‘Meeting on Iraq 18 Jul 02 1145’.

385. The Chiefs of Staff had concerns about the difficulties for any land operations posed by the timescales and logistics. That would need to be “set against the Prime Minister’s desire to be supportive”.

386. Mr Hoon’s Private Office was concerned about the weakness of the coalition elements and post-conflict plans, and advised Mr Hoon that his meeting should focus on what would “allow participation in planning to continue”.

387. The MOD has been unable to locate any record of Mr Hoon’s meeting on 18 July.¹⁷⁷

388. The DIS reported on 22 July that the US was “no better off than we are about actionable intelligence on WMD.”¹⁷⁸ Sites formerly used for the production of WMD were known, but there was “little intelligence on whether they are currently in use or on possible new locations”. The whereabouts of potential storage sites was “a top priority but no significant success was reported”.

Mr Blair’s meeting, 23 July 2002

CABINET OFFICE PAPER, ‘IRAQ: CONDITIONS FOR MILITARY ACTION’

389. The Cabinet Office paper ‘Iraq: Conditions for Military Action’ was issued on 19 July, to inform Mr Blair’s 23 July meeting with Mr Straw, Mr Hoon, Lord Goldsmith (the Attorney General) and key officials to discuss Iraq.

390. The purpose of the Cabinet Office paper was to identify the conditions which would be necessary before military action would be justified and the UK could participate in such action; and to provide the basis for a discussion with the US about creating those conditions.

391. The Cabinet Office paper stated that Mr Blair had said at Crawford that the UK would support military action to bring about regime change, provided certain conditions were met.

392. The Cabinet Office paper, ‘Iraq: Conditions for Military Action’, was issued on 19 July to those who would be attending a meeting to be chaired by Mr Blair on 23 July.¹⁷⁹

393. Ministers were invited to note the latest position on US military planning, the timescales for possible action, and to agree:

- The objective for military action, as set out in Mr Hoon’s minute to Mr Blair of 31 May, of “a stable and law-abiding Iraq within the present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to

¹⁷⁷ Letter MOD Iraq Inquiry Unit to Iraq Inquiry Secretariat, 23 May 2012, [untitled].

¹⁷⁸ [Minute DCDI to PSO/CDS, 22 July 2002, ‘Iraqi Capabilities’.](#)

¹⁷⁹ Paper Cabinet Office, 19 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Conditions for Military Action’.

its neighbours or to international security, and abiding by its international obligations on WMD”.

- To “engage the US on the need to set military plans within a realistic political strategy”, which included “identifying the succession to Saddam Hussein and creating the conditions necessary to justify government military action, which might include an ultimatum for the return of UN weapons inspectors to Iraq. This should include a call from the Prime Minister to President Bush ahead of the briefing of US military plans to the President on 4 August.
- The establishment of a Cabinet Office-led ad hoc group of officials to consider the development of an information campaign to be agreed with the US.

394. The paper stated that US military planning for action against Iraq was “proceeding apace” but it lacked a political framework: “In particular, little thought has been given to creating the political conditions for military action, or the aftermath and how to shape it.”

395. It seemed “unlikely” that the UK’s objective could be achieved while Saddam Hussein’s regime remained in power. The US objective was “unambiguously” the “removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime, followed by elimination of Iraqi WMD”. The view of UK officials was that it was by “no means certain” that one would follow from the other: even if regime change was “a necessary condition for controlling Iraq’s WMD”, it was “certainly not a sufficient one”.

396. The paper stated that “certain preparations would need to be made and other considerations taken into account”. It contained a series of sections addressing the conditions which would be “necessary for military action and UK participation, including:

- “a viable military plan”; and
- “a positive risk/benefit assessment”.

397. In relation to military planning, the paper stated:

- **The Chiefs of Staff were not yet able to assess whether the military plans were “sound”; although a “decision in principle” might be needed “soon”.**
- **Ministers were invited to “note” the potentially long lead times for equipping UK forces to undertake operations in Iraq, and asked to agree that the MOD could bring forward proposals for procurement of equipment.**

398. The Chiefs of Staff had advised that there were a number of questions which would need to be answered before US military plans could be assessed as “sound”. Those included:

- the realism of a “Running Start”;
- the willingness of Iraqi forces to fight; and

- the potential impact of Iraqi attacks using chemical or biological weapons.¹⁸⁰

399. Without an overt military build-up, a “Running Start” military action could begin as early as November, with air strikes and support for opposition groups and small-scale land operations, while further ground forces built up to overwhelm Iraqi forces “leading to the collapse of the Iraqi regime”. A “Generated Start” following a military build-up could begin as early as January 2003. That was also judged to be the latest date for the start of military operations unless action was “deferred until the following autumn”.

400. The “UK’s ability to contribute forces depended on the details of US military planning and the time available to prepare and deploy them”. The MOD was “examining how the UK might contribute to US-led action”. Options ranging from deployment of a division to making bases available had been identified. US plans assumed the use of British bases in Cyprus and Diego Garcia. Unless “publicly visible” decisions were taken “very soon”, the UK would not be able to send a division in time for an operation in Iraq in January 2003.

401. A “decision in principle” might be “needed soon on whether and in what form the UK takes part in military action”.

402. Ministers were invited to “note the potentially long lead times involved in equipping UK Armed Forces to undertake operations in the Iraqi theatre”; and to “agree that MOD should bring forward proposals for the procurement of Urgent Operational Requirements under cover of the lessons learned from Afghanistan” and the “outcome” of the 2002 Spending Review.

403. Mr McKane advised Sir David Manning separately that the paper covered US military plans “only in headline form” on the grounds that Mr Blair would “wish to receive a short oral brief from CDS”.¹⁸¹

404. The planning and preparations for equipping UK forces are addressed in Section 6.3.

405. **The Cabinet Office paper was written in order to support a Ministerial discussion about the approach the UK should take to the US on Iraq. It identified the issues the UK should be trying to get the US to address before it embarked on military action to secure regime change in Iraq in a way the UK would find difficult to support.**

¹⁸⁰ Paper Cabinet Office, 19 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Conditions for Military Action’.

¹⁸¹ Minute McKane to Manning, 19 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

406. It was not written to provide a broader and more fundamental analysis of the policy choices which the UK Government might at that time have considered, and their consequences, including:

- whether military action would be the best way to secure the UK's objective;
- the longer-term consequences and obligations which were likely to arise from military action.

407. The wider issues addressed by the paper are set out in Section 3.3.

MOD ADVICE FOR MR HOON

408. Following his minute of 3 July and a visit to Washington on 18 to 19 July, Sir Kevin Tebbit advised that the US Administration as a whole was increasingly united in the view that military action would be taken against Iraq to bring about regime change and remove WMD risks.

409. Sir Kevin Tebbit visited Washington from 18 to 19 July.¹⁸²

410. Sir Kevin advised Mr Hoon that the US Administration as a whole was increasingly united in the view that military action would be taken against Iraq to bring about regime change and remove WMD risks. He reported an "air of unreality" given the enormity of what was envisaged and the absence of a policy framework and detailed planning.

411. Sir Kevin Tebbit also wrote to Sir David Manning before the Ministerial discussion on 23 July.¹⁸³

412. The advice for both Mr Hoon and Sir David is addressed in Section 3.3.

413. In the light of uncertainty about the timing of possible military operations, Adm Boyce had directed that planning for deployment of land forces should concentrate on two packages: a "supporting/enabling package" and a northern option, comprising a division with two combat brigades (a division-minus).

414. MOD officials privately expressed strong reservations about military action to Mr Hoon stating that there was no objective justification for a pre-emptive attack either now or in the immediate future.

415. Mr Hoon was advised that the legal framework could constrain the UK's ability to support US action.

¹⁸² Telegram 970 Washington to FCO London, 20 July 2002, 'Iraq: Sir K Tebbit's Visit to Washington, 18-19 July'.

¹⁸³ Letter Tebbit to Manning, 22 July 2002, 'Iraq'.

416. In preparation for the meeting on 23 July, Mr Bowen advised Mr Hoon that the meeting would discuss the Cabinet Office paper of 19 July, and the agenda was expected to cover:

- US planning and timescales;
- objectives of any military action;
- the strategic policy framework;
- the potential UK contribution; and
- an information campaign.¹⁸⁴

417. Mr Bowen advised that it was “still too early to be definitive” about whether the US had a winning military concept; but that it was “likely” that the answer to that question would be “‘yes’ with certain conditions”. The key point for Mr Blair to note was that US action could take place “very quickly, as early as November”.

418. Agreeing the objective for military action would be “useful”, but it begged the question of the “*strategic policy framework* in which to take military action in pursuit of that objective”. “In particular a framework” was “required to set the conditions for military action including the necessary justification in international law”. That was “important because it may well constrain our ability to support US action”.

419. Adm Boyce had directed that UK planning should concentrate on two “packages”:

- a supporting/enabling package, including basing, maritime and air assets, in which the “the only land contribution would be Special Forces”; and
- a discrete land contribution of a “division (minus)” for operations in northern Iraq.

420. Those two packages had been chosen “because they effectively represent maximum practical UK contributions to US-led operations for either early or later action”. Schematic timelines showing decision dates and readiness which could be achieved were provided.

421. Mr Bowen advised that the “indications from the US” were that it did “not expect a ground force contribution from the UK for operations out of Kuwait”; and that “providing land forces to integrate with the US main effort in the South” had “been discounted because of the severe difficulties we would face due to interoperability; deployment time and geographic constraints affecting logistics in particular”.

422. Work was “now being tailored” to a UK contribution from the north, although it was “difficult to see how meaningful operations could be achieved outside the framework of a multi-national force such as the ARRC [Allied Rapid Reaction Corps] with the support of other allies”.

¹⁸⁴ [Minute Bowen to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 22 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Meeting with the Prime Minister’.](#)

423. A speaking note stated that the key points for the meeting with Mr Blair were:

- US military planning was “gathering pace”.
- The “mood and timetable” pointed to “this winter for action, although an alternative would be in 2003/4”.
- There was a “need for early guidance on UK military involvement and preparatory work”.
- Engagement between Mr Blair and President Bush was “needed now to assess US willingness to establish [a] strategic framework, followed by UK decision-making before summer break”.

424. The “Line to Take” offered to Mr Hoon included:

- It was “too early to judge” if the US military plan was a winning concept and the Chiefs of Staff were “not yet convinced”. The question of whether the US had a winning concept could be answered as planning developed. The UK view was that pressure should be “applied from South, West and North”.
- The US would like to establish the scale of UK involvement. Subject to the legal framework, the US expected Diego Garcia, Cyprus, air enablers, maritime force and Special Forces as a minimum. There was a “Developing expectation” of a division size force in the North with Turkey and other allies.
- Decisions were “needed urgently” if UK forces were to be involved “this winter”. A large land force contribution needed “preparatory action immediately” and would not be complete until “March/April”.

425. Commenting on Mr Bowen’s advice, Mr Watkins wrote that: “Large scale involvement in a US thrust from Kuwait would be impracticable”; and that a division (minus) option “would require immediate action on UORs etc and early decisions (October) on reserves”. The latter would “definitely be visible”.¹⁸⁵

426. In relation to a discrete “Land Contribution”, Mr Watkins wrote:

“Apart from being ‘involved’, the military utility (and risks) of this option are not clear.”

427. Mr Watkins added to the speaking note a suggestion that Mr Hoon should seek an understanding that the costs of UORs would be met from the Reserve.

428. Mr Watkins also offered Mr Hoon a “Private Office distillation of where we think most of your key advisers – Chiefs, PUS etc (with possible exception of Simon Webb) – are coming from”. That set out strong reservations about military action, including that there was no objective justification for a pre-emptive attack either now or in the immediate future.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Manuscript comment Watkins on [Minute Bowen to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 22 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Meeting with the Prime Minister’](#).

¹⁸⁶ [Note \(handwritten\) Watkins to SofS \[MOD\], 22 July 2002 attaching ‘Iraq: Summary’](#).

429. Mr Watkins' note is described in more detail in Section 3.3.

430. Adm Boyce was advised that the UK should agree to explore the northern option with the US, including being prepared to consider offering to lead land forces.

431. Separate advice from Lt Gen Pigott for Adm Boyce stated that the choice was “between ‘Embedded’ and ‘Distinctive’” options.¹⁸⁷ The former were “fine” for maritime and air components, but the latter were “better” for land and Special Forces, “largely for logs [logistic]/deconfliction reasons”.

432. Lt Gen Pigott also wrote that strategic thinking on a “Northern Axis” was “still immature” in relation to “Timelines/Practicality?”.

433. On the “Way Forward”, the UK should:

- “Agree [the] Intent” to offer enablers, maritime and air forces at medium scale, and “up to” a division (minus) to US planners, “with provisos on deployment/employment clearly spelt out”.
- “Agree to explore” the “Northern Option” with the US “as a matter of urgency”. The UK should also:
 - “Be prepared to consider Framework Nation lead of a Land Component within this option.”
 - “Be prepared ... to scope possible role for HQ ARRC.”
- “Agree to scope” Special Forces involvement.
- “Agree to Implement” invisible UORs now, and be prepared to advise Ministers later on visible UORs.
- “Agree to identify” other essential preparations for submission to Ministers “against “Window 1 timelines”.

434. Mr Blair's meeting on 23 July did not take firm decisions.

435. The record of the meeting stated that the UK should work on the assumption that it would take part in any military action and Admiral Boyce could tell the US that the UK was considering a range of options.

436. Mr Blair commissioned further advice and background material on all the issues.

437. Mr Blair discussed Iraq with Mr Straw and Mr Hoon, Lord Goldsmith, Sir Richard Wilson, Adm Boyce, Sir Richard Dearlove, Sir Francis Richards (Director of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)), Mr Scarlett, Mr Powell,

¹⁸⁷ Minute DCDS(C) to DPSO/CDS, 22 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Update on Key Issues’.

Baroness Morgan (Director of Political and Government Relations), Mr Campbell and Sir David Manning, on 23 July.¹⁸⁸

438. The discussion in the meeting and the actions that followed are addressed in Section 3.3.

439. In relation to military planning, the record of the meeting produced by Mr Matthew Rycroft, Mr Blair's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, stated:

- Mr Scarlett summarised the intelligence and latest (4 July) JIC Assessment: "Saddam's regime was tough and based on extreme fear. The only way to overthrow it was likely to be by massive military action." Saddam was "worried and expected an attack", but he was "not convinced" that an attack would be "immediate or overwhelming".
- Sir Richard Dearlove reported that there was "a perceptible shift in attitude" in Washington: "Military action was now seen as inevitable." President Bush "wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD".
- Adm Boyce reported that Secretary Rumsfeld and President Bush would be briefed by CENTCOM planners in early August. The US was examining two military options, and saw the "UK (and Kuwait) as essential". The three main options for UK involvement were:
 - “(i) Basing in Diego Garcia and Cyprus plus [...] SF [Special Forces] squadrons.
 - (ii) As above, with maritime and air assets in addition.
 - (iii) As above, plus a land contribution of up to 40,000 perhaps with a discrete role in northern Iraq entering from Turkey, tying down two Iraqi divisions.”
- Mr Hoon said that the US had already begun "spikes of activity" to put pressure on the regime. In his view, January was the most likely timing for military action.
- Mr Straw stated that it "seemed clear" that President Bush had "made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided".
- Lord Goldsmith warned that the desire for regime change was not a legal basis for military action. Self-defence and humanitarian intervention could not be the basis for military action in this case.
- Mr Blair had stated: "The two key issues were whether the military plan worked and whether we had the political strategy to give the military plan the space to work."
- Adm Boyce did not yet know if the US battleplan was "workable". There were "lots of questions", for example "the consequences if Saddam Hussein used WMD on day one, or if Baghdad did not collapse and urban warfighting began".

¹⁸⁸ [Minute Rycroft to Manning, 23 July 2002, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's Meeting, 23 July'](#).

- Mr Straw “thought the US would not go ahead with a military plan unless convinced it was the winning strategy”, but there “could be US/UK differences” on the political strategy.
- Mr Scarlett assessed that “Saddam would allow the inspectors back in only when he thought the threat of military action was real”.
- Mr Hoon stated that if Mr Blair wanted UK military involvement, an early decision would be required. Mr Hoon cautioned that “many in the US did not think it was worth going down the ultimatum route”. It would be important for Mr Blair “to set out the political context” to President Bush.

440. In relation to the military option, Mr Rycroft recorded that the meeting concluded:

- “• We should work on the assumption that the UK would take part in any military action. But we needed a fuller picture of US planning before we could take any firm decisions. CDS should tell the US military that we were considering a range of options.
- The Prime Minister would revert on the question of whether funds could be spent in preparation for this operation.
- CDS would send the Prime Minister full details of the proposed military campaign and possible UK contributions by the end of the week.”

441. Mr Rycroft sent a separate letter to Mr Straw’s Private Secretary on 23 July, which very briefly summarised the action points for the FCO, the MOD and the Cabinet Office.¹⁸⁹

442. In his memoir, Mr Blair recorded that Adm Boyce had made it pretty clear at the meeting that “he thought the US had decided on it [military action], bar a real change of heart by Saddam”.¹⁹⁰

443. In his account of the meeting, Mr Campbell wrote that Mr Blair had “said he needed to be convinced ... of the workability of the military plan.”¹⁹¹

444. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that he did not have a specific recollection of the meeting but he did not recall it as a key meeting, rather it was part of an “iterative process”.¹⁹²

445. Mr Hoon subsequently wrote that there was “a very full discussion of the relevant issues” at the meeting, and that:

“Arguments both for and against UK involvement as well as relevant legal opinions were set out and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. All of the reservations set out in the summary prepared by my Private Office were fully debated in the meeting.

¹⁸⁹ [Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 23 July 2002, ‘Iraq Prime Minister’s Meeting, 23 July: Follow Up’.](#)

¹⁹⁰ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

¹⁹¹ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

¹⁹² Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 20-21.

At such a meeting I would not have thought it necessary to repeat arguments already made by others ... unless there was some specific benefit in doing so.”¹⁹³

446. In his Note to President Bush of 28 July on the strategy on Iraq, Mr Blair suggested a build-up of military forces in the Gulf in the autumn as a signal of intent to encourage international support and demoralise Iraq.

447. Mr Blair’s Note to President Bush on 28 July and his and Sir David Manning’s subsequent discussions with President Bush are addressed in Section 3.3.

448. Mr Blair’s Note of 28 July began:

“I will be with you, whatever. But this is the moment to assess bluntly the difficulties. The planning on this and the strategy are the toughest yet. This is not Kosovo. This is not Afghanistan. It is not even the Gulf War.

“The military part of this is hazardous but I will concentrate mainly on the political context for success.”¹⁹⁴

449. In a section setting out the elements of a strategy to secure a political coalition, if not necessarily a military one, Mr Blair wrote:

“It goes without saying that the Turks and Kurds need to be OK. Strangely I think they are going to be the easiest, despite the Turkish elections. They both want our help badly and will play ball if offered enough.”

450. In a section headed “**The Military Plan**”, Mr Blair wrote:

“Finally, obviously, we must have a workable military plan. I don’t know the details yet, so this is first blush.

“The two options are running start and generated start.

“The first has the advantage of surprise; the second of overwhelming force. My military tell me the risks of heavy losses on the running start make it very risky. Apparently it involves around 15-20,000 troops striking inside Iraq, with heavy air support. The idea would be to catch the regime off balance, strike hard and quickly and get it to collapse. The obvious danger is [that] it doesn’t collapse. And there is the risk of CW being used.

“For that reason, a generated start seems better. It could always be translated into a more immediate option, should Saddam do something stupid. Also, the build-up of forces in such numbers will be a big signal of serious intent to the region and help to pull people towards us and demoralise the Iraqis. This option allows us to hammer his air defences and infrastructure; to invade from the South and take the oilfields; to

¹⁹³ Statement Hoon, 2 April 2015, paragraph 13.

¹⁹⁴ [Note Blair \[to Bush\], 28 July 2002, ‘Note on Iraq’](#).

secure the North and protect/stabilise the Kurds. Then effectively with huge force we go on to Baghdad.”

451. Mr Blair concluded:

“We would support in any way we can.

“On timing, we could start building up after the break. A strike date could be Jan/Feb next year. But the crucial issue is not when, but how.”

Definition of UK force “Packages”

MOD advice, 26 July 2002

452. In response to Mr Blair’s request for full details of the proposed military campaign and possible UK contributions, the MOD advised No.10 on 26 July:

- US military planning was still evolving and the Chiefs of Staff were not yet able to judge whether the US had a winning concept.
- Three possible options were identified but no recommendation was made about which option should be selected.
- The largest option comprised the deployment of a division, but the MOD was also examining the possibility of deploying an additional light brigade and providing the framework for a UK-led Corps headquarters.

453. Mr Hoon expressed caution about both the robustness of the estimates of the timescales for a UK deployment and the impact of Operation FRESCO – potential industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union in the autumn.

454. Mr Hoon’s view was that the UK should present its options to the US positively, but without commitment at that stage.

455. Mr Blair was advised that no decision was needed at that stage.

456. The three options identified by the MOD, which made no explicit reference to possible post-conflict commitments, provided the broad framework for discussions until the end of 2002.

457. Following Mr Blair’s meeting on 23 July, Mr Watkins commissioned further work, including a paper on all aspects of the military options for Mr Hoon to send to Mr Blair in time for his weekend box: a paper on military preparations, including the impact of the firefighters’ strike; and a draft script for Maj Gen Wilson to use at the CENTCOM meeting on 1 to 2 August.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Minute Watkins to PSO/CDS, 23 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

458. Maj Gen Fry provided PJHQ advice on 25 July, including a paper entitled ‘Discrete UK northern options through Turkey’.¹⁹⁶ That stated that the US would not be able logistically to sustain simultaneous assaults from the north and south, and that the “northern approach therefore remains a possibility for a self-sustaining UK force package as part of the overarching US campaign plan”.

459. The paper identified that the objective could be to either “defeat” or to “fix” Iraqi forces. The basic UK package would be an armoured division with two “square” brigades.

460. Maj Gen Fry advised:

“... what is beginning to emerge in the development of our work is the need for a possible post-conflict stabilisation force in order to meet the grand strategic end state of a new acceptable government.”

461. Maj Gen Fry suggested that there would be a need for a three-star headquarters, including to co-ordinate air assets.

462. The development of thinking on force levels in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq is addressed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

463. Mr Bowen sent Mr Hoon’s Private Office a fuller analysis of the options for a UK contribution on 25 July.¹⁹⁷ He advised that:

- Some British contributions, such as making available Diego Garcia and the Cyprus bases or employing air and maritime forces already engaged in operations against Iraq, could be achieved quickly.
- It would take another couple of months to increase forces to medium scale.
- “To meet probable US time-scales” it would “not be possible to deploy a fully prepared, fully sustainable armoured division for war-fighting.” A fully prepared and sustained armoured division (one which could fight a significant Iraqi force) would take 10 months.
- Deployment of an armoured division (minus) would only be possible “within six months of a decision to deploy”, and would have “limited sustainment and reach”.

464. The limited UK capability available after six months, with no more than 10 days ammunition and limited reach, could not mount a deliberate attack on large-scale Iraqi forces. The potential strategic advantage would be that the “actual deployment, even the preparation, should have an impact on the Iraqi regime and prevent single focus attention on the US forces in the South”. So long as it did not have to engage in all-out

¹⁹⁶ Minute Fry to MA/DCDS(C), 25 July 2002, ‘Developing Work on UK Options for Operations Against Iraq’.

¹⁹⁷ Minute Bowen to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 25 July 2002, ‘Iraq – Potential UK Contribution’.

“war-fighting”, it could be enough to “sow the seeds of uncertainty in the minds of the decision-makers in Baghdad”.

465. “In several significant ways,” the northern option was “very attractive”. It offered the UK the “opportunity to make a discrete contribution to the operation, but it also offers an opportunity to integrate other allies into the operation”. It would, however, be “highly challenging” and would require “not only Turkish acquiescence, but also full Turkish support along the line of communication”. That would require US involvement.

466. Because “a good proportion of UK maritime and air assets” would be integrated into the wider US effort, the force in the North would need to be confident that support from the US would be available “as and when required”. That was an issue that remained to be explored.

467. Mr Bowen also reported that CENTCOM understood the strategic benefit of a UK-led “northern effort”, but it was “not yet clear how important it is to their overall plan”.

468. Mr Bowen advised Mr Hoon that it was “also assessed as militarily unwise to integrate anything less than a division into the US land component”, and that “it would be militarily unattractive to commit UK land forces to US operations from Kuwait.”

469. On 26 July, the MOD provided advice on options for a UK contribution to US-led military operations in Iraq in a letter to Mr Rycroft.¹⁹⁸

470. The MOD advised that US military planning was “in full swing but it was still evolving”. The concept was for an attack launched by forces deployed in Kuwait and from other Gulf States and from ships in the Gulf and elsewhere. The plan was “neither fully developed nor finalised”. The Chiefs of Staff were “not yet able to judge whether this is a winning concept”. Greater clarity would be needed “before any UK option could be recommended”.

471. The MOD stated that it was “clear that the US plan of attack from the South” did not “need British land forces”:

“... in the time available there is very little scope for the preparation and integration of British land forces into the US order of battle; moreover the logistic space available in Kuwait, with five divisions worth of equipment and logistics support entering through only one airhead and a single port would already be confined ...”

472. Adm Boyce had recommended three options:

- **Package 1:** an “in-place support package” using forces already in the region.
- **Package 2:** an “enhanced support package” comprising Package 1 with additional air and maritime forces. This package could include forces that would be “of particular interest to the US because of their own deficiencies, e.g. mine

¹⁹⁸ [Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 26 July 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

clearance vessels and air-to-air refuellers for their carrier-based aircraft”. While no conventional land forces could meet the timescales for the deployment of maritime and air forces “Special Forces could be deployed very rapidly to match US timescales and priorities. This is likely to be very attractive to US planners, and their contribution to success would be significant.”

- **Package 3:** a “discrete UK package” based on deployment of an armoured division which the MOD envisaged would be used in northern Iraq, in addition to the forces in Package 2. The MOD stated that a force that was “credible” would be required: “Even to create uncertainty in the mind of Saddam”, and the contribution of a division “would probably require command and control at Corps level. The UK might consider providing an armoured division either as part of a US-led Corps or as part of a larger coalition force possibly led by the UK using the framework of the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps [ARRC].”¹⁹⁹

473. The MOD advised:

“... it would take **six months** for the whole division to be in place and then with such limited sustainment and reach that it would be unsuitable for a deliberate attack on large-scale Iraqi forces. An optimum capability for a sustained campaign inside Iraq could take about [...] to achieve”.

474. The MOD also stated that the “deployment of a light brigade with an air mobile capability” was “an additional possibility”. That:

“... would have the task of securing the deployment area in Turkey ahead of the arrival of the full division and preparing for operations short of armoured war fighting. These could involve a role in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone if it were subject to the threat of an Iraqi attack and/or post-conflict operations following the defeat of Iraqi forces. The actual deployment of forces, even their preparation, should have an impact on the Iraqi regime and prevent its single-focus attention on the US forces in the South.”

475. The MOD highlighted problems with:

- the concept of a “Running Start”;
- the fragility of the logistic chains; and
- vulnerability to chemical or biological weapons.

476. The MOD stated that “thinking about dealing with the aftermath of a successful attack remains sketchy”.

477. Finally, the MOD drew attention to the funding which would be required once a decision in principle was made to participate in military activity.

¹⁹⁹ [Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 26 July 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

478. Mr Hoon attached “two large caveats” to all three options:

- First, the timescales were “best planning estimates” and made “sweeping assumptions” about basing, transit routes and overflights. They also assumed that funding would be available to improve sustainability and implement UORs.
- Secondly, if the armed forces were required to provide 18,000-20,000 people for an emergency fire service in the event of a nationwide firefighters’ strike (Op FRESCO) and the US started military action in winter 2002/3, only the in-place support package and Special Forces would be available.

479. Mr Hoon had commissioned further work with a view to expediting what would need to be done once a decision in principle had been taken. UK representatives at a CENTCOM planning meeting the following week would be instructed “to set our options positively but without committing us to any specific ones”. The MOD would write again as soon as there was “greater clarity about the US plan, such that the Chiefs can update their assessment of it (and the risks involved) and the Defence Secretary can make recommendations about the best option to pursue”.

480. Copies of the letter were sent to Mr Straw’s and the Cabinet Secretary’s Private Offices, and to Mr Scarlett.

481. The advice was sent to Mr Blair on 31 July, as one of several “background papers” he had commissioned at his meeting on 23 July “for summer reading”.²⁰⁰

482. Mr Rycroft commented to Mr Blair:

“The military are not yet ready to make a recommendation on which if any of the three options to go for. Nor can they yet judge whether the US have a winning concept. They are continuing to work with the US military. You do not need to take decisions yet.”

483. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that Mr Blair had said that:

“... he didn’t want to take any decision or accept any of these options. I think in retrospect ... this was because ... this was the time ... when we were pressing for the Americans to consider the UN route. I think he didn’t want to give any signal that he was keen to think about a military alternative ...”²⁰¹

484. A minute from Mr Hoon’s Private Office on 31 July stated:

“The question of whether funds could be expended in preparation for an operation in Iraq is being considered separately elsewhere.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Minute Rycroft to Prime Minister, 31 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Background Papers’.

²⁰¹ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, page 36.

²⁰² Minute Watkins to Sec(O)1a, 31 July 2002, ‘Iraq – Enhancements Required for Possible UK Contribution’.

485. Discussions about expenditure, on UORs and other preparations for military action are addressed in Sections 6.3 and 13.1.

Developments during August 2002

486. A minute to Sir David Manning on 1 August advised that, with US assets returning from Afghanistan, the coalition was “reasserting control over all the southern No-Fly Zone”.²⁰³

487. At a meeting on 2 August, the UK informed CENTCOM that, while no decision had been taken for action in Iraq, the most obvious option for a UK land contribution was through Turkey. The UK needed more information on what effect was desired and further guidance on the political context.

488. Mr Hoon received a submission from PJHQ on 26 July outlining themes Maj Gen Wilson might use at the CENTCOM meeting on 2 August.²⁰⁴

489. When Adm Boyce spoke to both Gen Franks and Gen Myers on 29 July, about Afghanistan and Iraq, he stressed that the UK’s input to planning on Iraq was heavily bound with caveats.²⁰⁵

490. The record of the discussions reported US interest in both UK participation in the North and the potential contribution from HQ ARRC.

491. On 30 July, an MOD official provided Mr Hoon with a “best estimate” of the equipment enhancements that might be necessary in order to deliver the potential UK force packages.²⁰⁶

492. The official reported that there was a shortfall of essential NBC equipment for Packages 1 and 2 that would be required to treat casualties in the event of an Iraqi biological attack. The MOD had “low confidence” that it could be obtained within six months. It could take “up to nine months” to procure certain stocks from industry but further work was needed to identify other possible sources.

493. For Package 3, the MOD had “lower confidence” in the ability to deliver measures for tanks “for the fully sustained war-fighting role”, which it judged “would take around ten months”. There would also be a shortfall in NBC protection and biological detectors if Package 3 were to be adopted. Further work was being done to see how quickly this could be acquired.

²⁰³ Minute Dodd to Manning, 1 August 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²⁰⁴ Minute PJHQ Hd of J9 Pol/Ops to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 26 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Themes for Maj Gen Wilson’s talk to the CENTCOM Component Commander’s Conference’.

²⁰⁵ Minute DPSO/CDS to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 29 July 2002, ‘Telecons CDS/Gen Franks (CINCCENTCOM)/Gen Myers (CJCS) – 29 Jul 02’.

²⁰⁶ [Minute Sec\(O\)1a to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 30 July 2002, ‘Iraq – Enhancements Required for Potential UK Contribution’.](#)

494. The 30 July advice and the response are addressed in Section 6.3.

495. Responding to a request from MOD officials for urgent approval to widen the group involved in contingency planning to improve the estimates of the time and costs of enhancements likely to be needed to support military operations, Mr Hoon concluded that that would be premature.²⁰⁷

496. On 30 July, in a meeting with Adm Boyce, Sir Kevin Tebbit, Lt Gen Pigott and Mr Bowen, Mr Hoon discussed the line that Maj Gen Wilson should take in the CENTCOM meeting the following day.²⁰⁸

497. Mr Hoon acknowledged that “striking the right tone and balance ... was difficult. Ministers would wish the SBMA [Maj Gen Wilson] to be positive without, at this stage, committing the UK to any specific contribution”. The draft provided by PJHQ on the northern option “risked over committing us”.

498. Mr Hoon concluded that Maj Gen Wilson should warn the US of the political difficulty created by the need, in “the absence of pre-positioned assets”, for a move of UK armour to Turkey, which “would have to take place early and be very visible”.

499. After considerable debate, an agreed text was sent to Maj Gen Wilson on 1 August, and forwarded to Mr Hoon’s Office for information.²⁰⁹

500. Maj Gen Wilson’s address emphasised that the UK fully understood and sympathised “with the US position on Iraq, and Saddam Hussein”, and shared US “concerns about leaving him to develop his WMD aspirations” and the potential threat he posed.²¹⁰ The UK was “deeply appreciative of the opportunity to ... contribute towards the US ... planning process” and had been “working hard to identify forces” that could “in principle” be made available to support the US plan. But he was “bound to reiterate” that the UK had “made no decision in favour of action in Iraq” beyond its involvement in enforcing the No-Fly Zones.

501. Maj Gen Wilson offered “observations” on the US plan, including:

- The UK would be able to build on existing activity and be in support of the US “from Day One”. The “fullest possible deployment of maritime, air and SF” could be operational “relatively quickly”.
- In relation to land options in the South, “once the logistic in-load has begun” it was “going to be very busy in the South”. While it would be “wrong” to make “any definitive judgements” until planning was complete, it was difficult to see how the

²⁰⁷ Minute Watkins to Sec(O)1a, 31 July 2002, ‘Iraq – Enhancements Required for Possible UK Contribution’.

²⁰⁸ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 30 July 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²⁰⁹ Email PJHQ-J9-Hd(Pol/Ops)(s) to SOFS-Private Office, 01 Aug 2002, ‘CENTCOM Iraq Planning – A UK Perspective’.

²¹⁰ [Paper Wilson, \[1 August 2002\], ‘CENTCOM Iraq Planning – A UK Perspective’.](#)

“UK could contribute”. In the time available under “current planning”, “integration would also be difficult”.

- The UK knew that the US had “been looking at how else land forces might be used”, which raised the issue of “Turkey and the ... ‘northern option’”. “To maximise the military prospects of success” that “must be an essential part of your [the US] plan ... Indications are that Saddam is expecting something to happen in the North. Why disappoint him and make his decision process easier?”

502. Maj Gen Wilson added that there would be difficulties “particularly for the UK”.

- First, it would need “active Turkish support and engagement, not just acquiescence”, and there “may be scepticism in UK about whether active Turkish engagement could be delivered”.
- Second, the UK “could probably not get there as quickly ... as you might want us”.

503. Before the UK Government could agree to exploring a military contribution seriously, it was likely to need:

- a much more refined mission, with a better understanding of the effects required; and
- a better understanding of the level of US support that will be available.”

504. It could be possible to achieve “certain military effects in the North ... without pitched battles with the Iraqis”, but defeating Iraqi forces on the way to securing the northern oilfields would “probably” require a “heavy Division”, and it was “doubtful that that would be possible” within US timescales. The UK had:

“... thought about North, but we have now taken our thinking about as far as it can go without more detail from you. What we now need from you is to know what you really want; and most importantly more on what effect you would want us to achieve.”

505. Maj Gen Wilson offered “three other observations”:

- Unless political and legal issues were resolved, it would be “difficult to even deliver basic support”.
- The UK Government would “find it easier to engage politically” if the campaign was multi-national and, if a multi-national force was considered for the northern option, “that might be a role for the UK-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps”. Multi-nationality brought “complications”, but the use of the ARRC HQ would bring advantages, including that it had “already been focused on the region for years” which could “help save deployment time” and could “achieve the combat power for certain tasks more quickly than a purely UK force”.

- It would be “helpful ... to have a better feel for the ‘post-conflict’ thinking and aftermath management”. The experience of Afghanistan had shown it was “as important to win the peace” as it was to win the war. That was “fresh” in the UK’s mind, and it was “undoubtedly true that both UK politicians and ... military colleagues would like to know what we are getting ourselves into in the longer term”.
- Maj Gen Wilson concluded that the “involvement of significant UK land forces” would be a “challenge”. The UK agreed “that the most obvious option” was “through Turkey”; but more information was needed on what effect was desired and “further guidance” was needed “on the political context”.

506. Maj General Wilson stated that he could not stress too much that he “would have been shot” if he had extended his brief. There had been “no questions” and he had been “the last to speak”.²¹¹ Asked about the reaction to his talk, Maj Gen Wilson told the Inquiry: “Probably ‘yoo-hahs’ and a few of those delightfully American idiosyncrasies.”

507. Lt Gen Reith reported that Gen Franks saw great value in a northern axis led by the UK, but UK preparations needed to begin.

508. Between 5 and 7 August, Lt Gen Reith visited the US Army Central Command (ARCENT) HQ and CENTCOM.²¹²

509. Lt Gen Reith reported to ACM Bagnall:

“The indicators point to CENTCOM being ready to commence operations from about mid-Nov 02, with the main attack to launch from early Jan 03. Gen Franks is keen for strong UK participation. He sees great value in an axis from TU [Turkey] led by UK.”

510. There was, however, concern about Turkey’s position. If an attack was not possible from the north then the Kurdish oilfields would still need to be secured from the south. Lt Gen Reith reported that Gen Franks had suggested that could also be a “worthwhile discrete task for the UK”. There was a general readiness to provide US support if that would make it possible for UK forces to arrive earlier.

511. Lt Gen Reith concluded:

“With the US clock ticking, from an operational perspective, we ought to start our own. We need political and financial approval as soon as is feasible to prepare, but without committal to deploy. Without this the PM’s choices will be limited and he may not be able to fulfil what are clearly high US expectations.”

512. Lt Gen Pigott issued military planning guidance on 8 August.

²¹¹ Public hearing, 4 December 2009, pages 13-14.

²¹² Minute Reith to MA/VCDS, 8 August 2002, ‘Visit to ARCENT/CENTCOM 5-7 Aug 02’.

513. Reporting on a meeting held by Lt Gen Pigott on 8 August, Mr Drummond informed Mr McKane that the US seemed:

“... undecided on the importance of a front in the North ... He [Gen Franks] seems to think that a campaign mounted from the South could be sufficient but it would require more resources ... MOD will continue with their planning during August using small teams.”²¹³

514. Lt Gen Pigott issued updated planning guidance for possible military operations in Iraq to Lt Gen Reith and MOD staff on 8 August.²¹⁴

515. Significant points in the guidance included:

- MOD’s “planning posture” was “on the basis of being ‘as positive as possible’ but without implying premature political commitment”. Ministers had “not yet authorised any expenditure” on force preparation.
- The impact of Op FRESCO needed to be factored into planning.
- Maintenance of operational security was “**critically important**”. Mr Hoon’s “Intent and Direction” [that only named individuals could be involved] was “very clear” and the implications were “understood and accepted”.
- PJHQ should focus its effort on the issues which would inform judgements on whether there was a “Winning Mil Strategic Concept/Plan”, including:
 - a military plan within an integrated political strategy;
 - intelligence that was “good enough to give high confidence” that the elimination of WMD, the replacement of the regime, post conflict operations and minimising unintended consequences, could be achieved;
 - the strategy for the North was “joined up”;
 - an information campaign was “in place and effective”;
 - the “Coalition dimension” being “adequately covered”;
 - CBRN judgements affecting combat operations were “sound”; and
 - arrangements for logistics, “correlation of forces” and “rear” operations were “sound”.
- PJHQ should “Continue to scope” Package 3 scenarios with the US whilst making it clear that was “currently without firm commitment”.

516. Updates were to be provided for the Chiefs of Staff “Think Tank” on 6 September.

517. The decision to confine planning to a named list of individuals in the MOD and PJHQ respectively (the “Centurion” and “Warrior” groups), and the detailed planning for UORs which began on 22 August, is addressed in Section 6.3.

²¹³ Minute Drummond to McKane, 8 August 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²¹⁴ [Minute Pigott to Reith and others, 8 August 2002, ‘Updated Guidance for Possible Military Operations \(Iraq\)’](#).

518. The MOD reported on 12 August that President Bush had authorised preparatory military activities.

519. The MOD continued to warn No.10 against any assumption that the UK could take the lead in the North within the timelines being considered by the US.

520. A meeting of the US National Security Council was held on 5 August to review what Vice President Cheney described as “the latest iteration of the war plan”.²¹⁵

521. Gen Franks described his strategic objective as regime change and his operational objectives as securing the oilfields and water infrastructure, while preventing Iraq’s use of long-range missiles and WMD.²¹⁶

522. A letter from Mr Hoon’s Private Office to No.10 on 12 August reported that President Bush had authorised preparatory military activities costing US\$1bn and that an inter-agency process in Washington had been launched.²¹⁷

523. The MOD reported the emergence of a “hybrid option”, combining elements of both the generated and running start plan. The US could be in a position to take action in November and there was:

“... growing enthusiasm in the US for action in northern Iraq led by the UK ... we will need to guard against US assumptions of UK leading ground operations in northern Iraq ... General Franks has indicated his interest in seeing the UK lead such forces.”

524. Sir David Manning wrote alongside the point above: “An idea our own MOD are v. keen on; may be some ventriloquism here”.²¹⁸

525. The MOD advised that the projected timelines for the deployment of a UK division, “albeit with limited sustainment and reach”, bore “no relation to the timescale of US plans”. It might be possible to reduce deployment times if the US provided support, but the UK would need time for preparation.

526. The MOD concluded:

“It will be important, therefore, in the coming weeks, to guard against any assumption that the UK will take the lead from the north or could do so on the basis of current US timelines. Apart from the impossibility of making military commitments in advance of political decisions, there are practical constraints, one of which is the potential requirement to provide emergency cover during any fire strike in the autumn – not so far revealed to the US.”

²¹⁵ Cheney D & Cheney L. *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

²¹⁶ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

²¹⁷ Letter Davies to Wechsberg, 12 August 2002, ‘Iraq: US Contingency Planning’.

²¹⁸ Manuscript comment Manning on Letter Davies to Wechsberg, 12 August 2002, ‘Iraq: US Contingency Planning’.

JIC ASSESSMENT, 21 AUGUST 2002: 'SADDAM'S DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY OPTIONS'

527. A JIC Assessment of 21 August concluded that in a conflict Saddam Hussein would order missile strikes and the use of CBW against coalition Forces, supporting regional states and Israel.

528. The JIC had little intelligence on Iraq's CBW and little insight into how it would fight. Its conclusions reflected the Committee's own judgements.

529. At the request of the MOD, the JIC issued an Assessment on 21 August considering "what diplomatic options Saddam has to deter, avert or limit the scope of a US-led attack".²¹⁹ It also considered his "military options for facing a US-led attack" and how his analysis about each course of action might "change as an attack becomes increasingly imminent".

530. The JIC examined Iraq's options for the short term, whether Saddam Hussein might seize the initiative, how Iraq might respond to a US military build-up, Saddam's options in "war" – including the use of missiles and WMD and "alternative scenarios and at the death".

531. The JIC's Key Judgements on the military options were:

- Much as Saddam Hussein would like to seize the initiative before a US attack, his options remained limited. He was "likely to be cautious about using force early. But the closer and more credible an attack seemed, the more risks he will be willing to take, perhaps including deniable terrorist attacks, most likely in the Gulf region – though we cannot exclude a threat to the UK."
- "Early on in any conflict, Saddam would order missile attacks on Israel, coalition forces and regional states providing the US with bases."
- "Saddam would order the use of CBW against coalition forces at some point, probably after a coalition attack had begun. Once Saddam was convinced that his fate was sealed, he would order the unrestrained use of CBW against coalition forces, supporting regional states and Israel."
- "Iraq would probably try to ride out air strikes while conserving its ground forces. Iraq's likely strategy for a ground war would be to make any coalition advance as slow and costly as possible, trying to force the coalition to fight in urban areas."
- "There is a significant potential for Saddam to miscalculate, either by escalating a crisis at an early stage, or by making concessions too late in the day to avert an attack."

²¹⁹ [JIC Assessment, 21 August 2002, 'Iraq: Saddam's Diplomatic and Military Options'](#).

532. In relation to Saddam Hussein's options for seizing the initiative, the Assessment stated:

- A “concerted attempt” to bring down an aircraft in one of the No-Fly Zones was “a possibility”.
- A pre-emptive attack on the Kurds or Kuwait was judged “unlikely”.
- Saddam Hussein “would probably ... order preparations for a campaign of **terrorism and sabotage** in the region”.
- “... we know that Iraqi Special Forces and other organisations, such as the ‘Saddam Fedayeen’, also possess the capability to conduct sabotage or terrorist attacks.”
- It was “possible that Iraqi terrorist attacks could be conducted against other [non-military] interests or the leadership and economic (e.g. oil industry) targets of regional States”.
- The JIC did not “know enough about Iraqi capabilities to discount the threat outside the region, including within the UK, though previously Iraqi attempts to mount terrorist attacks, or engage proxies to do so on their behalf, have been largely ineffective”.

533. In relation to missile attacks, the Assessment stated:

- “Saddam would probably order missile attacks ...”
- Attacks on Israel would be an attempt to attract Israeli retaliation and thus widen the war, split the Coalition and arouse popular opinion in the Arab States.
- Missiles “could be armed with chemical or biological warfare (CBW) agents”.
- “Saddam might be deterred at least initially by the threat of Israeli nuclear retaliation.”
- Attacks on coalition forces in Kuwait would require Iraq to deploy short-range missiles into the “No Drive Zone”.²²⁰
- A pre-emptive missile attack on Israel was “less likely because it would show Iraq had been lying about its retention of long range missiles”.

534. The Assessment stated that the JIC had:

“... little insight into how the Iraqi military might plan to fight any ground war ... At present we have little evidence to judge whether Iraq sees urban or guerrilla warfare as feasible options. Iraqi effectiveness would be mitigated by problems of command and control, inadequate training and poor morale. We doubt that guerrilla activity would be very effective; urban warfare is more plausible ...”

535. The judgements about Saddam Hussein's potential use of chemical and biological weapons are addressed in Section 4.2. The firmness of those judgements, which bear

²²⁰ Resolution 949 (1994) imposed a “No Drive Zone” in Iraq south of the 32nd parallel.

similarities to the assumptions in the 13 June SPG paper, reflected the views of the members of the Committee.

536. The judgements were incorporated in a revised SPG paper produced on 4 September.

537. The assessment of Saddam Hussein's diplomatic options is addressed in Section 3.4.

THE IMPACT OF OPERATION FRESCO

538. From late July it was clear that the possible requirement to provide cover in the event of a nationwide firefighters' strike (Op FRESCO) would limit the UK's ability to deploy ground forces.

539. The MOD continued, however, to promote the advantages of the northern option to both UK Ministers and US military planners.

540. In August UK military planning actively focused on identifying the maximum contribution which the UK might be able to offer to the US.

541. The MOD advised No.10 on 28 August that if Op FRESCO was implemented in full, the UK would be able to provide only a brigade for land operations; and that the US should be informed.

542. During the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq a dispute over pay and conditions with the Fire Brigades Union led to a requirement for an MOD contingency plan, Op FRESCO, to provide a replacement fire-fighting capability to which some 19,000 Service Personnel were assigned.²²¹

543. Military advice about the UK's ability to generate ground forces changed radically between the end of July and the end of August. The evidence clearly demonstrates the focus on identifying the "maximum effort" and giving the UK a combat role in ground operations.

544. Mr Hoon was sceptical about the wisdom of that approach and sought to ensure that No.10 was given a more balanced perspective.

545. No.10 was warned on 26 July about the potential impact of a firefighters' strike on the UK's ability to deploy land forces for operations in Iraq.²²²

546. On 22 August, in the context of a predicted discussion between the US and Turkey on a possible northern option, ACM Bagnall commented to Air Vice Marshal Clive Loader, Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Operations) (ACDS(Ops)), that a MOD meeting held on 21 August had concluded:

²²¹ Report MOD, *Operations in Iraq: First Reflections*, July 2003.

²²² [Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 26 July 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

“... we will need to decide whether we wish to influence US planning in developing any northern option. This may well be necessary sooner rather than later.”²²³

547. The MOD has been unable to provide any record of the meeting on 21 August.²²⁴

548. On 27 August, Dr Cholerton sent Mr Hoon an update on Iraq-related developments, including the potential impact of Op FRESCO.²²⁵

549. Dr Cholerton reviewed recent political and diplomatic developments and its understanding of US planning, including that:

“Operations in Northern Iraq are increasingly seen by the US planners as highly desirable and an important addition to the campaign plan. The overwhelming effect of simultaneous action against Saddam is one of the principal features of the campaign design. It is increasingly accepted that action in the North would play an important part in that; adding a significant additional complication he will have to overcome.”

550. In relation to the UK’s ability to deploy forces while supporting Op FRESCO, Dr Cholerton advised that “a more refined set of force packages”, which would be “more flexible in composition” was being developed; and that the position was “significantly better” than the MOD had reported to No.10 on 26 July. Further work had shown it would be possible to produce Package 2 if a firefighters’ strike lasted no longer than three months. That package could include substantial maritime and air capabilities and Special Forces. The ability to deploy a Royal Marine Commando Group after October 2002 was included in an Annex showing an “illustrative” Package 3.

551. If negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union broke down and a decision was taken to begin full-scale training for Op FRESCO, it would not be possible to deploy a division, but it would be possible to release forces for a single brigade tailored to operational needs. That would fall well short of the contribution required to enable the UK to carry out a “discrete” role in the North.

552. A smaller contribution could raise “some of the integration issues which led the Chiefs of Staff to view our offering conventional land forces for operations in southern Iraq as impractical”. The UK would, however, continue to “explore ideas of how such a contribution could be made to work alongside other potential partners and drawing heavily on US goodwill and resources”.

553. There were suspicions that US planners continued to believe that the UK could deliver a division if it were supported by the US, although there were “signs” that it was “looking at the provision of US forces” if the UK could not provide a division. A draft

²²³ Minute VCDS to ACDS(Ops), 22 August 2002, ‘Iraq Planning – US Briefing to Turks’.

²²⁴ Letter MOD Iraq Inquiry Unit to Iraq Inquiry Secretariat, 1 November 2012, [untitled].

²²⁵ [Minute Cholerton to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 27 August 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

planning directive to EUCOM, who would be responsible for the northern option, tasked it to provide logistic support for a division-sized force, either coalition or US only.

554. Dr Cholerton advised Mr Hoon that it would be “important to guard against any false assumptions the US might make about the UK’s potential contribution to any military action”. The UK should explain the consequences of Op FRESCO to the US once a decision had been taken to commence training.

555. In relation to forthcoming US/Turkish discussions in Washington, the UK had made it clear to the US that:

“... in advance of UK political decisions, it would be wrong to discuss potential UK participation in ground operations from Turkey with the Turkish General Staff.”

556. Commenting on a draft of the advice to Mr Hoon, a civilian in PJHQ had pointed out that “a discrete UK option need not necessarily mean a northern attack through Turkey”.²²⁶

557. On 28 August, the MOD’s revised assessment of the implications of Op FRESCO was set out in a letter to Sir David Manning.²²⁷

558. The MOD also stated that Mr Hoon:

“... considers it particularly important that we guard against any false assumptions that the US might make about the UK’s potential contribution to any military action ... Explaining the impact ... to the US would ... serve to focus US planners on the real practical limitations we would face, were political decisions taken to join the US in military action.”

559. Sir David Manning commented to Mr Powell that he was not clear where the Fire Brigades issue stood; and that he would be “grateful for a word ab[ou]t what to say to Washington and when”.²²⁸

PJHQ ADVICE, 30 AUGUST 2002

560. PJHQ reported on 30 August that Land Command believed it would be able to deploy a division.

561. PJHQ also identified the risks associated with the northern option.

562. On 30 August, Lt Gen Reith submitted an update on the timelines for deploying a division (minus) to Lt Gen Pigott.²²⁹

²²⁶ Email PJHQ–J9-HD(Pol/Ops) to VCDS/PS, 23 August 2002, ‘PJHQ Comment on Iraq Submission’.

²²⁷ [Letter Williams to Manning, 28 August 2002, ‘Iraq – Potential UK Contribution and a Fire Strike’](#).

²²⁸ Manuscript comment Manning to Powell, 30 August 2002, on [Letter Williams to Manning, 28 August 2002, ‘Iraq – Potential UK Contribution and a Fire Strike’](#).

²²⁹ Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 30 August 2002, ‘Operations Against Iraq Deployment Timeline of a UK Division (-) through Turkey’.

563. On the same day, Maj Gen Fry provided advice for the Chiefs of Staff, reviewing planning for operations in Iraq as requested by Lt Gen Pigott on 8 August.²³⁰

564. Maj Gen Fry reported that the US was now working on a “hybrid option”, which contained elements of both the running and generated start. The “importance of the development of an axis in the North is now fully recognised”, and a contingency plan was being developed to commit significant US forces, possibly in addition to any coalition contributions.

565. The most significant development was that Land Command now believed it could deploy HQ ARRC, HQ 1st (UK) Armoured Division, one triangular brigade, 16 Air Assault Brigade and a logistic brigade some 124 days after a political decision to allow overt preparations for deployment. There would be some risk to the UK’s ability to deploy forces in 2004:

“... the overall penalties ... would be severe, some roulement tour lengths would be extended to 12 months and the generation of armoured and mechanised HR [High Readiness] forces in [20]04 would be put at risk.”

566. Maj Gen Fry advised that:

- “The northern approach offers the opportunity for greatest effect but probably carries the highest risk.”
- If a northern option for a land package was not viable, a western approach through Jordan could offer “very similar effects at less risk”.
- “A timely effect in the South could probably only be achieved by the ARG [Amphibious Ready Group] in support of the US MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force].”

567. The risks of the northern approach were listed in an Annex as:

- The need to be deployed in time to secure parts of the oilfields around Kirkuk from Iraqi destruction.
- The weather from January to March could severely restrict air operations.
- The distance to be travelled overland would be more than 1,000km.
- The terrain would constrain manoeuvre and considerable US engineer support would be needed to cross the river Tigris.
- Long lines of communication and challenges to sustainability.

568. The paper invited the Chiefs of Staff to agree that potential UK force contributions could be exposed to US planners to inform the CENTCOM planning conference scheduled for 23 September; and that, if the UK was “to retain a claim to leadership

²³⁰ Minute Fry to DCDS(C), 30 August 2002, ‘PJHQ Update on Planning for Operations Against Iraq’.

in the North then we must participate in the forthcoming CENTCOM/EUCOM recces in Turkey”.

569. On 31 August, Maj Gen Wilson reported to Adm Boyce that “CENTCOM clearly hope the UK will run with” the northern option.²³¹ He advised:

“Whilst I am continually reinforcing the UK policy line to US colleagues in CENTCOM (discreet planning and scoping, but without political endorsement or commitment), the demands of US operational planning necessitate input on UK planning data and separately, our intent for key evolutions [activities] such as ground recces to Turkey and [Exercise] Internal Look. In terms of expectation management, and without over stating it as seen from here, the time for putting more UK military cards on the CENTCOM/EUCOM tables (caveated as necessary) is fast approaching.”

570. Maj Gen Wilson also reported that he had been asked about Op FRESCO, and its potential impact on the UK’s ability to contribute to Iraq, which he had “played long”.

Preparations for Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush, Camp David

571. Despite military advice that the UK might be able to deploy HQ ARRC and “division-scale forces”, Mr Hoon advised continued caution about the UK’s ability to deploy land forces.

572. No decision on a possible UK military contribution to US operations was taken before the meeting with President Bush, but the MOD advised that there could be a need for tough decisions within two weeks.

573. Mr Blair decided that the UK should not inform the US about the potential impact of Op FRESCO at that stage.

574. The discussions between the UK and US on the policy on Iraq, Mr Blair’s press conference in Sedgefield on 3 September, and the decision that he and President Bush would meet at Camp David on 7 September following a meeting of the National Security Council which would have been briefed by Gen Franks, are addressed in Section 3.4.

575. In response to the MOD advice of 28 August, Mr Blair’s view, as reported on 3 September by Sir David Manning, was for “nothing to be said to the US about Op FRESCO for the moment”.²³² Mr Blair hoped it would be possible to discuss the issues with Mr Hoon the following week before he flew to Washington.

576. Reporting an MOD meeting on 3 September to Mr Straw, Mr Stephen Wright, FCO Deputy Under Secretary Defence and Intelligence, stated that, in the MOD’s view, the Pentagon’s plans had not firmed up significantly during August.²³³ It was still working on

²³¹ Minute Wilson to PSO/CDS, 31 August 2002, ‘SBMA SITREP 29’.

²³² Letter Manning to Williams, 3 September 2002, ‘Iraq – Potential UK Contribution and a Fire Strike’.

²³³ Minute Wright to Private Secretary [FCO], 4 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

the basis of a December to February window for military action. Because of continuing uncertainties, including over Turkey, the MOD did not feel able to advise Ministers whether the US had a “winning concept”.

577. Mr Wright also wrote that the MOD “sense a mounting desire on the part of US military planners to learn more about the possible levels of UK force commitments”.

SPG PAPER, 4 SEPTEMBER 2002

578. A revised version of the SPG paper ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’ was produced on 4 September.²³⁴ The paper contained significant new analysis about the US intentions and their implications for UK planning.

579. The SPG assessed that the US had “sufficient combat power to destabilise, and overthrow the current Iraqi regime” by itself, but it required a “minimum coalition” to provide basing and transit, including use of UK bases in Cyprus and Diego Garcia. The paper also set out the current CENTCOM concept and plan, including an assessment that “shaping operations” (described as including a “series of activities designated as spikes by the US”, which were “intended to progressively increase the level and tempo of military activity”) had “already begun” and the UK was “implicated in their conduct”.

580. A number of key issues would “need to be resolved” to evaluate the design of the campaign. Those included:

- avoiding a tactical victory at the cost of strategic failure;
- determining the “strategic effect” the UK was seeking from participation in the campaign;
- demonstrating “US/UK solidarity (delivering the Special Relationship)”;
- adding “value through sharing the planning burden, and acting as a moderating influence” on the US; and
- demonstrating that the UK was “an active, determined and capable nation by making an operationally significant contribution, in a discrete role that satisfies a clear military objective”.

581. The potential UK strategic objectives identified by the SPG were to:

- Stand alongside the US as a junior partner, sharing both the strategic and operational risks and burdens, to:
 - preserve the Atlantic Alliance; and
 - encourage the US to continue to exercise its power via established international bodies and norms.

²³⁴ [Paper \[SPG\], 4 September 2002, ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’.](#)

- Remove the threat that any Iraqi regime may pose to the UK, UK interests and regional stability through its failure to comply with international law and agreements. That implied:
 - verifiable destruction of Iraq’s WMD capability; and
 - establishing a regime that had the trust of the international community.
- Reintegrate Iraq into the international community.
- Support and where possible enhance regional stability. That implied:
 - preventing the establishment of a Shia dominated Islamic fundamentalist state; and
 - ensuring the impact of military operations was “at the very minimum ... neutral in terms of regional stability”.
- Prevent the Iraqi regime from perpetrating further humanitarian disasters.
- Enhance the security of the UK’s long-term economic interests, including oil supplies.

582. The SPG defined the UK’s “Military Strategic Objectives” as:

- provide US Commanders “with support necessary for the execution of [the] approved campaign plan, focusing first on delivery of critical capabilities”;
- assist the US to create conditions to deny Iraq’s ability to use its WMD;
- create conditions for a changed Iraqi regime;
- create conditions to strengthen regional security and stability; and
- assist US forces in securing Iraq’s oil infrastructure and production facilities.

583. Other key points in the paper included:

- No clear picture had “yet emerged” on how the US planned to “effect ... regime change (other than ... military defeat and subsequent elimination of Saddam Hussein”.
- Iraq was experienced with chemical weapons and had experimented with biological weapons. There was “every reason” to believe they would be used if regime survival was threatened.
- US and UK policies on a “deterrent response to Iraqi first use of WMD” needed to be reviewed.
- There was a need to determine what would constitute “success for an inspection regime”.
- Package 3 was defined as including “UK Force Elements with a discrete role in the North, within an integrated US-led campaign”.
- The risk analysis was based on the provision of a division (minus).
- An illustrative force package included a Royal Marine Commando Group which would be available after October as part of the maritime element, an armoured

division including two square armoured brigades, and a light “Air Assault capable” brigade.

584. The SPG advised that, in the absence of clear post-conflict plans, the potential scale of the UK military engagement remained unknown. In the worst case, the UK needed to be prepared for “a substantial long-term commitment”.

585. The SPG’s conclusions on post-conflict issues are addressed in Section 6.4.

586. The SPG concluded that the “key **military** question” which had to be addressed was: “Is there a winning military concept and plan?”

587. The paper set out lists of the conditions that would need to be met for the UK to answer yes, and the reasons why the UK should not offer to participate in the CENTCOM plan.

588. The Chiefs of Staff met on 4 and 6 September, but no discussion of the military options for Iraq is recorded in the minutes.²³⁵

MOD ADVICE, 6 SEPTEMBER 2002

589. Sir David Manning asked the MOD for advice in preparation for Mr Blair’s meeting with President Bush at Camp David on 7 to 8 September.²³⁶

590. An initial draft of the advice, submitted by Dr Cholerton, described the meeting at Camp David as “to discuss Iraq”, the possibility of an ultimatum to Iraq on the return of weapons inspectors, and Mr Blair’s candid reference the previous day to regime change and the planned publication of a dossier (see Section 3.4).²³⁷

591. Dr Cholerton advised that further work in PJHQ and Land Command suggested it might be possible to generate “up to ‘division scale’ forces ... 4 months after an overt political decision” as well as HQ ARRC; and that the Chiefs of Staff would look at whether the US military plan would deliver the UK’s desired end state.

592. Dr Cholerton advised that Mr Blair “should be cautious in discussing UK’s ability to contribute to military capability” with President Bush.

593. Mr Hoon requested further advice on the costs of the packages and the number of personnel involved.²³⁸

²³⁵ Minutes, 4 September 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting; Minutes, 6 September 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²³⁶ Minute Williams to DG Op Pol, 4 September 2002, ‘Iraq – Update for the Prime Minister’.

²³⁷ Minute Cholerton to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 4 September 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²³⁸ Minute Cholerton to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 5 September 2002, ‘Iraq’.

594. On 5 September, Mr Hoon discussed the draft letter to No.10 with Adm Boyce, Sir Kevin Tebbit, Lt Gen Pigott, Maj Gen Fry and Mr Ian Lee, who had replaced Mr Bowen as MOD Director General Operational Policy.²³⁹

595. The note of the meeting recorded that they concluded there was now slightly more clarity on the window for military action (then considered to be between December 2002 and May 2003), and the possibility of a simultaneous entry into Iraq from the north and south. The Chiefs of Staff were not yet in a position to determine if the US had a winning concept, and were focused on the ability to mount an operation from the north.

596. Mr Hoon pointed to the complication resulting from the shift in the diplomatic context, which raised the question of the “necessity or otherwise to move assets” while the UN process was under way “and before Parliament returned in mid-October”. That “was especially acute for Package 3”. A requirement to support Op FRESCO “effectively precluded our offering a fully capable fighting division”. That meant that the UK should assume that the US would deploy its 4th Infantry Division to the North. It would be difficult to integrate UK forces with that Division; the Chiefs of Staff would “consider whether we could offer some land force components of a larger coalition” force in the North. Even Package 2 would require early decisions on UORs, including desertisation of equipment.

597. In Mr Hoon’s view, the draft advice for No.10 underplayed “the scale of the contribution provided by Package 2 and the degree of influence which it would give us on US military planning”.

598. Mr Blair discussed the UK’s military contribution with Mr Hoon on 5 September.²⁴⁰ Mr Straw was also present.

599. Mr Watkins recorded that Mr Blair, Mr Hoon and Mr Straw had discussed the packages, and that Mr Hoon had highlighted the benefits of Package 2. “No decisions were taken” and Mr Blair “did not expect President Bush to commit himself imminently to a military campaign”.

600. Mr Watkins also recorded that Mr Hoon had met Mr Brown to discuss the options and alert him to the likely costs of Package 2.

601. There was no No.10 record of the meeting.

602. Mr Lee provided a revised letter to No.10, advising caution because the advice had been “assembled in a short space of time from a necessarily limited group”.²⁴¹

603. Mr Watkins responded that Mr Hoon had asked for the letter to be recast to explain more fully why the UK was not able to offer a fully capable division; and that the

²³⁹ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 5 September 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²⁴⁰ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 5 September 2002, ‘Iraq’.

²⁴¹ Minute Lee to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 5 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Update for the Prime Minister’.

possibility of a land “Task Force” should be more heavily caveated as Mr Hoon remained “of the view that we should not offer now more than we are certain we can deliver”.²⁴² Mr Hoon also asked for a reference to be included to the fact that a land task force would “lend itself to involving other countries should they so wish”. He would consider the text again the following day.

604. On 6 September, Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning, providing an update on US military planning and “the factors informing decisions on any UK military contribution”.²⁴³ He cautioned that the MOD’s assessment was “necessarily provisional”, partly because the US plan was still evolving, and partly because there had not yet been “detailed joint planning with the US”.

605. The MOD had identified three options ranging from minimum to maximum effort. That included a further revision of the impact of Op FRESCO, which meant that:

“Were we to throw in everything we are likely to have, the UK could potentially generate up to a divisional headquarters, an armoured brigade, 16 Air Assault Brigade and a logistic brigade”.

606. The MOD was also “examining whether a Royal Marine Commando Group could form part of Package 2 [the air and maritime forces packages]”.

607. A land task force would “offer significant capability to a US-led northern force, although it would not be fully suitable for involvement in decisive war-fighting operations”. It would also require switching units assigned to Op FRESCO training, and visible activity such as the call-out of “hundreds of key Reservist personnel”. A decision to commit all those elements (some 40,000 personnel, of whom 10,000 could be Reservists) would have “wide-ranging downstream consequences”.

608. The MOD cautioned “against betting the whole store in this way on one operation”, and urged continued caution in discussing “the scale of UK’s ability to contribute military capability”.

609. Mr Watkins stated that, “even were [Op] FRESCO to end soon, we could not provide a self-standing division within US timescales” of having an offensive capability in place in the Gulf by December/January. He continued:

“There would simply not be enough time to carry out the preparations we would need to make. We would not have enough time to engage industry in order to improve sustainability (ammunition, etc) and implement UORs to optimise forces for the theatre and interoperability with the US.”

²⁴² Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 5 September 2002, ‘Iraq – Update for the Prime Minister’.

²⁴³ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 6 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’](#).

610. The MOD reported that US planners increasingly considered operations from Turkey were “integral to the success of the campaign plan” (earlier drafts said “key”), although the US Joint Chiefs of Staff had yet to be briefed on this plan.

611. The MOD also drew attention to the “sketchy” post-conflict plans and the importance of keeping in mind the US timetable when identifying the potential contribution the UK might offer and the influence it was hoped to bring.

612. The MOD advice concluded that, should “US military preparations continue at their current pace, we will face some early tough decisions within two weeks of your return from Camp David”.

613. Copies of the letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Sir Andrew Turnbull, who became Cabinet Secretary in September 2002, and to Mr Desmond Bowen, who succeeded Mr McKane as Deputy Head of OD Sec.

614. On 5 September, Lt Gen Pigott’s staff also provided Adm Boyce with a list of key questions he might pose to Gen Myers and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR, a NATO post held by a US commander, who also commands EUCOM), to inform the UK’s thinking and assess the merits of US plans.²⁴⁴

615. The questions included:

- the robustness of the plan to withstand a CBRN attack and the lines of communications to withstand asymmetric attack;
- whether the northern axis was fundamental to the US plan;
- if the US required a UK ground forces presence, would it be prepared to wait;
- US views on the length of post-conflict engagement;
- regional reactions; and
- the best and worst post-conflict outcome they envisaged.

616. The MOD has been unable to find a record of Adm Boyce’s discussions.²⁴⁵

617. On 5 September, Maj Gen Wilson told Maj Gen Fry that Gen Franks was “comfortable” with having US troops under UK command; and that he saw “more political attraction in UK, rather than the US leading ‘in the North’”.²⁴⁶

618. Lt Gen Pigott accompanied Mr Blair on his visit to Camp David.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Email DOMAAD(ME) to CDS/PSO, 5 September 2002, ‘CDS Questions on Iraq for SACEUR/CJCS’.

²⁴⁵ Letter MOD Iraq Inquiry Unit to Iraq Inquiry Secretariat, 23 May 2012.

²⁴⁶ Minute Wilson to DCJO (Ops), 5 September 2002, ‘Iraq Contingency Planning’.

²⁴⁷ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

Attack in Iraq, 5 September 2002

In response to hostile acts against Coalition aircraft monitoring the southern No-Fly Zone, US aircraft, with UK aircraft in support, attacked an Iraqi air defence facility in western Iraq on 5 September, prompting press speculation that it was a prelude to Special Forces attacks and more general military action.²⁴⁸

The outcome of the meeting at Camp David

619. Mr Blair cautioned President Bush about his assumption that the UK would be ready to lead a strike into northern Iraq. But he told President Bush that the UK would take a significant military role if it came to war with Iraq.

620. Mr Blair told Mr Hoon that he had been alarmed by the US expectations that the UK would lead the northern axis and there should be no visible preparations for a month or so. But Mr Hoon was not sent a copy of Sir David Manning's record of the discussions at Camp David.

621. Mr Blair met President Bush and Vice President Cheney at Camp David on 7 September.²⁴⁹

622. Before his meeting with Mr Blair, President Bush held a meeting of his National Security Council at Camp David which was given a briefing by Gen Franks, who introduced his concept of a campaign comprising five simultaneous "operational fronts" in Iraq.²⁵⁰

623. The meeting between Mr Blair and President Bush, the press conference which preceded it, and President Bush's decision to take the issue of Iraq to the UN, are addressed in Section 3.4.

624. In relation to the discussion at Camp David on military action, Mr Blair said that he was in no doubt about the need to deal with Saddam Hussein; and that the likelihood was that this would mean military action at some point:

"If it came to force, we could hope that we would secure the relatively quick overthrow of Saddam. But even if we did, we would, still be faced with the big issue of what followed his departure."²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 2002, *100 jets join attack on Iraq*.

²⁴⁹ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 8 September 2002, 'Your Visit to Camp David on 7 September: Conversation with President Bush'.

²⁵⁰ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

²⁵¹ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 8 September 2002, 'Your Visit to Camp David on 7 September: Conversation with President Bush'.

625. President Bush and Mr Blair discussed the prospects for a military campaign, including the possibility of leaving Saddam Hussein “bottled up” in Baghdad.

626. Sir David Manning recorded that Mr Blair expressed caution about the US assumption that the UK would be ready to lead a strike from Turkey into northern Iraq and provide two thirds of the force. But Mr Blair had emphasised that the UK would indeed take “a significant military role” if it came to war with Iraq.

627. Mr Hoon was not sent Sir David Manning’s record of Mr Blair’s discussion with President Bush.²⁵²

628. Mr Blair telephoned Mr Hoon on the evening of 8 September, to give him a read-out of his discussions with President Bush and Vice President Cheney, and the US position on the UN route, in advance of Mr Hoon’s visit to the US.²⁵³

629. Mr Rycroft recorded that Mr Blair said:

“... he had been alarmed that [President] Bush had understood that the UK would be ‘leading the invasion’ from the North of Iraq. This required very careful handling. Having received the military advice, the Prime Minister’s view was that we could not offer Package 3 in the timescale required and given the constraints of Operation Fresco. But we might be able to offer Package 2, plus some further elements. There should be no visible preparations for a month or so.”

630. A minute from Mr Hoon’s office to Sir David Manning on 12 September reported that, following the discussion, Mr Hoon had taken “a small number of decisions”, related to participation in US planning and exercises “necessary to keep these options open”.²⁵⁴ They included:

- a reconnaissance visit to Turkey;
- preparations for participation in Exercise Internal Look, a US exercise to develop command arrangements for any future military operation against Iraq, including a visit to Qatar, pending a final decision on participation; and
- participation in a CENTCOM planning conference starting on 23 September, at which it would be necessary to define, without commitment, the detail of any military involvement.

631. Sir David Manning commented to Mr Powell and Mr Rycroft: “Looks OK”.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 8 September 2002, ‘Your Visit to Camp David on 7 September: Conversation with President Bush’.

²⁵³ Minute Rycroft to Manning, 9 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Contribution’.

²⁵⁴ [Letter Williams to Manning, 12 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Contingency Actions’](#).

²⁵⁵ Manuscript comment Manning on Letter Williams to Manning, 12 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Contingency Actions’.

632. There is no evidence which explains how President Bush was advised that the UK would play a leading role in the North in the event of an invasion. The most likely routes would have been the briefings from Gen Franks on 5 August or the briefing of the National Security Council before Mr Blair's arrival at Camp David on 7 September.

633. The Inquiry can only conclude that the US understanding was based on military discussions over the summer; and that it would have reinforced the messages that had been reported in the late spring of 2002.

JIC Assessment, 9 September 2002

634. The JIC issued an Assessment of Iraq's possession of chemical and biological weapons and possible scenarios for their use on 9 September.

635. Following Mr Blair's meeting on 23 July, Sir David Manning asked Mr Scarlett for further advice on Saddam Hussein's military capabilities and intentions, in particular in relation to the possible use of chemical and biological agents.²⁵⁶

636. The JIC Assessment was issued on 9 September.²⁵⁷ The Key Judgements stated:

- “• Iraq has a chemical and biological weapons capability and Saddam is prepared to use it.
- Faced with the likelihood of military defeat and being removed from power, Saddam is unlikely to be deterred from using chemical and biological weapons by any diplomatic or military means.
- The use of chemical and biological weapons prior to any military attack would boost support for US-led action and is unlikely.
- Saddam is prepared to order missile strikes against Israel, with chemical or biological warheads, in order to widen the war once hostilities begin.
- Saddam could order the use of CBW weapons in order to deny space and territory to Coalition forces, or to cause casualties, slow any advance, and sap US morale.
- If not previously employed, Saddam will order the indiscriminate use of whatever CBW weapons remain available late in a ground campaign or as a final act of vengeance. But such an order would depend on the availability of delivery means and the willingness of commanders to obey.”

637. The Assessment and the basis for its judgements are addressed in Section 4.2.

²⁵⁶ [Minute Manning to Blair, 24 July 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

²⁵⁷ [JIC Assessment, 9 September 2002, 'Iraqi Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons – Possible Scenarios'](#).

Decisions to offer ground forces to the US for planning purposes

MOD planning for a UK land contribution, September 2002

638. Reflecting the discussion with Mr Blair on 8 September, Mr Hoon told Secretary Rumsfeld on 11 September that the UK would not want to offer more than it could deliver and was therefore expecting to offer maritime and air assets for any military campaign.

639. MOD planning for a land contribution and discussions with the US continued.

640. Lt Gen Reith continued to report a military perception that the US wanted a UK-led force in the North.

641. In preparation for Mr Hoon's meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld on 11 September, Dr Cholerton provided a list of questions seeking clarification on a number of issues.²⁵⁸ He identified Turkey's attitude and the US perspective on the northern option as "the key points" on which "more clarity" was needed from the US.

642. In a meeting with Mr Hoon on 11 September, Secretary Rumsfeld raised the firefighters' strike.²⁵⁹ Mr Hoon explained that, partly for this reason but also because "movement of UK ground force assets could become visible prematurely in relation to the diplomatic/UN process", the UK would not want to offer more than it could deliver and was therefore expecting to offer maritime and air assets for any military campaign.

643. On 12 September, Lt Gen Reith submitted further advice to Lt Gen Pigott on "the UK component options available to contribute to US action in decisive operations against Iraq".²⁶⁰

644. Lt Gen Reith provided a detailed analysis of the individual components which could contribute to the operation and the assumptions surrounding them. He understood that the Chiefs of Staff were now content with the UK Special Forces, air and maritime contributions. He focused on the land component, where a decision was "now required". A number of factors were considered, of which "US requirements" were judged to be the "most important".

645. Lt Gen Reith identified a spectrum of options from the deployment of a Royal Marine Commando Group with the Amphibious Response Group for operations in the

²⁵⁸ Minute Cholerton to APS/SofS [MOD], 9 September 2002, 'Iraq – Defence Secretary's Meeting with Rumsfeld'.

²⁵⁹ Letter Williams to Manning, 13 September 2002, 'Iraq: Meeting with Donald Rumsfeld: 11 September 2002'.

²⁶⁰ Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 12 September 2002, 'Potential UK Contribution to US Operations Against Iraq'.

Gulf to a divisional headquarters with a square armoured brigade and 16 Air Assault Brigade for operations in northern Iraq. The emphasis was on options to be used in the North, although Lt Gen Reith stated:

“... a contribution could still be offered (albeit under significant constraints) for use ... in the South, if movement through Tu[rkey] became politically unacceptable.”

646. Lt Gen Reith recommended an option to deploy a UK divisional HQ and an armoured brigade comprising three battalions or regiments (a “triangular” brigade) alongside a US brigade:

“This option best balances the key requirements of providing a worthwhile military contribution, with appropriate political profile, although above the target figure of 20,000.”

647. Adm Boyce asked in a manuscript comment:

“How is this conclusion reached? There is no analysis of the pluses and minuses of the options and the extent to which they meet essential criteria.”²⁶¹

648. Lt Gen Reith also wrote: “It is perceived that CENTCOM would prefer the land operation in the North to be commanded at the tactical level by the UK.”²⁶²

649. Adm Boyce questioned in a manuscript comment: “Has he asked for this or is it an assumption?”²⁶³

650. Lt Gen Reith submitted revised advice on 13 September, which recommended the deployment of a square brigade comprising two armoured regiments and two armoured infantry battalions.²⁶⁴ He also stated that Gen Frank’s “strong preference” was for the UK “to provide the tactical lead for the North”.

651. There was no explanation in the paper for the revised recommendation.

652. Knowledge of the consideration of military options continued to be kept to a very tight group of people and the sensitivities about potential leaks remained.

653. Mr Drummond alerted Sir David Manning on 16 September to a prospective request from the MOD on military options. He had advised that the “PM would want first sight”; and that No.10 would advise on circulation.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Manuscript comment Boyce on Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 12 September 2002, ‘Potential UK Contribution to US Operations Against Iraq’.

²⁶² Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 12 September 2002, ‘Potential UK Contribution to US Operations Against Iraq’.

²⁶³ Manuscript comment Boyce on Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 12 September 2002, ‘Potential UK Contribution to US Operations Against Iraq’.

²⁶⁴ Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 13 September 2002, ‘Potential UK Contribution to US Operations Against Iraq’.

²⁶⁵ Minute Drummond to Manning, 16 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Pigott Meeting’.

654. In response to the minute which Mr Drummond had classified “Confidential”, Sir David Manning commented: “Please ensure all minuting is Secret and Personal – and keep circulation to [the] barest minimum.”²⁶⁶

655. Although significant concerns were identified about the viability of an operation through Turkey, the northern option remained the preference of the Chiefs of Staff.

656. Military planners also advised that deployment of anything above a small scale land force would commit the UK to three medium scale operations.

657. In the event of the deployment of UK land forces, there was a judgement to be made on whether the UK military should be engaged in the conflict or post-conflict phase. Both would be difficult to sustain.

658. Adm Boyce noted that it was “inconceivable” that the UK military would not contribute “in some manner” to post-conflict tasks.

659. A commentary on the military options, seeking judgements and decisions from the Chiefs of Staff to inform Ministerial decisions, was prepared by the SPG on 19 September.²⁶⁷

660. The SPG reported that US military planners and the Joint Staff in Washington had made it clear that the UN process would “not derail their current planning timelines” although it was clear that “political developments may yet overtake the military’s contingency work”.

661. The SPG identified continuing uncertainties in the potential shape and timing of a campaign and the Chiefs of Staff view was that it was not “yet” a winning concept:

- The northern option was not yet “firmly established as a viable axis” because of uncertainties about Turkey and the logistic feasibility of the operation. The Chiefs of Staff would “wish to assess whether there is yet sufficient operational emphasis being placed upon it for the UK to commit forces”.
- The [US] timelines determining UK “deadlines” were based on offering President Bush “the earliest opportunity for action, as opposed to ‘the last safe moment’ for a decision”.
- There was no clear articulation of post-conflict scenarios and their demands.
- The UN track might “delay rather than advance decisions on the legality of any potential action”.

²⁶⁶ Manuscript comment Manning on Minute Drummond to Manning, 16 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Pigott Meeting’.

²⁶⁷ [Paper SPG, 19 September 2002, ‘Iraq Package Options – Military Strategy Commentary’.](#)

662. A Royal Marine Commando Group deployed with the Amphibious Response Group offered “a high readiness, flexible **small scale land contribution**” which presented “an opportunity for ‘boots on the ground’ if the UK decision [was] not to commit beyond Package 2”.

663. The SPG identified the land element of Package 3 as on “the critical path for both UK and US planning”. It was clear from contacts with the US that there was:

“... an expectation of UK ground force commitment, and although there is a genuine willingness to facilitate our being there, this is not without limit.”

664. The section headed “Conflict vs Post-conflict” asked whether, if UK forces were to participate in the military campaign, “our effort should be against the need to meet US short-term planning for combat, or the equally demanding and pressing need for preparations for the post-conflict phase”. It continued:

“Conflict phase. Commitment to this phase may carry with it inherent risks with regard to post-conflict engagement with little choice on role, timing, location, or future extraction. An alternative approach that offers a UK lead, or UK participation in the post-conflict phase may be equally attractive to the US as our commitment to a land role in the conflict phase.

“Post-Conflict. Given the wide range of possible post-conflict scenarios these forces would have to be combat capable forces at high readiness, and in all probability with key elements forward deployed during the conflict phase. The length and scale of our post-conflict commitment will determine our ability to fulfil a range of other operations, and most notable our Balkan commitment. An enduring medium scale commitment in Iraq would preclude continued medium scale engagement in the Balkans.

“Strategic Balance. We are currently committed to two medium scale land operations (FRESCO and the Balkans), and a land commitment to Iraq at anything above small scale will commit us to **three medium scale** land operations. Although with a full Package 3 commitment to the conflict phase we retain the SLE [Spearhead Land Element], our ability to deploy and sustain even a small scale force package has yet to be determined, and anything above this Scale of Effort will be impossible ... Recovery and recuperation will also be key to our judgements as to which phase to commit to. Hard and fast judgements are not possible, however, commitment of Package 3 will have an effect for at least two years.”

665. The SPG concluded:

“Assuming that UK land participation is a requirement, there is a judgement to be made on whether we should be engaged in the conflict or post-conflict phases. Both would be difficult to sustain.”

666. The SPG recorded that the Chiefs of Staff had:

“... already voiced clear reservations over the integration of substantial UK land forces in the southern theatre. Therefore, if we are to be engaged in combat operations the US and UK military preference is that we should be in northern Iraq.”

667. The SPG identified a number of concerns, including:

- The “evident” complexities of the command relationship between CENTCOM and EUCOM, “against the need to deliver a compliant Turkey”.
- The inability to conduct a detailed reconnaissance created a “significant risk”.
- Northern Iraq was “a difficult area politically”. Turkey still remembered the UK’s role in creating an Iraq which included Mosul “and its associated oilfields”. The Kurds remembered the UK’s assistance in Op HAVEN [in 1991], but were “equally quick to remember that it was the RAF that effectively suppressed a number of Kurdish revolts”. There was a “real danger that post conflict the UK, simply through our force location, would retain the ‘lead’ in the North, thereby splitting our lines of communication [with other forces in the Gulf] ... and placing us in an intractable position for some time”.

668. The SPG confirmed that there was “broad agreement between MOD and PJHQ staffs” on the option recommended by PJHQ.

669. Also on 19 September, the Chiefs of Staff discussed a draft submission to Mr Hoon circulated by Lt Gen Pigott.²⁶⁸

670. The minutes of the COS discussion recorded that “a simultaneous advance of forces in the southern and northern axes [would be] key to overwhelming the Iraqi decision making process”; and that Gen Franks “strongly favoured a UK-led force in the North” as an alternative to deploying a US infantry division.

671. A “Package 4” was being developed “to address the inevitable post-conflict tasks”. Adm Boyce commented that it was “inconceivable that the UK would not contribute in some manner, to those tasks”.

672. Lt Gen Reith strongly recommended offering a limited version of Option 3: a land option of a divisional headquarters and a square armoured brigade (with four battalions or regiments) operating alongside a US formation.

673. Gen Walker expressed some misgivings. Although the force package was about right, he “did not believe the plan as currently envisaged, to be a viable concept”. He was concerned about the semi-autonomous nature of the UK forces and integration with the US as envisaged, the lack of an operational reserve, assumptions on Iraq combat capability, and the reliance on air power.

²⁶⁸ Minutes, 19 September 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

674. Lt Gen Reith stated that it would be “easier, militarily, to ratchet down than ratchet up any forces offered”, but the “COS acknowledged that it might be unattractive politically,²⁶⁹ to deliver less than that which had initially been offered”.

675. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that the package recommended by Lt Gen Reith was a viable option, subject to resolving the constraints which had been identified; and that an armoured brigade represented the smallest force that could act autonomously.

676. Lt Gen Reith told the Inquiry:

“I got a briefing on the northern option from my own staff on the 18 September, having done operational analysis on it, and it was clear that we couldn’t do it on our own, even with a full division.”²⁷⁰

677. When Mr Hoon discussed the options with his most senior advisers later that day, Adm Boyce told him that there was “clearer [US] understanding of the importance of operations in northern Iraq to ‘fix’ Iraqi forces”.²⁷¹ Gen Franks had indicated that it would be “helpful if the UK could provide in the North an armoured brigade and a 2-star tactical lead” which would command US forces.

678. Adm Boyce added that the Chiefs of Staff had continuing doubts about whether the US had a winning concept.

679. When Package 3 was discussed, Mr Hoon requested clarification of the length of time necessary to deploy a land contribution.

680. Adm Boyce said that early decisions would be needed on UORs, reserves and units which were allocated to Op FRESCO. Package 3 would also require a “£1bn premium”, which “could exhaust the Reserve”.

681. Mr Hoon agreed that, subject to No.10’s agreement, Lt Gen Reith would be able to indicate to CENTCOM, for planning purposes and with the caveat that no final political decision had been taken, that two separate UK contributions could potentially be available:

- Package 2, which offered a “significant and useful contribution to any US led action”; and
- Package 3 as a possible add-on, with guidance that the US should also plan without it.

682. Mr Hoon also asked for a detailed breakdown of the estimated costs of UORs for a meeting with Mr Brown on 23 September.

²⁶⁹ The Inquiry considers this to be a reference to the potential impact on US/UK relations, not a comment on the views of politicians.

²⁷⁰ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 23

²⁷¹ [Minute Watkins to PSO/CDS, 19 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Potential UK Contribution to any US-led Action’.](#)

683. On 20 September, the MOD sought Mr Blair’s agreement to offer Package 3 as a “possible add-on” to CENTCOM “for planning purposes”.

684. On 20 September, Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning, advising that two issues needed quickly to be addressed:

- what potential UK force contribution should be presented to a US planning conference the following week; and
- whether to replace army units already allocated to Op FRESCO so that they would be available if a land force contribution was approved.²⁷²

685. The MOD proposed that the air and maritime package with Special Forces (Package 2), should be presented as a potential UK contribution at the CENTCOM planning conference; and that further work was under way on whether the UK might also offer a Commando Group of around 1,700 Royal Marines for early operations in southern Iraq. It would need to be established whether that could be sustained in parallel with ground operations in the North.

686. The MOD had also considered the provision of a divisional headquarters together with an armoured brigade to operate with the US (Package 3). That would be “more complicated”, but the Chiefs of Staff regarded that as the “minimum sensible” ground contribution to operations in the North. It would entail a commitment of around 28,000 service personnel in addition to the 13,000 in Package 2, and the call-out of around 6,000 Reservists – a decision that would need to be taken and announced in mid-October.

687. Mr Watkins told Sir David that Mr Hoon felt it would be “premature” to offer a ground contribution on the same basis as Package 2:

“... we should indicate to CENTCOM that we are still considering this option and that they should model two plans in parallel, one including the UK land force contribution and one without it.”

688. Mr Watkins also wrote that a “publicly visible measure” to remove units from Op FRESCO would be needed to keep the option of a ground force open. Mr Hoon recommended that Mr Blair’s statement to the House of Commons, which had been recalled to debate Iraq on 24 September (see Section 3.5), would provide the opportunity to make clear “as part of the Government’s policy that the will of [the] United Nations must ultimately be backed up by the threat of force”, and that the Ministry of Defence would be taking some prudent contingency measures to avoid foreclosing military options.

689. Some public acknowledgement that MOD was involved in contingency work would also allow “discreet discussions” to begin with industry. That was “increasingly

²⁷² [Letter Watkins to Manning, 20 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Potential UK Contribution to Any Military Action’.](#)

urgent” and if it was not acknowledged publicly, there was “a clear risk of the information leaking, leading to accusations that we have been less than open with Parliament”.

690. The letter made no reference to a possible UK contribution to post-conflict military operations.

691. Copies of Mr Watkins’ letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw, Mr Brown and Sir Andrew Turnbull, and to Mr Bowen.

692. Mr Blair and Sir David Manning had reservations about the viability and costs of the MOD proposal.

693. Sir David Manning advised Mr Blair:

“The possibility that the military could make a land contribution in the North is a surprise. Until recently we were being told that covering the firemen’s strike (Operation FRESCO) would make this impossible. Now, suddenly it isn’t. The (militarily mouth-watering) prospect of being given tactical leadership of the campaign in the North ... may have something to do with this volte face.”²⁷³

694. Sir David advised Mr Blair to “register extreme caution” and to address a number of questions; in particular:

- How this was suddenly possible?
- What confidence there was that the Turkish angle would be sorted out?
- Whether the UK could sustain the numbers and, if so, for how long?

695. Sir David advised that Mr Blair should:

- give the MOD the “go ahead” provided the conditions they had identified were met, including that CENTCOM should “produce a parallel plan without a UK contribution” which “may well not be forthcoming”; and
- agree to the replacement of key units allocated to OP FRESCO.

696. Mr Blair wrote:

“As discussed. Be careful of this Land idea ...”²⁷⁴

697. In a meeting with Mr Hoon on 23 September, Mr Blair agreed limited contingency preparations for a land option, but asked for publicity to be minimised.

698. Following the discussion, the MOD informed the US that the UK was still considering a land option.

²⁷³ [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 22 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Possible UK Military Contribution’.](#)

²⁷⁴ Manuscript comment Blair on [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 22 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Possible UK Military Contribution’.](#)

699. That was not the No.10 understanding of what had been agreed.

700. In the context of the many issues which were being addressed on 23 September 2002,²⁷⁵ the Inquiry has seen no evidence to indicate that the difference of view about what Mr Blair and Mr Hoon had agreed was anything other than a genuine misunderstanding.

701. Mr Blair discussed the issues with Mr Hoon on 23 September.²⁷⁶

702. Following that meeting, Mr Watkins informed officials in the MOD that:

“The Prime Minister is content for us to proceed broadly as set out in my letter of 20 September. The Prime Minister remains very cautious about the viability of Package 3, not least because of its implications for our ability to meet other contingencies and the significant cost premium entailed. In the light of this, Mr Hoon believes that it is all the more necessary heavily to caveat this possibility in contacts with the US. We should emphasise that it is at the limits of what we could offer and that – because of other potential demands on our Armed Forces including FRESCO – we cannot be sure that we could deliver it. The US must therefore examine carefully how they would plan the campaign in the absence of such a contribution.”

703. The packages that might be offered to the US were to be conveyed in terms cleared with Mr Hoon’s Private Office.

704. Mr Blair had also confirmed that he was content to reallocate units from Op FRESCO and agreed that his statement on 24 September would contain a reference to the need for preparedness.

705. Mr Watkins made no reference to any discussion of post-conflict issues.

706. Sir David Manning’s record of the meeting on 23 September, issued on 25 September, stated that Mr Blair had agreed that “we should present Package 2 as a potential contribution at the CENTCOM Planning Conference” and: “We should not be shy about presenting this as a significant and valuable offer.”²⁷⁷

707. Sir David also recorded that Mr Blair had agreed that units for Op FRESCO should be replaced to maintain the possibility of a land force contribution, with minimum publicity. Mr Blair did not, however, want “any suggestion” that the UK might offer “a major land contribution to a Force in northern Iraq. We should not surface this possibility at the [US] Planning conference.”

²⁷⁵ Preparations for publication of the WMD dossier and Statement/debates in Parliament on 24 September 2002.

²⁷⁶ [Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 23 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Meeting with the Prime Minister: 23 September’.](#)

²⁷⁷ [Letter Manning to Watkins, 25 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Potential UK Contribution to Any Military Action’.](#)

708. By the time Sir David Manning had produced his record of the discussion between Mr Blair and Mr Hoon, the MOD had already acted.

709. Mr Hoon's Office replied to No.10 immediately stating:

“Separately and heavily caveated, we have indicated to CENTCOM that we are still considering a Land option ... we agreed that the UK involvement ... should continue on this basis. Defence staffs will continue actively to ensure that US expectations remain realistic.”²⁷⁸

710. Sir David Manning commented to Mr Powell: “Just about OK” and referred to being “bounced” by the MOD.²⁷⁹

CABINET, 23 SEPTEMBER 2002

711. Neither the content nor the terms of the UK's offer to the US were considered by Ministers collectively.

712. On 23 September, Cabinet was told that there would be a future discussion of military options.

713. On 23 September, Cabinet was informed that the question of military action would arise “only if inspections were thwarted again”.²⁸⁰

714. Cabinet was not given any information about the options under consideration. Mr Blair concluded: “If military action was required, the job could be done. There would be a discussion about the military options.”

715. Ms Clare Short, the International Development Secretary from 1997 to 2003, told the Inquiry that Mr Blair had told her in September 2002 that he hadn't had a presentation on the military options; in her view that was “one of the many misleading things he said”.²⁸¹

716. As the evidence in this Section shows, Mr Blair had been offered advice on the nature of the options for a UK contribution to US-led military action from April onwards, but in September the MOD's thinking on the role it might be able to play was still evolving. The debate at that stage was about the assumptions the US should make in its planning.

²⁷⁸ [Letter Williams to Manning, 25 September 2002, 'Iraq: Potential UK Contribution to Any Military Action'](#).

²⁷⁹ Manuscript comment Manning to Powell on [Letter Williams to Manning, 25 September 2002, 'Iraq: Potential UK Contribution to Any Military Action'](#).

²⁸⁰ [Cabinet Conclusions, 23 September 2002.](#)

²⁸¹ Public hearing, 2 February 2010, page 15.

Parliamentary debates, 24 September 2002

The dossier, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction. The Assessment of the British Government*, was published on 24 September 2002.²⁸²

Both Houses of Parliament were recalled from recess on 24 September 2002 to debate the case for effective action in respect of the threat posed by Iraq.

Mr Blair's statement to Parliament on the publication of the dossier on 24 September and the subsequent questions and answers lasted for 90 minutes.²⁸³

During his statement, which focused on the history of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme, its breach of United Nations resolutions and its attempts to rebuild that illegal programme, Mr Blair stated that "there must be genuine preparedness and planning to take [military] action" if diplomacy failed.²⁸⁴

Mr Blair's statement was followed in the House of Commons by a nine-hour debate.

There was also a debate in the House of Lords.

Mr Blair's statement and the debates in both Houses of Parliament are described in Section 3.5.

The content of the dossier and Mr Blair's statement are addressed in Section 4.2.

CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING, 25 SEPTEMBER 2002

717. When the Chiefs of Staff discussed Iraq planning on 25 September, Adm Boyce emphasised that:

"... expectation management with respect to UK caveats had to be taut. Package 2 ... was a formidable contribution in its own right and Package 3, given its importance to the US, was not just a 'nice to have'."²⁸⁵

718. The Chiefs of Staff also discussed the post-conflict phase, "Phase IV". It was recognised that this Phase "would not have a clear-cut start" and that we should "guard against any accusation that the "US does the war-fighting while the UK does the peacekeeping". Not being involved in Package 3 at all "would be difficult to manage". The Chiefs commissioned the SPG to "scope the issues within Phase 4" (see Section 6.4).

719. Mr Ehrman reported that Adm Boyce had:

- directed that the Chiefs of Staff should meet every Wednesday to discuss Iraq; and
- said that it should be made clear to the US that they must deliver Turkey.²⁸⁶

²⁸² *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction. The Assessment of the British Government*, 24 September 2002.

²⁸³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 24 September 2002, columns 1-23.

²⁸⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 24 September 2002, column 6.

²⁸⁵ Minutes, 25 September 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²⁸⁶ Minute Ehrman to Chaplin, 26 September 2002, 'Iraq: Military Planning'.

720. On 26 September, Lt Gen Pigott wrote to Lt Gen Reith with guidance to “summarise the current baseline on ... options and to flag up the key issues”, on which addressees and their staff could draw on in discussion with US contacts.²⁸⁷

721. Lt Gen Pigott cautioned that aftermath and “Home Base” requirements were still to be addressed and “could impact on the final shape” of the force packages he was describing.

722. Lt Gen Pigott identified that there was:

“... much work to be done if there is to be any prospect of a significant UK Land option from the North within current time windows ... Until we have a much better feel for all the factors ... we should be very cautious of giving US Commanders the impression that we can deliver something which events, most of them outside our control, simply preclude.”

723. Lt Gen Pigott concluded:

“Package 3 must at the moment have considerable caveats, and every effort must be made to dampen expectations that it can be delivered.”

724. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry:

“It was indeed decided that we would not expose the full large-scale option to the US at that point because of concerns about the UN process, because ... lack of clarity ... persisted, as to whether the Turks would actually provide the necessary facilities for the northern option which was the one mainly under consideration.”²⁸⁸

725. Lord Boyce initially told the Inquiry:

“I think that Package 2 would have disappeared as being a favoured option in about September, because the large-scale option was obviously more difficult to prepare, so our focus was on that.”²⁸⁹

726. Asked whether he was aware of the size of the UK contribution that was on the table in September 2002, Lord Boyce subsequently told the Inquiry:

“Package 2 was on the table then. No authorisation had been given by the Prime Minister or Defence Secretary to say that we could offer anything more than that. In fact, we were explicitly not saying that we were prepared to make available any land commitment, let alone a division commitment.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Minute DCDS(C) to CJO, 26 September 2002, ‘Iraq – Potential Scale of UK Force Contribution for Use in UK/US Contingency Planning’.

²⁸⁸ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 36.

²⁸⁹ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 35.

²⁹⁰ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 22-23.

SPG PAPER, 30 SEPTEMBER 2002

727. The SPG advised on 30 September that:

- **A coercive strategy, “Force on Mind”, was “the key instrument of military power” during a conflict prevention phase.**
- **Overt preparations for the use of military force were strategic elements of that strategy.**
- **The northern option was seen as strategically fundamental by the UK but was not seen as operationally fundamental by CENTCOM.**
- **More clarification was needed of the likely tasks for UK land forces and planning was still constrained by uncertainties about Turkey.**
- **The UN route and the timetable for inspections might not be compatible with the US timetable for the pursuit of regime change, which might pose a potential fault line between the US and UK.**

728. A further version of the SPG paper ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’ was produced on 30 September.²⁹¹

729. The paper stated that Ministerial statements highlighted a twin track approach to achieving the UK’s “End State” for Iraq:

- Achieving a “significant change” in the “behaviour and posture” of the current regime, “with respect to WMD, and other UNSCRs, **to prevent conflict**”.
- If the regime failed “to change its behaviour voluntarily”, then it would “be **compelled to change its posture** through the application of force”. If that resulted in regime change it would be “an unsought, but added benefit”.

730. That was underpinned by a revised section on the principles for the campaign, which stated that the UK was “executing a strategic **Force on Mind** campaign” in which influence was “targeted against decision makers and their will to fight”. During a conflict prevention phase, that was “the key instrument of military power”:

- The crisis had reached the point where “constant coercive pressure” was “needed to keep up forward momentum”.
- “Overt Force Generation and Force Preparation activities” were “strategic elements” in applying pressure.
- A “clear and unified declaration of intent” from “a wide and solid coalition” would deliver the most powerful message to Saddam Hussein.

²⁹¹ [Paper \[SPG\], 30 September 2002, ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’.](#)

731. Other additions to the previous draft included:

- The section on potential UK strategic objectives in the 4 September draft was replaced by draft campaign objectives produced by the Cabinet Office, which are addressed in Section 6.4.
- As well as assisting the US to secure Iraq's oil infrastructure and production facilities, the section on "Potential UK Military Strategic Objectives" identified three additional tasks in the event of conflict:
 - ensuring that Israel's security was not threatened by Iraqi action;
 - ensuring Iraqi sovereignty post-conflict; and
 - minimising damage to Iraqi infrastructure.
- Draft objectives for a northern option, which were being considered by the Pentagon, were set out for the first time.
- The elements of an information campaign.
- A statement that the northern option was "only viable if Turkey can be delivered". There was "a lack of clarity in the US" about whether that was "achievable within current planning timelines". The need for "accurate assessments of likely success in delivering key states for the coalition (especially Turkey)" was one of the "conditions" for a "winning concept". A northern option was seen by the UK as strategically "fundamental" but was not seen as "operationally" fundamental by CENTCOM.
- A much expanded section on post-conflict planning.
- The identification of a possible scenario in which Saddam attempted "to distract coalition forces by a deliberate and sustained attack in the North, using all methods available to him (including CBW)".
- An updated analysis of the US plan and whether it constituted a winning concept, including that a division-size force would be needed for the North; but the tasks still required "**more clarification**". EUCOM planning was "**much further behind**" than CENTCOM planning for the South and was "**still constrained**" by the "**inability to properly engage with Turkey**".
- The UN route and the timetable for UN inspections might "**not be compatible**" with the US end state, which was focused primarily on regime change. That was "**a potential fault line in the UK/US relationship**". The UK might face a "**choice of following the US or the UN route**".

Concerns about Turkey

The JIC Assessment, 'Iraq: Regional Attitudes', issued on 19 April 2002, addressed regional attitudes to military action and how much support or opposition they might offer (see Section 3.3).²⁹² It stated that “**Turkey**, as a NATO ally, would probably provide basing if asked, despite its reservations, [...]”

The FCO recognised that there could be difficulties with Turkey. In an internal minute of 30 July 2002, Mr Ricketts wrote:

“Turkey is a special case. Would have to give active support for military operation, even if only the use of the airfields. Quite possibly a much more direct role. But the timing is exceptionally difficult: no Government until after 3 November. The Cyprus talks quite likely to fail, leading to a major train wreck with the EU at Copenhagen [EU Summit in December 2002]. The Turks are bound to use their strategic importance on Iraq as leverage. The UK cannot deliver what the Turks will want from the EU ... The US ... will have to work the Turkey case hard: it cannot be left to the Brits.”²⁹³

At the request of the MOD, the JIC reconsidered the judgements in its 19 April Assessment on 5 August 2002.²⁹⁴ That is addressed in Section 3.4.

In relation to Turkey, the JIC judged:

“Turkey would be willing to provide basing for a US-led attack on Iraq.”

The Assessment stated:

“The Turkish Government has been reluctant to see an attack on Iraq. [...] The exact extent of this Turkish help would have to be negotiated. Turkey would demand to be kept fully informed of US planning [...]”

The FCO and Mr Peter Westmacott, British Ambassador to Turkey, exchanged views on whether or not the UK should engage in direct talks with Turkey.²⁹⁵

Mr Bowen wrote to Sir David Manning:

“We are not committed to the northern option and our early participation in talks with the Turks may give the wrong impression.”²⁹⁶

Sir David replied that he strongly agreed.²⁹⁷

A separate manuscript comment recorded that Sir David had asked the MOD to consult him about plans for consulting Turkey.²⁹⁸

²⁹² [JIC Assessment, 19 April 2002, 'Iraq: Regional Attitudes'](#).

²⁹³ [Minute Ricketts to Chaplin, 30 July 2002, 'Iraq'](#).

²⁹⁴ JIC Assessment, 5 August 2002, 'Iraq: Regional Attitudes and Impact of Military Action'.

²⁹⁵ Letter Oakden to Westmacott, 30 September 2002, 'Iraq/Turkey'; Letter Westmacott to Oakden, 1 October 2002, 'Iraq/Turkey'.

²⁹⁶ Manuscript comment Bowen to Manning, 1 October 2002, on Letter Westmacott to Oakden, 1 October 2002, 'Iraq/Turkey'.

²⁹⁷ Manuscript comment Manning to Bowen, 1 October 2002, on Letter Westmacott to Oakden, 1 October 2002, 'Iraq/Turkey'.

²⁹⁸ Manuscript comment Bowen on Letter Oakden to Westmacott, 30 September 2002, 'Iraq/Turkey'.

The MOD request to offer ground forces

732. The offer of Package 2 was not enough to address growing MOD concerns that the caveats on Package 3 were leading the US to discount the contribution in its planning, closing off the option for UK ground forces to participate in the combat phase.

733. Concerns were expressed at the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 2 October about the risk of irreparable damage to US/UK relations as a result of continuing uncertainty about a UK land contribution.

734. Adm Boyce was clear that should not be allowed to happen.

735. The UK's involvement post-conflict might be more onerous than war-fighting.

736. Elements of the "Force on Mind" strategy were still being discussed.

737. On 30 September, Lt Gen Reith provided an "illustrative critical decision and event matrix on timings", to provide a critical path for deploying Packages 2 and 3.²⁹⁹ Timings within the matrix were "illustrative only". That included:

- decisions in the week beginning 7 October to begin the UOR process for priority equipments, nomination of a National Contingent Commander (NCC), and a decision on UK participation in Exercise Internal Look;³⁰⁰
- beginning overt preparations, including call-up of Reserves, by the end of October; and
- deploying the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and beginning pre-deployment training for the land component by the end of November.

738. Lt Gen Reith advised that the timelines assumed a US Presidential decision, on whether to take military action, on 6 January 2003. He also stated that it was anticipated that UN inspectors would begin work in mid-December, and were required to submit an initial report two months later. That "could offer the US a trigger to begin operations" which "could come forward" if a "strongly worded" resolution was adopted.

739. Lt Gen Reith separately sought endorsement of the command and control (C2) arrangements for potential operations in Iraq and the nomination of the individuals who would potentially fill key posts in time for them to participate in Exercise Internal Look.³⁰¹ That included the identification of the UK NCC, who would be collocated with CENTCOM's Forward HQ in Qatar.

²⁹⁹ Minute Reith to MA/DCDS(C), 30 September 2002, 'Planning for Iraq – Critical Decision and Event Matrix'.

³⁰⁰ Internal Look was a CENTCOM exercise planned for December 2002 which would be a mission rehearsal for possible future military operations against Iraq.

³⁰¹ Minute Reith to DCDS(C), 30 September 2002, 'Warrior Command and Control Architecture and Preparations for Exercise Internal Look'.

740. Lt Gen Reith also advised that, while it was “too early to judge” how Phase IV operations would be structured, it was “likely” that it would be “conducted under US leadership, with territorial sectors allocated to national or multi-national formations, perhaps akin to the Balkans model”. The UK could be asked “to provide formation[s] such as HQ ARRC, a UK Div HQ, or UKAMPHIBFOR [UK Amphibious Force] to oversee national or multi-national 1* formations”.

741. The Chiefs of Staff met on 2 October to discuss Iraq planning.³⁰²

742. Adm Boyce identified 15 October as a critical date for decisions, linked to whether or not to participate in Exercise Internal Look, when the “fudge option” would no longer be available. Some decisions might be delayed until the end of October, but that was an “absolute end stop”.

743. The Chiefs of Staff “required a sitrep” which set out the key issues:

- Turkey’s position and its implications;
- an appraisal of whether the northern option was essential and the UK’s participation;
- an explanation of the UK’s “coercive strategy and the Force on Mind gambit”;
- the “need to maintain the impetus on UNSCRs [UN Security Council resolutions] using optimal, visible measures balanced against the resulting adverse PR”;
- the “unpredictable consequences” that might arise from the “Saddam factor”, including his reaction to the spikes in US military activity and response options;
- Special Forces options; and
- the linkage between CENTCOM’s Exercise Internal Look and UK force planning.

744. The minutes recorded:

“Keeping options open would be difficult if relations with the US, including those outside military circles, were not to suffer irreparably as a consequence and CDS was adamant that this should be avoided if at all possible. There were also implications for Force on Mind if the UK was perceived to be weakening its stance. Phase IV considerations needed to be clearly understood, given that the inevitable UK involvement might result in an even greater burden than war-fighting per se.”

745. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that:

- Advice should be sent to Mr Hoon by 11 October.
- Lt Gen Reith should provide a paper “on land component options other than the northern option”.

³⁰² Minutes, 2 October 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

- Lt Gen Reith's recommendations on the command and control structures for potential operations in Iraq and preparations for Exercise Internal Look.
- There was a requirement to identify UK headquarters that might be required to contribute to "follow on" operations.

746. The first paper that the MOD had been able to find on land options other than the northern option was produced by Lt Gen Reith on 18 November. That is addressed later in this Section.

747. Mr Drummond reported to Sir David Manning that the discussion at the Chiefs of Staff meeting had addressed the:

"... importance of 'force on mind' as part of the campaign. The US was already using this tactic to good effect. We were not yet, because no decisions have been taken about the extent of our engagement in a possible military campaign. I said that the attention was focused on getting the right UNSCR, which would be the priority for the next few days."³⁰³

748. Mr Drummond also reported that there was:

"A strong wish to do the northern Option 3. The military judgement was that this should be tactically possible. Not to do it would damage our relations with the US and might leave us with the even more onerous task of peacekeeping (Option 4). I rehearsed the Prime Minister's view that Option 2 would be a very substantial contribution."

749. There was "acceptance" that the US should lead on "persuading" Turkey, but a wish that the UK would be able "to engage early" if the northern option was pursued. There had been a "suggestion" that the US might be planning a northern option without the UK; and that Turkey might find the presence of British troops "difficult to contemplate".

750. On the basis of their perception of the US timetable, the Chiefs of Staff agreed on 9 October to seek a non-public Ministerial decision in principle to offer Package 3 to the US, ideally by 21 October.

751. The Chiefs of Staff recognised that UK withdrawal after Exercise Internal Look would have unpalatable diplomatic consequences.

752. On 8 October, Brigadier William Rollo, a member of Maj Gen Fry's staff, reported to Adm Boyce's Private Office that the US was likely to deploy its 4th Infantry Division in the North, "irrespective of subsequent UK decisions".³⁰⁴ He also reported signs of Turkish nervousness.

³⁰³ Minute Drummond to Manning, 2 October 2002, 'Chiefs Meeting'.

³⁰⁴ Minute Rollo to PSO/CDS, 8 October 2002, 'Iraq Update on Warrior Planning'.

753. Draft advice to Mr Hoon was discussed at the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 9 October.³⁰⁵

754. The Chiefs of Staff were informed that there seemed to be “increasing flexibility” in Washington over the timing of military activity and that “the weather would not be a limiting factor”. That might affect UK decision-making.

755. Ministers “should be left in no doubt” that the northern option was a “fundamental part of US planning”. From the Army’s “perspective, Package 3 would guarantee long-term strategic influence with the US”.

756. Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire, Chief of the Air Staff, commented that Package 2 “did not entail a loss of influence”, and sought “visibility of fallback options in the South”.

757. In the context of predicted US discussions with Turkey on 21 October and reported indications from US military contacts that planning for one scenario whereby the US acted with the UK and another where it acted alone was “rapidly becoming untenable”, the Chiefs of Staff considered that:

“Ministers needed to be advised that a non-public ‘decision in principle’ to contribute was required, ideally by 21 October. In practice, because of the unpalatable diplomatic consequences of the UK’s withdrawal after the completion of Ex[ercise] Internal Look ... 15 Oct[ober] was also a key date.”

758. Lt Gen Reith “observed that a meaningful discussion about, or leverage on, US planning with Gen Franks would not be possible until a decision (in principle) regarding the UK contribution had been made.”

759. In addition, to maintain the UK’s options, a call-out of some Reserves by the end of October might be required. That and visible action on UORs “would contribute to the ‘force on mind’ campaign”. A successful coercion strategy was “key to the process”.

760. The minutes also record the view that “it would be important to guard against the perception in the US that the UK’s decision was a matter of legitimacy as opposed to a problem with mobilisation and public perception”.

761. The Chiefs of Staff directed that the advice to Mr Hoon should be amended to reflect the discussion, including:

- the timing of US discussions with Turkey;
- a “decision in principle” on Package 3; and
- more explanation of the timelines for decision taking.

³⁰⁵ Minutes, 9 October 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

762. Lt Gen Reith was also asked to provide a paper considering southern options for UK involvement if Turkey denied the northern option.

763. Reporting on the meeting to Sir David Manning, Mr Bowen wrote:

“The military are pressing for a decision on whether the UK should be offering, with caveats, Package 3 ... The argument for doing so is that the Americans now need to know in principle whether they should plan on our participation and that ... our acceptability as a major player in the North needs to be broached early with the Turks.

“The conclusion ... was that the MOD should seek a positive decision in principle ... [that] would expose to the US ... the time lag ... between a decision to deploy and deployment on the ground. The key decision to proceed in practice would be taken later ...”³⁰⁶

764. Mr Bowen added that the MOD had underlined:

“... that diplomacy ought to be backed by the threat of the use of force. In the game of coercion, military planning and preparation can have a beneficial effect in achieving a peaceful outcome. Moreover, in case the diplomatic track is brought to a halt, we should endeavour to reduce the gap between that point and the enforcement action we threaten. This would involve us being more up-beat about our contingency planning, without moving into war-mongering mode.”

765. Mr Bowen also wrote that:

- A decision in principle in favour of Package 3 would help the UK to influence US thinking to a greater extent than had been possible up to that point, “especially in relation to the aftermath of any military action”.
- In “making a decision in principle, without final commitment, we would stress that this reflected the UK political situation and was not specifically linked to authorisation through the UN”.
- While it could be argued that agreeing in principle to provide Package 3 was “no different” from the position on Packages 1 and 2, there was “no doubt” that a commitment to deploy land forces was “a different matter from deployments in the air or at sea”.

766. The MOD would be writing to No.10, and Mr Hoon was seeking a meeting with Mr Blair on 17 October to discuss the issue.

767. Sir David Manning commented to Mr Powell: “A foretaste of the line MOD will argue next week”.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Minute Bowen to Manning, 9 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Chiefs of Staff Meeting’.

³⁰⁷ Manuscript comment Manning to Powell, 10 October 2002, on Minute Bowen to Manning, 9 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Chiefs of Staff Meeting’.

768. Adm Boyce agreed with Gen Franks on 10 October that planning should proceed on the assumption that Package 3 would be available.

769. Adm Boyce spoke to Gen Franks on 10 October, stressing that Package 2 was “not an insignificant contribution”.³⁰⁸ The option of a UK operation in the South was being looked at if the northern option “fell away”.

770. Gen Franks observed that a deployment in the South would be “very sequential because of the narrow entry front”.

771. Adm Boyce told Gen Franks that the way ahead on Package 3 was “too close to call”. In relation to the difficulties that posed for US planning, Adm Boyce was told that it was easier for the US to plan on having Package 3 rather than not having it. They agreed that “interests would be best served” by planning on the assumption that Package 3 would be available.

772. The arguments in favour of offering Package 3 to the US and for immediate clarification of the UK’s position were set out in advice for Mr Hoon, agreed by Adm Boyce, on 11 October.

773. The need for a decision on the potential UK contribution to any US-led action against Iraq was set out in an urgent minute to Mr Hoon, from Mr David Johnson, Head of a newly created Iraq Secretariat in the MOD,³⁰⁹ on 11 October.³¹⁰

774. Mr Hoon was invited to note the increasing difficulty of maintaining the feasibility of Package 3 as long as its status was “unconfirmed”. He was asked to either rule it out or move it to the same status as Package 2.

775. Mr Johnson told Mr Hoon that the US needed to know where the UK stood very soon:

“In addition to pressure from US planners, it is in our interests to be clearer about our level of engagement, against the background of a series of key planning events from mid-October onwards.”

776. Mr Johnson advised that the UN position was “a key element of the continuing strategic uncertainty”. The UN inspections team was not expected to be fully operational before mid-February, but Iraqi non-co-operation “could occur at any point”, including a refusal to accept the UN resolution. The “most likely scenario” was that “potential triggers for military action” were “moving to the right” but, “both the need to be ready for the worst case and the strategy of conflict prevention” pointed in the same direction: “continuing and visible military preparations”. The main focus of US planning

³⁰⁸ Minute PSO/CDS to PS/SofS [MOD], 11 October 2002, ‘Record of a Discussion Between CDS and CINCCENT: 10 Oct 02’

³⁰⁹ Created on 30 September 2002.

³¹⁰ [Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 11 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Contingency Planning’.](#)

was “preparation to allow the commencement of offensive action in January (with contingency planning for an earlier start should that prove necessary)”.

777. Mr Johnson stated that the northern option was:

“... now seen as fundamental by US military planners, both in the Pentagon and in CENTCOM. There is an important role for the UK to play if we so wish. But if we decide not to play this role, the US will have to mobilise other US forces ... The caveats we have so far attached to Package 3 have thus resulted in the US having to work on two separate plans, compounding what is already a complex process ... CENTCOM ... need a clear statement of the UK commitment, within the overall understanding that all the packages are subject to a general political caveat.”

778. Mr Johnson advised that the need for the UK to clarify its position “will become increasingly acute”; and that:

“From a purely national perspective, the lead-times for putting Package 2 and Package 3 in place mean that some publicly visible decisions ... need to be taken well in advance of any deployment ... But we do need to be prepared to take these decisions.”

779. Gen Franks had told the UK that he would continue to run two plans “to preserve the possibility of incorporating Package 3”. But the longer the US worked on that basis “the more disgruntled they will be if we subsequently rule Package 3 out”.

780. Mr Hoon was given details of the decisions needed on both Packages 2 and 3 and their costs. Package 2, which included a Commando Group based in HMS Ocean, would cost some £464m-500m, excluding movement costs, ammunition and other consumables, and post-operational recuperation. On the same basis, Package 3 was estimated to cost an additional £508m.

781. Mr Johnson advised Mr Hoon that, in coming to a decision, Ministers would “need to take into account”:

- The impact of visible decisions. In addition to their role in ensuring the viability of a UK contribution: “Overt preparations on the scale of Package 3 may make an impact on Saddam’s perception of the seriousness of Coalition intent ... They might also encourage key figures in the Iraqi regime to reflect further on whether their best interests continue to be served by Saddam’s leadership ... these measures would reinforce the coercive ‘force on mind’ approach that has already borne fruit”.
- Cost. The costs of either package would be significant – Package 2 “could be not far short of £1bn”; Packages 2 and 3 together “could be between £1.5bn and £2bn”.
- US expectations. The MOD had been “careful to manage” US expectations but a decision to rule out Package 3 would “inevitably disappoint” the US,

with “knock-on effects”, which the UK would need to work hard to minimise. A decision to rule out Package 3 would need to be taken “very soon”. Adm Boyce recommended that, “unless a definite decision is taken to say ‘no’ now to Package 3, we must commit appropriate effort to [Exercise] Internal Look”.

- Burden-sharing. Package 2 could “justifiably” be presented as a “substantial contribution” but Package 3 would be “significantly more substantial” and “a vivid sign of a willingness to share the risks”. The shortcomings in the US tactical plan for the northern option “could be resolved if we were fully able to engage in planning and to flex resources to make it work”.
- Impact on readiness and capability for other tasks. Either package would impinge on the UK’s ability to respond to contingency operations, but Iraq was “the central issue” and there might be “a trade-off between committing to a military campaign and committing to an enduring follow-up operation”. A six-month war-fighting operation was “consistent with the Defence Planning Assumptions”.
- Aftermath management and the long term. US thinking on the “Day After” was “under-developed at present”, but there was “likely to be a need for a substantial, potentially long-enduring commitment of forces. Assuming that military action had taken place under a UN umbrella, it is likely that the US would look to Allies and the UK to play a major role in this, perhaps including providing a framework capability through the ARRC. We clearly have an interest in minimising the risk of a long lasting commitment ... in a part of the world that will not be retention-positive for our personnel: in terms of Defence Planning Assumptions, a ... medium scale PSO [peace support operation] in Iraq would only be manageable if our commitments elsewhere ... were capped at small scale. The more substantial our contribution to military action in the first place, the more plausibly we will be able to argue that we have done our bit.”
- Turkey. Turkey’s attitude to UK forces might “remain uncertain for some time”. It was “possible that some or all of Package 3 might be able to play a role in the South (although space constraints might [have an] impact on timing)”.
- Wider context. In the context of securing influence, the MOD had “been taking soundings over what gives us influence over US campaign planning”. It was “clear that sharing risk – political and military” was “crucial to having a voice in how a military operation” was planned, and it also provided “a locus to influence the wider overall campaign”. There was “thus a longer-term and strategic dimension to the issue of Package 3: not joining will reduce the influence we have over planning”, including a change in the US “perceptions of the UK as a partner longer-term fostering a tendency to see us as a specialist in Peace Support Operations rather than a war-fighting ally, with potential knock-on effects on other areas of close bilateral cooperation (intelligence, nuclear, missile defence, equipment and network-centric capability, etc)”. Contributing

Package 3 would mean that the UK Government would “be well placed to be more vigorous in pressing its views especially on better regional handling and ‘day after’ planning”. If those components were not properly planned, a military operation might “not offer a worthwhile return”. The UK “could and should offer a contribution on the understanding that these dimensions must be better addressed”.

- Army morale. “If the Army does not participate in the biggest combat operation for over a decade, and particularly if it is subsequently committed to a potentially enduring aftermath task, this may foster a perception that the Army is no longer regarded as a war-fighting force (particularly if they are deployed on Op FRESCO duties) and may have knock-on effects on recruitment and retention. It will clearly present a leadership challenge. This should not be a critical factor in reaching decisions ... but it is an issue which the Secretary of State will wish to have in mind.”

782. Mr Johnson advised Mr Hoon that:

“A firm commitment in principle to Package 3 should give us better involvement in US thinking, especially in Washington, about the most realistic timings for military action. We may find that we have more time ... but this is only likely to emerge progressively if at all. So if Ministers wished to place any caveats on the timescales or circumstances in which they are prepared to take the subsidiary decisions, we would have to make these clear to the US at the outset.”

783. There would be:

“... a case for presenting visible deployment decisions more assertively, arguing that they are an essential ingredient of a successful coercive strategy. This might not persuade journalists to present them as anything other than a ‘countdown to war’. But we would be less vulnerable to accusations of proceeding to war by stealth ...”

784. Mr Johnson stated that Adm Boyce had seen and approved the minute.

MR HOON’S MINUTE, 15 OCTOBER 2002

785. Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 15 October setting out the arguments for telling the US that it could plan on the assumption that the UK would make a land contribution.

786. At a meeting on 14 October, Mr Hoon asked for more work, in preparation for a meeting with Mr Blair on 17 October, on:

- a clear presentation of the key dates for visible activities, including the call-out of Reserves;
- the relationship between this activity and the likely diplomatic process;

- the impact of UK decisions on the Coalition; and
- a draft letter to Mr Alan Milburn, the Health Secretary, on the impact on the National Health Service.³¹¹

787. Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 15 October, seeking a decision that week on whether to tell the US they could assume a UK land contribution in addition to the air, maritime and Special Forces package already offered for planning purposes.³¹² In any event, there would be a need to be more robust in public about the need for essential military preparation.

788. In the context of the potential US timetable, and the need to maintain pressure on Saddam Hussein, Mr Hoon added:

“Indeed, Saddam has conceded ground so far only because diplomacy has been backed by the credible threat of force. We must maintain and reinforce this effect.”

789. The reasons for urgency included:

- a week-long CENTCOM conference, which started that day, during which the US military wanted to finalise their plans;
- discussions with Turkey; and
- the need to start visible preparations, including the call-up of Reserves.

790. Mr Hoon told Mr Blair that either Package 2 or Package 3 “would be a viable military contribution”, but in describing the Packages, Mr Hoon added:

- The number of visible “boots on the ground” in Package 2 would be “small”, which “could lead to some criticism here and elsewhere that UK support for the operation was half-hearted. The US may be disappointed that we are not offering more; the likely political reaction is more difficult to judge ...”
- Package 3 would provide a “major element of the northern line of attack”, which was judged “essential”. Without UK land forces, the US would have to redeploy its forces from the South. UK forces “could therefore help both to shorten the campaign and secure a more decisive outcome”.
- Package 3 “would have more impact” and “might provide a framework for integrating elements from other countries into a land force”.
- “There was “likely to be a substantial and continuing post-conflict stabilisation task in Iraq”. If the UK did not contribute Package 3, it might be “more vulnerable to a US request to provide a substantial force for this potentially open-ended task”.

³¹¹ Minute Williams to Head of Sec(Iraq), 14 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Contingency Planning’.

³¹² [Minute Hoon to Prime Minister, 15 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Military Options’ attaching Paper Ministry of Defence, 14 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Contingency Planning’.](#)

791. Mr Hoon wrote:

“A critical – and the least quantifiable – factor in weighing the two packages must be the impact on our strategic relationship with the US. In principle, both packages could strengthen that relationship: Package 2 alone should easily surpass any other conceivable non-US contribution, except perhaps that of Turkey.”

792. Mr Hoon stated that, while he had “sought to dampen” Secretary Rumsfeld’s expectations of any sizeable land contribution, there might be disappointment that the UK was “not prepared to put significant numbers of ground troops in harm’s way”. That might translate into a cooler view towards our privileged links.

793. Mr Hoon added:

“A further factor which cannot be entirely discounted is the negative reaction of many of our own military personnel – particularly in the Army – if we do not provide a land contribution. This could find its way into the media which would be quick to draw unfavourable comparisons between our contribution to this campaign and the Gulf Conflict in 1990/91.”

794. Mr Hoon stated that an offer of Package 3 “must be subject to conditions”:

- The UK would be dependent on US help to secure Turkey’s agreement to the UK deployment.
- The UK “must be fully involved in developing the final plan on which a final decision to deploy would be based”.
- The UK would want US help to reconstitute stocks, particularly of smart weapons.

795. A detailed MOD paper attached to Mr Hoon’s minute set out the factors Ministers would “need to take into account” in coming to a decision and the detailed composition of the force packages, which was largely based on Mr Johnson’s minute to Mr Hoon of 11 October.

796. Mr Hoon also sent his minute to Mr Brown, Mr Straw and Sir Andrew Turnbull.

797. The Chiefs of Staff meeting on 16 October was informed that a Ministerial decision on the likely UK contribution was expected the following day.³¹³

798. Lt Gen Pigott provided updates on US planning and UK strategy.

799. Adm Boyce commented that the UK position on support for US action “had to be clear”, and that a “distinction between supporting the US with basing in Diego Garcia and the deployment of personnel into any battlespace was academic”.

³¹³ Minutes, 16 October 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

NO.10'S QUESTIONS

800. Sir David Manning's private advice to Mr Blair expressed scepticism about a number of the arguments in Mr Hoon's minute.

801. Sir David Manning made a number of comments expressing scepticism about some of the arguments employed:

- In response to the argument that overt preparations would reinforce a strategy of coercion, Sir David wrote: "The opposite is also possible i.e. Saddam will conclude that we are interested only in [war]; he will therefore not co-operate."
- US expectations of UK ground troops had been "fuelled because MOD almost certainly aroused great expectations early on – without political authority".
- Sir David questioned whether the MOD had carefully managed US expectations, writing: "Have we? US only know about Package 3 because we talked it up."
- The UK would be "vulnerable" to a request for substantial forces post-conflict whether it provided Package 3 or not.
- Sir David did not "buy" the MOD argument that failure to offer Package 3 would change the US perception of the UK as a long-term partner.
- Adm Boyce was "worried" about managing the impact on army morale if it did not participate in combat operations.³¹⁴

802. In addition, Sir David provided detailed advice for the Prime Minister on 16 October, flagging concerns about whether the assumptions underpinning the package were robust, and about domestic handling issues.³¹⁵

803. Sir David summarised the key arguments in favour of Package 3 as:

- “• It would be a strong signal of our intent and would increase the pressure on Saddam;
- It is what the US is hoping for;
- It would buy us influence in the conduct of the military campaign against Iraq;
- US gratitude would make Washington correspondingly more inclined to be generous to us in other areas ...
- It would reduce the risk that we would be expected to contribute large numbers of troops to help administer Iraq after hostilities;
- The British Army would like it; and would be correspondingly demoralised if no use were made of their war-fighting capability.”

³¹⁴ Manuscript comment Manning to Powell on [Minute Hoon to Prime Minister, 15 October 2002, 'Iraq: UK Military Options' attaching Paper Ministry of Defence, 14 October 2002, 'Iraq: UK Contingency Planning'](#).

³¹⁵ [Minute Manning to Blair, 16 October 2002, 'Iraq: UK Military Options'](#).

804. Sir David commented that he thought some of those arguments were “pretty dubious”:

- It was “not clear” whether Saddam Hussein would be much affected by signals of British military intent; “it was US intent that bothered him”.
- The problem of US expectations on Package 3 might have been “self-generated”. His “guess” was that the UK military had “been pretty forward leaning in their contacts with their US opposite numbers”.
- He doubted that the UK “would have much say in the management of the military campaign”.
- He was “not much persuaded by the argument about US gratitude: it should not be a key factor in our decision”.
- He was “not much persuaded either, that if we help with the war-fighting, we shall be spared the post-conflict washing up. It didn’t work like that in Afghanistan. Experience shows that once you are in, you’re in deep, without queues of grateful countries waiting to take over when the shooting stops.”
- “Army morale would have to be managed: we needn’t fight every war.”

805. Sir David suggested that Mr Blair should explore with Mr Hoon:

- What had changed since the summer when Mr Blair had been advised that the UK could not deploy Package 3, and whether the new assumptions were “really safe and robust”?
- Whether the UK could “bank on Turkish assurances given to the US about access, bases and supply”?
- Whether the UK would be able to fight in a “CBW environment”, and “in summer temperatures if necessary”?
- Whether it made sense to commit the UK so heavily to Iraq and how the UK would respond to a sudden crisis elsewhere?
- Whether Package 3 was affordable?

806. Sir David concluded:

“In sum, the MOD paper is special pleading for Package 3. You [Mr Blair] may want to go this route to signal your determination; and for US solidarity reasons. But there are risks and difficulties that need to be thoroughly explored; and there will be costs which are only sketchily dealt with here – and which might balloon.

“Personally, I doubt whether there is a strong military case for Package 3. The US would like us along, but could certainly do the job without UK land forces. This is a political call.”

807. Mr Blair responded: “This is a v. tough call”; and that he would “need to speak to the senior military in detail” before he committed to Package 3.³¹⁶

808. Asked about his comments on army morale, Sir David Manning explained, to the Inquiry that he thought morale should not be a reason for participating in a land invasion.³¹⁷

THE FCO PERSPECTIVE

809. The FCO advised Mr Straw to question some of Mr Hoon’s arguments.

810. Mr Edward Oakden, Head of FCO Security Policy Department, advised Mr Straw to question whether the decision really had to be made that week.³¹⁸

811. Mr Oakden wrote:

- Without a UN resolution preparations would look like UK determination to pursue the military option, “instead of backing the diplomatic route with a credible threat of force” and that it would be worth drawing out the MOD’s thinking.
- Postponing the decision until a UN Security Council resolution had been agreed seemed “likely to make a real difference to how a move to military preparations would be viewed, both domestically and internationally”.
- Third countries, including Turkey, would be unwilling to support preparation or participation until a legal basis was found.
- Once the forces were deployed, there would be no going back until Saddam Hussein was disarmed: “Pulling out without achieving this would cause severe strains with the US and serious harm to UK credibility. So the prospect is for a longish haul, with the UN inspectors likely to take some time to find what will be well-concealed WMD. We should look very hard before our first public leap.”
- “Many senior Turks still [believed that] the UK” had “a secret agenda to create a Kurdish homeland in Northern Iraq”; and memories of the UK’s efforts to dismember Turkey in the 1920s remained “surprisingly vivid”. The UK should let the US conduct negotiations with Turkey.
- The MOD’s suggestion that the UK could trade a more active role in fighting for “a smaller military role during reconstruction” seemed “optimistic”: “On the contrary, if we have fought without international legal sanction, we could be left on our own with the US.”

812. Mr Oakden concluded that the MOD had rightly highlighted real concern about longer-term damage to the US/UK relationship “if for the first time in recent memory the UK decides not to join the US on the ground”, or if it complicated US military planning and put US timelines at risk. But he questioned whether that concern was at the military,

³¹⁶ Manuscript comment Blair on [Minute Manning to Blair, 16 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Military Options’](#).

³¹⁷ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 99.

³¹⁸ Minute Oakden to Private Secretary [FCO], 16 October 2002, ‘Iraq’.

“rather than the political level”. He suggested further talks with the US at a senior political level “if the Chiefs judge there is a real danger of US disaffection”.

813. Mr Westmacott reported on 16 October that he had been told by a senior Turkish official that Turkey assumed that, if the UK decided it wanted to join the US in making military deployments in or through Turkey in support of a UN resolution, it would let Turkey know in good time.³¹⁹ Without Security Council authorisation, it was “quite possible” that Turkey would refuse to co-operate. Constitutionally the Turkish Parliament had to give its consent, and the constitution stated that it could only do so in the context of international legitimacy.

US Congressional authorisation for the use of force

On 10 and 11 October, the House of Representatives and the Senate passed a joint resolution authorising the use of military force against Iraq.³²⁰

Signing the joint resolution on 16 October, President Bush stated that it symbolised the united purpose of the nation and expressed the considered judgement of Congress.³²¹ Congress had authorised the use of force but he had not ordered that use, and he hoped that would not become necessary.

More detail is provided in Section 3.5.

Mr Blair’s meeting, 17 October 2002

814. Mr Blair concluded that, while he wanted to keep the option of Package 3 open, the UK must not commit itself at that stage.

815. Mr Blair, Mr Straw and Mr Hoon met on 17 October to discuss the latest developments on the UN negotiations and the military options.³²² Adm Boyce, Mr Powell, Mr Campbell, Baroness Morgan, Sir David Manning and Mr Rycroft were also present.

816. Mr Rycroft recorded that Mr Hoon and Adm Boyce had “set out the options, as in the Defence Secretary’s minute” of 15 October. Adm Boyce had “put the military arguments for agreeing to Package 3. But if we were to end up agreeing on Package 2, it would be better to tell the US now”. Mr Straw had said “that the international case for Package 3 was strong”.

817. Mr Blair “took these points” but:

“... remained concerned about the costs. He concluded that he wanted to keep open the option of Package 3. But we must not commit to it at this stage.”

³¹⁹ Teleletter Westmacott to Oakden, 16 October 2002, ‘Possible Military Action Against Iraq: Turkish Policy’.

³²⁰ Almanac of Policy Issues, 15 October 2002, *Congressional Resolution Authorizing Force Against Iraq*.

³²¹ The White House, 16 October 2002, *President Signs Iraq Resolution*.

³²² [Letter Rycroft to Watkins, 17 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Military Options’](#).

818. The meeting also “agreed that there must be no leaks and no public announcements (for instance any notices to Reserves) until after the first UN resolution had passed and after a further discussion” with Mr Blair.

819. Copies of Mr Rycroft’s record of the discussion on military options were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Hoon, Mr Straw, Mr Brown and Sir Andrew Turnbull, and to Mr Bowen.

820. The discussion on the progress and direction of negotiations on a draft UN resolution, which had reached a critical stage, was recorded separately and is addressed in Section 3.5.

821. In his diaries, Mr Campbell wrote that Adm Boyce had said that he would have a real problem with the Army if they were not properly involved and that Mr Blair would have far greater influence with the US if the UK was there on the ground.³²³ Gen Franks really needed to know what our answers may be. Mr Blair had said it was not no, but it was not yet yes. He wanted more work done analysing the cost.

822. Mr Watkins told officials in the MOD that Mr Blair “did not wish to rule out Package 3 at this stage but wished to give the matter further consideration”: “In terms of our internal MOD planning, the position therefore remains essentially unchanged.”³²⁴

The UK’s draft strategic objectives

The preliminary objective for UK policy in Iraq agreed by Mr Straw and Mr Hoon in May, and recorded in Mr Hoon’s minute to Mr Blair of 31 May 2002 (see Section 3.3), was revised in October.

Mr Bowen sent Sir David Manning draft strategic policy objectives for Iraq on 4 October, explaining that “Whitehall would find it helpful” to agree objectives “for the present phase of activity” and, “in particular, it would help us in formulating an information strategy”.³²⁵

The Cabinet Office draft stated that the UK’s prime objective was:

“... to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their associated programmes and means of delivery, including prohibited ballistic missiles (BM) ... in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions ... an expression of the will of the international community, with which Iraq has persistently failed to comply, thereby perpetuating the threat to international peace and security.”³²⁶

Other objectives included the desired end-state for Iraq, to which the words “and providing effective and representative government for its own people” had been added to the text agreed by Mr Straw and Mr Hoon earlier in the year.

³²³ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

³²⁴ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 17 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Military Options’.

³²⁵ [Minute Bowen to Manning, 4 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Strategic Policy Objectives’](#).

³²⁶ [Minute Bowen to Manning, 4 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Strategic Policy Objectives’](#).

The draft also identified the immediate priorities for the UK, including that continuing to “make military plans and preparations in case military action” was required to “force compliance with UNSCRs”.

Mr Lee sent a copy of the draft to Mr Hoon’s Private Office, commenting that, while the text was “helpful”, it did not “go far enough in providing direction for current military activity and an information strategy”.³²⁷ Mr Lee did not expect the draft to move forward until there was a clear UN position.

Sir David Manning informed members of the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy on 22 October that Mr Blair had agreed draft UK strategic objectives for Iraq.

The draft objectives agreed by Mr Blair were unchanged from those proposed by Mr Bowen on 4 October.³²⁸

The draft objectives underpinned subsequent policy statements both to explain the UK’s position and to maintain the pressure on Saddam Hussein to comply with the demands of the international community.

The UK’s objectives were formally announced by Mr Straw on 7 January 2003.³²⁹

Mr Blair’s decision to offer Package 3 to the US, 31 October 2003

823. The Chiefs of Staff meeting on 23 October was informed that time was running out if the UK wanted to keep open the option of deploying ground forces in the combat phase of any military operations.

824. Adm Boyce directed that a further submission should be made to Mr Hoon.

825. An update from Lt Gen Reith to Lt Gen Pigott on 21 October, entitled ‘The Northern Axis – Current Thinking’, advised that, while the UK’s “preferred option remain[ed] leadership of the Northern Axis”, an independent British command was now unlikely.³³⁰ He also advised that the package would need to be reinforced with a second formation to establish a “genuine manoeuvre capability”; and that analysis had indicated that “additional forces would be required for such tasks as protection of LOCs [Lines of Communication] and handling of EPW [Enemy Prisoners of War]”.

826. The timelines for action were discussed at the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 23 October.³³¹

827. The Chiefs of Staff were informed that there was “no discernible position on UK forces” in Turkey. Lt Gen Reith suggested that a UK tactical lead on the northern option

³²⁷ [Minute Lee to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 7 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Strategic Policy Objectives’.](#)

³²⁸ [Letter Manning to McDonald, 22 October 2002, ‘Iraq’](#) attaching Cabinet Office Paper ‘Iraq: Strategic Policy Objectives’.

³²⁹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 January 2003, column 4-6WS.

³³⁰ Paper CJO to MA/DCDS(C), 21 October 2002, ‘The Northern Axis – Current Thinking’.

³³¹ Minutes, 23 October 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

was possible and desirable but now “in the balance and time was running out”. The end of October deadline for UK decisions was “inextricably” tied to military action from the first week of January. If the US start date was later, then the timetable for UK decisions could be later.

828. Adm Boyce was “not prepared at this juncture, to recommend that the UK offer a Package 3 type contribution that would arrive some time after the US [Main Effort] of end-Feb”. He directed that further advice should be provided to Mr Hoon on the options for UK participation.

829. A report of the meeting from Mr Oakden observed that Adm Boyce understood the interaction between the United Nations Security Council resolution and a decision on Package 3, but “was emphatic that the UK forces had to be there for the start, or not at all”.³³²

830. Mr Bowen reported the discussion to Sir David Manning, pointing out that the “the US did not think that land forces in Turkey were ruled out, but they certainly had not been ruled in either”.³³³ Following the Turkish elections in early November, it could be 45 days before a new government was formed. Mr Bowen concluded by stating that “the key question about Turkish attitudes is far from resolved”.

831. Mr Bowen also reported that the MOD wanted a structure that would allow them to “integrate offers of coalition participation” and was concerned about the risk that someone else might take on that role.

CABINET, 24 OCTOBER 2002

832. Cabinet was informed on 24 October that negotiations on the UN resolution continued and progress was “slow”.

833. Mr Blair said that Iraq would continue to be discussed at Cabinet, “including in due time the military options”.

834. A draft resolution agreed by the US and UK was tabled in the Security Council on 23 October 2002.³³⁴

835. Mr Straw told Cabinet on 24 October that discussions with the Permanent Members of the Security Council and with others continued on a resolution on Iraq. It was a long drawn-out process and progress was slow.³³⁵

³³² Minute Oakden to Ehrman and Private Secretary [FCO], 23 October 2002, ‘Iraq Military Planning’.

³³³ Minute Bowen to Manning, 24 October 2002, ‘Chief of Staff Meeting on 23 October’.

³³⁴ Telegram 2031 from UKMIS New York to FCO London, 23 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Draft Resolution of 23 October’.

³³⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, 24 October 2002.

836. Mr Blair stated that Iraq would continue to be discussed in Cabinet, “including in due time the military options”. The Government must “keep its options open in responding to future developments” after a resolution was achieved.

837. The negotiations on the draft resolution are addressed in Section 3.5.

MOD CONCERNS ABOUT THE US PERSPECTIVE

838. The MOD continued to argue that keeping open the option of a land contribution and being able to influence the US planning process required a clearer statement of the UK position.

839. Mr Johnson asked Mr Hoon on 25 October to note the “increasing difficulty of keeping options open” because:

- The US could not “continue much longer with the uncertainty” over the UK contribution.
- A UK contribution on the scale of Package 3 would “cease to be viable within the current US timetable on or around 31 October if no public acknowledgement is made” of the need for preparatory work on the availability of Reserves.³³⁶

840. Mr Johnson also asked Mr Hoon to consider the “need to re-establish with the US at the highest level whether their planning timetable [was] likely to change”.

841. Mr Johnson advised that there might be constitutional difficulties in Turkey over hosting foreign forces in the absence of a UN resolution. It seemed “increasingly likely” that the “substantial” US forces would be committed to the North, and that they might “wish to exercise overall leadership there”. Uncertainty about the UK contribution complicated the issues for the US and limited the UK’s ability to influence the developing plan. Gen Franks remained “wedded to a UK role, not least as a possible framework for integrating contributions from other potential coalition members”.

842. Adm Boyce would raise questions about the US timetable with Gen Myers and there might be “a case for following up at a political level”. But, unless the US accepted later dates, a decision to permit preparatory action on Reserves would be needed if UK options were not to be closed off.

843. A meeting for Mr Hoon to discuss the issues with Adm Boyce had been arranged for 28 October.

844. Mr Watkins commented to Mr Hoon that there were potential tensions between the military and inspection timetables; and that there was “as yet ... little irritation with our fence sitting at senior military level in the US”.³³⁷

³³⁶ Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 25 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Sitrep’.

³³⁷ Manuscript comment Watkins on Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 25 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Sitrep’.

845. The meeting between Adm Boyce and Gen Myers added weight to the view that US timelines were slipping, in part because of the UN process. There was “some sympathy with the UK position”.³³⁸

846. CENTCOM was described as “coming round” to the northern option. That would depend on Turkey’s co-operation. Gen Myers was reported to have:

- accepted Adm Boyce’s “point that some overt preparations would send an entirely appropriate signal to Saddam immediately after” adoption of the UN resolution, “rather than doing nothing until actual signs of resolution-bending”;
- recognised the value a UK divisional HQ “might bring in providing a ‘home’ for any coalition contributions”; and
- stated that “Much planning” was taking place in the US on post-conflict considerations.

847. The record of the meeting was sent to Sir David Manning, who commented to Mr Powell that it was “Evidence” that US plans were “now slipping” and that it put the UK decision “in context”.³³⁹

848. The minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 28 October recorded that:

“The US understood the reasons why the UK could not commit while the UNSCR was under discussion.”

849. While US military staff “continued to work to planning timelines prescribed” by President Bush in August 2002:

“Senior US officials had begun to acknowledge that there could be a requirement for these timelines to be altered. It would be important for the UK to try to influence a shift of several weeks rather than incremental shifts that mirrored the delay in the signing of the UNSCR.”³⁴⁰

850. The minutes stated that the UK’s ability to influence the US was diminishing as time advanced, “particularly as the US had now decided to commit” the 4th Infantry Division to the northern axis. Adm Boyce directed that “UK planning for either a western or southern axis was not to commence ahead of a political decision on UK commitment”.

851. The minutes also stated that “it would be important to emphasise within forthcoming submissions that, although Package 3 might be considered expensive, the alternative of committing to op[eration]s during the aftermath would also require considerable resources”.

³³⁸ Minute MA/CDS to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 29 October 2002, ‘CDS Bilateral Meeting with Gen Myers – US CJCS – 26 Oct 02’.

³³⁹ Manuscript comment Manning on Minute MA/CDS to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 29 October 2002, ‘CDS Bilateral meeting with Gen Myers – US CJCS – 26 Oct 02’.

³⁴⁰ Minutes, 28 October 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

852. On 29 October, Mr Bowen reported to Sir David Manning that the Chiefs of Staff were pressing for a decision in principle on Package 3.³⁴¹

853. Mr Bowen stated that Gen Franks understood the UK position, “including the political dimension” and had “directed that planning should proceed on the basis of US forces only operating out of Turkey” and that the 4th Infantry Division would be “the main combat formation”. Package 3 “would still be welcome as an addition and could have the particular task of integrating other coalition members’ contributions”.

854. Mr Bowen added:

“The MOD argue that they are being excluded from detailed planning and their influence in discussing issues like the aftermath is diminishing.”

855. Mr Bowen commented that some of the assumptions behind the MOD case were “fragile”. The planning date of early January was “no more than a military [planning] assumption”, and the willingness of Turkey to accept any ground forces was “still in doubt”. But the military needed to make such assumptions if they were to “get on with the job of planning complex operations for extremely uncertain scenarios”.

856. Mr Bowen wrote that the MOD would be arguing that:

- It was to the UK’s disadvantage to be excluded from planning for the northern option.
- The “Turkish dimension” needed to be fully explored if the UK was to be involved.
- A commitment in principle did not lock the UK into a commitment in practice.
- The UK leadership of other coalition members’ involvement could be prejudiced.

857. The MOD would concede that notification of the Reserves “could be postponed, on the basis that a commitment in principle would enable them to cause the US military to re-examine the assumptions with a view to negotiating a more realistic date”.

858. In addition to Sir David Manning’s questions about the implications of offering Package 3, whether it would be “realistic to think we could backtrack from a decision in principle” and whether the UK understood what it would be getting into, Mr Bowen identified the need to consider costs, “the overall profile” the UK wished to adopt, and the need to factor in slippage in the timetable at the UN and Turkish decisions.

859. Mr Bowen viewed the US decision to earmark the 4th Infantry Division as “helpful” because it showed it was “committed strategically” and would “take the lead”, but he added that Turkey’s position might mean that nothing would come of the northern axis.

³⁴¹ [Minute Bowen to Manning, 29 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Whether to Offer Package 3 to the US?’](#)

860. Mr Bowen wondered whether:

“A way through this ... would be to make a commitment in principle to Package 3, but on the basis that we cannot accept the current planning assumption date for a Presidential decision. That would force the US military to exclude us or have a serious discussion about the realism of their timetable ...”

861. Mr Bowen also suggested that the offer of Package 3 might be made “dependent on US leadership in the North and willing co-operation by the Turks”.

862. Mr Bowen wrote that pressure on Saddam Hussein needed to be maintained. “Continued planning” together with activities that were “necessary to prepare for action” would “all play their part” in that. The UK should be “persuading the international community and our domestic audience that proper preparation for war” was “the best way to avoid it”.

863. Mr Bowen concluded:

“Overall, I fear we are enmeshed in a military planning cycle which operates out of synch with the political track. But it is only planning. Provided we enter the right caveats and get a realistic re-think about the timelines ... I think there is advantage in our being involved in planning for the North (unless the political view is definitely that we should confine ourselves to the sea and air packages).”

864. The MOD advised Mr Blair on 29 October that its influence on US planning was reducing and the option to deploy UK ground forces was at risk of being excluded by default. The only way to avoid that was to offer Package 3 to the US for planning on the same basis as Package 2.

865. Package 3 could also significantly reduce the UK’s vulnerability to US requests to provide a substantial and costly contribution to post-conflict operations.

866. Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning on 29 October, to report that “US military planning [was] continuing, but increasingly assuming no UK Land contribution”; and that an option for a “significant UK land contribution” could be “sensibly kept open only by placing it on a similar basis” to Package 2.³⁴²

867. The MOD advised that it had “become clear over the past few days” that the US military had begun planning on the assumption that the UK would “not contribute ground forces and consequently, will not pursue the question of UK involvement with Turkey”. The US had also decided to commit the 4th US Infantry Division:

“... which would mean that the option of the UK commanding the operation from the North at divisional level has gone. This does not necessarily mean that we could not

³⁴² [Letter Watkins to Manning, 29 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Military Options’.](#)

resurrect the option of a land contribution especially should timescales change. But it does mean that the prospect of a significant UK ground role in the North and our ability to influence that part of the US plan is reducing daily ...”

868. The MOD advised that preparatory work on Reserves would need to go forward soon unless the US timetable changed. The UK had taken “discreet soundings” on whether the US timetable was realistic:

“The sense amongst US military planners is that the realistic starting date for the current plan is now slipping. But this does not have political endorsement, and we do not know when or if President Bush will be prepared to signal a later timetable, given the importance of sustaining pressure on Saddam and US domestic political considerations.”

869. The uncertainty about whether the slippage would be “a matter of days or something more substantial” left two questions to be addressed.

870. First, in relation to a land contribution, the MOD stated that Package 3 was:

“... for practical purposes being excluded by default. If we are to keep the option open, and continue to have the strongest military cards to underpin our political influence, the Defence Secretary believes that we should indicate to the US that they should plan on the assumption that the land contribution would be available, subject to final political approval ... This can be done without publicity. It is also worth noting that, while Package 3 is significantly more expensive in itself than Package 2, making it available could significantly reduce our vulnerability to US requests to provide a substantial (and costly) contribution to post-conflict stabilisation operations.”

871. Second, Mr Hoon was concerned that he would appear disingenuous if he failed on 4 November to answer oral questions about the Reserves, were an announcement then to be made shortly thereafter.

872. Mr Watkins concluded that Mr Hoon recognised:

“... that these issues ... cannot be disentangled easily from the political climate and the fate of the UNSCR negotiations which are currently in the balance. But, equally, he is concerned that we should continue to contribute to maintaining the pressure on the Iraqis which has so far shown some level of success.”

873. Copies of the letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Mr Brown, and to Mr Bowen.

874. On 30 October, Mr Watkins advised Mr Hoon to press for a decision to offer Package 3, on the same basis as Package 2, but on the understanding that the offer was subject to clarification of the Turkish position.³⁴³

875. Mr Watkins added:

“Paradoxically, clarifying the status of Package 3 puts us in a stronger position to persuade the US that this timetable is no longer realistic ...”

876. Mr Watkins wrote that Mr Hoon might want “to counsel against any simplistic suggestions” that Turkey, and the Turkish General Staff, could be persuaded to co-operate.

JIC ASSESSMENT, 30 OCTOBER 2002: ‘TURKEY: ATTITUDE TO AN IRAQ CAMPAIGN’

877. The JIC assessed on 30 October that Turkey would support a US-led military campaign and that its opposition to UK forces could be overcome with US pressure.

878. At the request of the MOD, the JIC issued an Assessment of Turkey’s attitude to any international campaign against Iraq, including Turkey’s interests in Iraq, on 30 October.³⁴⁴

879. The JIC judged that Turkey did not want a war against Iraq, but it would support a US-led military campaign. Turkey appeared:

“... opposed to UK troops. Such resistance is probably surmountable, but only by US pressure. Turkey will prefer international legitimacy for the campaign and require guarantees on the territorial integrity of Iraq.”

880. The Assessment recounted Turkish concerns about the impact of war, including:

- regional instability, including if Israel was drawn in;
- the domestic impact of a possible outflow of Kurdish refugees; and
- the economic impact of war.

881. The JIC attributed Turkish sensitivity to UK military involvement in the region to its role in the creation of Iraq in the 1920s and stated that: “The involvement of UK troops in aiding Kurds after the 1991 Gulf War aroused suspicion of UK partiality towards the Kurds.”

³⁴³ Minute Watkins to Secretary of State [MOD], 30 October 2002, ‘Iraq: Meeting with Prime Minister: 31 October’.

³⁴⁴ JIC Assessment, 30 October 2002, ‘Turkey: Attitude to an Iraq Campaign’.

MR BLAIR'S MEETING, 31 OCTOBER 2002

882. On 31 October Mr Blair agreed that the MOD could offer Package 3 to the US on the same basis as Package 2.

883. Sir David Manning commented to Mr Blair that Mr Watkins' letter of 29 October was: "Further pressure from MOD on Package 3. This is based on military planning cycle ... not the UN/Political realities."³⁴⁵

884. Sir David asked:

- Is the timing realistic any more?
- Would the Turks have us?
- Could we backtrack if we gave a firmer commitment?
- Can we afford Package 3?

885. Sir David also wrote alongside the MOD argument that Package 3 would reduce the UK's vulnerability to a US request for a substantial post-conflict contribution: "This supposes we w[ou]ld agree to such costly requests."

886. Mr Powell wrote a manuscript note to Mr Blair stating:

"The military are making another effort to bounce you into a decision on option 3 ... US timelines are slipping and we do not have to decide yet."³⁴⁶

887. On 31 October, Mr Blair, Mr Straw, Mr Hoon and Adm Boyce discussed the MOD wish to offer Package 3 to the US for planning purposes.³⁴⁷

888. Adm Boyce stated that US planning was proceeding on the assumption that there would not be a UK land contribution. The US was "unwilling to approach the Turks about a possible UK contribution until they had a firmer indication" of likely UK commitment. If the "UK wanted to keep open the option of a land contribution and be able to influence the planning process", the US needed to be told that the land package could be assumed on the same basis as the other two packages. That "would not be a final commitment to a UK land contribution".

889. Adm Boyce and Mr Hoon added that the US timetable was slipping beyond the possible early January start date:

"As a result the earlier tight timelines on warning UK Reservists no longer applied ... a warning notice would not be required until the middle of November."

³⁴⁵ Manuscript comment Manning on [Letter Watkins to Manning, 29 October 2002, 'Iraq: UK Military Options'](#).

³⁴⁶ Note (handwritten) Powell to Prime Minister, [undated], 'Iraq: Troops'.

³⁴⁷ [Letter Wechsberg to Watkins, 31 October 2002, 'Iraq: Military Options'](#).

890. Mr Blair asked about the additional costs of Package 3 and whether they had been discussed with the Treasury.

891. The record of the meeting does not indicate whether Mr Blair’s question about the cost of Package 3, and whether that had been discussed with the Treasury was answered.

892. Adm Boyce was reported to have said that “he believed that if we made a major financial contribution through Package 3, we would be under less pressure to finance a big share of the post-conflict reconstruction effort”.

893. Mr Rycroft recorded that Mr Blair concluded that the MOD should tell the US that the UK was “prepared to put Package 3 on the same basis as Package 2 for planning purposes, in order to keep the option open; but that no warning should be issued to the Reservists at this stage”. Mr Blair “should be consulted again before any such warning was issued”.

894. Copies of the record of the meeting were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Hoon, Mr Straw and Mr Brown, to Adm Boyce, and to Mr Bowen.

895. The MOD discussions with the Treasury on the costs of the military options and Mr Brown’s involvement are addressed in Section 13.

Why did the UK Government decide to offer ground forces?

896. The decision to offer Package 3 was, as Sir David Manning advised Mr Blair, a “political call”.

897. In military terms, the US did not need UK ground forces to launch an invasion of Iraq.

898. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that the US did not need a ground force contribution from the UK:

“... if they had chosen to go on their own, they could have done so. They had the capability and the numbers to do so.”³⁴⁸

899. According to Sir David Manning, the military importance of the UK contribution was:

“... quite an important contribution, but not decisive.

“The Americans could have done this operation without us. We always knew that ... But nevertheless, I’m sure they were grateful to have a sizeable British contribution when, in the end, it came to military action.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 37.

³⁴⁹ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, pages 38-39.

Why did the UK offer a divisional headquarters and an armoured brigade?

900. The MOD started in spring 2002 from the assumption that if military action was required, the UK should participate; and that its contribution would be on a similar scale to the UK contribution to the US-led operation Desert Storm, the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. It stressed the importance of making a contribution which would be seen by the US as commensurate with the UK's capabilities and the demands of the campaign.

901. In addition, from the outset of the planning process, the military leadership was looking for a discrete UK role in ground operations. This reflected their concerns about the difficulty of integrating forces from different nations for ground operations.

902. That led to the identification of Package 3, which was described as a UK division, although its size, shape and component parts changed significantly over time.

903. From late July onwards, the need to provide cover for a potential strike by the Fire Brigades Union, which was equivalent to a medium scale operation, meant that the UK would have been unable to deploy a division of either two or three brigades within the timescales envisaged by US military planning.

904. Military planners concentrated on identifying the maximum practicable contribution the UK would be able to generate within the potential timescales for US action.

905. From August until December 2002, UK planning was based on providing a divisional headquarters and one armoured brigade for operations in northern Iraq.

906. Asked how the UK's options had been evaluated, Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that the assessment of the UK's contribution had been approached "in terms of what actually was achievable"; it had been "assumed that we would want to be helpful to the United States ... and, therefore, how would we go about offering as much as was consistent with all the other pressures that we faced".³⁵⁰

907. Mr Hoon added:

"My sense was that, generally speaking, the Prime Minister wanted us to be involved to the maximum extent that was possible ... The Prime Minister was, generally speaking, anxious to do what the United Kingdom could to help."³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 53.

³⁵¹ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 56.

908. Mr Hoon stated that Mr Blair “would have accepted” if there were practical reasons why the UK could not offer Package 3, but his “assumption” was that “Downing Street” wanted to offer a land contribution “if it could be done”.³⁵²

909. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that the Chiefs of Staff’s view was that the UK contribution had to be “large enough to be able to integrate ourselves properly with the Americans”; and the UK “shouldn’t be put in the position of expecting somebody else to defend us or sustain us”.³⁵³

910. Asked by the Inquiry if he had a sense that the military were agitating to make sure that they had a role, Sir David Manning replied that he needed to be “very careful” about that. He had not seen any papers suggesting that and it seemed to him that the military adopted different positions at different times.³⁵⁴ In the “spring/summer of 2002”, the military wanted Mr Blair to understand the limits on what they could deliver. But, by autumn 2002, he sensed that “reluctance” had “shifted to an enthusiasm for taking part”, and the “pressure” was to offer Package 3.

911. Asked by the Inquiry whether the US had requested a particular military scale of contribution from the UK, Mr Blair said:

“No. He [President Bush] very much left this to us, to decide what we wanted to do, but I had taken a view that this was something that, if it was right to do, actually it mattered to have Britain there ...”³⁵⁵

912. The military arguments for the UK offering to lead a division in the North reflected discussions with the US and the UK military assessment of the requirements of the operation.

913. Lt Gen Fry told the Inquiry there had been a view that converging axes from north and south, and avoiding logistic congestion in Kuwait and the risks associated with transit through the Gulf, made “eminent military sense”. The northern option offered tactical advantages. He had been “slightly more sanguine” about the length of the lines of communication through Turkey than some of his colleagues. There would also have been more freedom of manoeuvre and fewer bridging operations in the North.³⁵⁶

914. Lt Gen Fry told the Inquiry that the co-ordination of ground manoeuvre operations was difficult and dangerous, and it was best to separate land forces from different states so far as that was possible.³⁵⁷

³⁵² Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 57.

³⁵³ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 70.

³⁵⁴ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 100.

³⁵⁵ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 61.

³⁵⁶ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, pages 14-15.

³⁵⁷ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 14.

915. Lt Gen Fry emphasised that thinking had been driven by the tactical advantages of “a certain degree of national independence” and the avoidance of the need to co-ordinate ground operations, not national ambition.³⁵⁸

What was the UK’s desire to influence the US seeking to achieve, and was it a determining factor in the decision?

916. The importance of influencing the US was stated repeatedly in the papers produced by the MOD between the spring and autumn of 2002.

917. Most MOD witnesses suggested that the scale of the UK contribution would have an impact on the degree of influence it would be possible to exert on the US, and in particular on military planning.

918. General Sir Mike Jackson, Commander in Chief Land Command in 2002, told the Inquiry that it was important to have a substantial land component to influence US planning and its execution.³⁵⁹

919. Asked by the Inquiry if there was a direct relationship between the size of the contribution and the degree of influence the UK would have, Gen Jackson replied that it was not “a linear relationship”, but there was firm connection.³⁶⁰

920. Asked by the Inquiry why the UK was “so keen to send a division”, Lord Boyce replied:

“I think it was only by having something of that particular size that we thought we would have a reasonable influence on how the Americans were going to conduct the campaign.”³⁶¹

921. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry:

“... unless and until we had ground force commitments, we did not have the inside track on planning or influence on the day after or the general conduct of affairs, including ... holding the Americans to a multi-lateral track and ... exhausting the arms control route and trying to deal with this through disarmament.”³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 21.

³⁵⁹ Public hearing, 28 July 2010, page 9.

³⁶⁰ Public hearing, 28 July 2010, page 10.

³⁶¹ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 38.

³⁶² Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 46.

922. Sir Kevin added that one of the lessons of the UK experience in the 1990-1991 Gulf Conflict was that:

“In 1990, we learned that, once we committed ourselves to a ground force contribution, the planning process opened completely ... and we were able to influence it, and that experience ... still influenced the way we thought ...”³⁶³

923. Sir Kevin subsequently stated that the lesson the UK had drawn from the 1991 Gulf Conflict was that only “ground forces in significant numbers” really secured influence; and that demonstrating commitment would put the UK in a better position to influence US behaviour “and the way in which Saddam and his regime perceived the seriousness of our position”.³⁶⁴

924. Lt Gen Fry told the Inquiry that “the larger the contribution we made, the more influence we felt we would have over American planning and the ability to shape things in the future”.³⁶⁵

925. Asked in what specific areas it was thought, in the second half of 2002, British influence could apply, Lt Gen Fry replied:

“... we felt at a tactical level we might be able to influence the Americans in certain ways ... about the conduct of operations, and to a certain extent that was true. I don’t think we ever fundamentally influenced their level of military ambition or necessarily even their scheme of manoeuvre, but I think we did assist and shape their views in some ways.

“But I think ... the full benefit that this should have given the UK was never going to be visible to me, because it seems to me that it was the military contribution ... which brought the influence which should then have been deployed at governmental and diplomatic levels.”³⁶⁶

926. The debate in the MOD suggests that there was no unanimity about whether significant ground forces were required to influence the US or that could be achieved by the forces within Package 2.

927. On 9 October, ACM Squire stated that Package 2 would “not entail a loss of influence”.

928. On 15 October Mr Hoon wrote: “In principle, both packages could strengthen that relationship: Package 2 alone should easily surpass any other conceivable non-US contribution, except perhaps that of Turkey.”

³⁶³ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 46.

³⁶⁴ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, pages 69-70.

³⁶⁵ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 6.

³⁶⁶ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, pages 57-58.

929. Gen Reith told the Inquiry that he was not sure that it had been necessary to provide significant numbers to secure influence. It was the UK's "niche capabilities" and the quality of the advice it provided to US commanders that gave the UK influence.³⁶⁷

930. The advice to Mr Hoon and Mr Blair did not distinguish clearly between a desire and ability to influence US military planning on the one hand and wider and more strategic objectives on the other.

931. There was a perception that the UK would be able to influence, and if necessary delay, the timing of the military campaign. That was initially seen as desirable to give more time for inspections and the strategy of coercion to work and to build domestic and international support for action.

932. A later timescale was also desirable if UK ground forces were to be ready to participate in combat operations.

933. The argument that the UK would be unable to influence the conduct of the US military campaign without a significant and active role in combat operations is self-evidently true. The key question is, however, whether the influence achieved was commensurate with the scale of the UK contribution.

934. The degree to which the UK was able to influence the planning and conduct of the military campaign is difficult to determine, as Section 8 states.

935. The extent to which the offer of Package 3 rather than Package 2 was driven by the view that it would materially affect the UK's ability to influence the US at the political level, or that it would have a lasting impact on the strategic relationship between the US and UK is debatable.

936. Mr Blair regarded the decision as a strategic choice for the UK. He told the Inquiry: "If you are there with a bigger force alongside the Americans than otherwise, then, of course, you will be more intimately involved, but that's not really the reason."³⁶⁸

937. Asked whether he saw a correlation between the size of the UK contribution and its influence with the US, Mr Jonathan Powell told the Inquiry that he did not think that was true.³⁶⁹

938. Asked by the Inquiry whether he thought offering Package 3 had been essential, Mr Powell replied: "No"; the two reasons which had "militated in favour" of that decision were:

³⁶⁷ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 57.

³⁶⁸ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 62.

³⁶⁹ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 91.

- First, the military wanted to participate at a command level and thought that standing by the US was important to the relationship with the US military “on which they crucially depended”.
- Second, Mr Blair “felt that, if we were going to do it, we should be with the Americans properly”.³⁷⁰

939. Sir David Manning told the Inquiry that the reasons for participating in a land invasion “should be for state reasons, for political reasons”.³⁷¹ In his view, what the US particularly wanted was use of bases, “Cyprus and Diego Garcia”, Special Forces and aircraft.

940. Sir David Manning acknowledged that the relationship between the size of the UK contribution and the degree of influence it bought was “not a wholly spurious argument”.³⁷² There had been Defence Reviews which:

“... argued that we must be capable of fighting with the Americans in hot wars, and if we suddenly show we can’t do that, we are not willing to do that, that changes the perspective.”

941. But Sir David added that was, in his view, not a “clinching argument” in relation to Iraq. The UK’s “willingness to take our fair share had been very clear in Afghanistan”. He did not feel that the UK’s “influence was likely to suffer particularly if we said there’s a limit to what we can do”.

942. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that the decision “was not a narrow military issue”; it should be considered in the context of Mr Blair’s policy that the disarmament of Saddam Hussein was the most important single thing to do at that stage. In that broader context, it was, therefore:

“... very valid for us to seek to make a significant contribution ... to international stability.”³⁷³

943. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that in his view it had been “recognised ultimately” that the decision on Package 3 “was a political judgement for the Prime Minister, in terms of the wider picture of the kind of things we had been discussing in terms of influence and coherence”.³⁷⁴

944. Mr Hoon’s minute of 15 October suggested that Mr Blair should attach conditions to the offer of Package 3. There is no indication that the UK did so.

³⁷⁰ Public hearing, 18 January 2010, pages 90-91.

³⁷¹ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 99.

³⁷² Private hearing, 24 June 2010, pages 101-102.

³⁷³ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 39-40.

³⁷⁴ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 50.

What factors influenced the timing of the decision?

945. The uncertainties about the US timetable for military action, including the impact of the timetable for inspections following adoption of a UN resolution, made it hard to identify a precise date by when decisions on preparations would have had to have been taken.

946. The MOD was, however, anxious about the need to make timely preparations to equip, train and deploy the agreed force package if it was to keep the option of a land contribution on the table.

947. Package 3 in October 2002 was based on a square armoured brigade, which constituted only a medium scale capability, but the deployment of a divisional headquarters and the demands of the northern option for logistic support increased the number of personnel it was estimated would be required to a total of 28,000, including 7,700 Reserves.

948. Lt Gen Pigott had advised Mr Hoon on 24 May that three months' warning would be needed to deploy a medium scale joint force, and six months' warning would be needed to deploy a large scale war-fighting land force. The latter would be better prepared and carry fewer risks if nine months warning was available.

949. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry:

“... if politicians wanted certain options, you had to have enough time to prepare ...”³⁷⁵

950. In the event, as Section 6.2 shows, the size and shape of the UK contribution changed very significantly in January when the decision was made to deploy for operations in southern Iraq. The roles for two of the three UK brigades were not decided until March 2003.

951. The Government's stated objective was to keep the option of a significant UK land contribution open.

952. In the MOD's advice to Mr Hoon, and in his advice to Mr Blair, a range of arguments were set out of differing weight and significance in support of the MOD position that a decision was needed in October 2002 to offer significant ground forces to the US for planning purposes on the same basis as the forces in Package 2 if the UK was to have a significant role in ground combat operations.

953. The timing of the decision on 31 October to offer ground forces to the US on the same basis as Package 2 appears to have been driven primarily by the MOD advice of 29 October that the option of UK participation in ground operations through Turkey was at risk of being excluded from CENTCOM's

³⁷⁵ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 49.

planning by default, and Adm Boyce's advice in Mr Blair's meeting on 31 October that US planning was proceeding on the basis that there would not be a UK land contribution.

954. Mr Hoon's oral evidence to the Inquiry suggested that the US had given the impression that, in the absence of a firm decision, it was discounting a UK contribution.

955. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that, in October, the UK had:

"... pretty much assumed that the Americans had discounted the prospect of ... [Package 3] and were planning without our involvement, simply because we had not taken the decisions that were required in the timescale that was at that stage required."³⁷⁶

956. Mr Hoon stated:

"... by October ... we had had this discussion on several occasions ... my understanding, by the middle of October, was that the Americans were assuming we wouldn't be there ... on the land [option] ... So essentially ... what I was really saying to the Prime Minister was, 'You have got to decide. You have got to decide whether we are going to offer this third option and this package of an armoured division on the land' ... eventually ... probably as late as the very end of October, that decision was then taken."³⁷⁷

957. Evidence about CENTCOM's position in documents at the time, including Adm Boyce's discussion with Gen Franks on 10 October, Mr Johnson's advice to Mr Hoon of 25 October, and Mr Bowen's report of the Chiefs of Staff discussion on 26 October, indicated that CENTCOM continued to plan on the basis that the UK might offer a land contribution.

958. The US Administration wanted UK support and bases for political as well as military reasons.

959. It is not clear what specific information caused Adm Boyce and Mr Hoon to advise in late October 2002 that the US was planning on the basis there would be no UK land contribution.

Were the post-conflict implications for the UK, of a significant role on the ground in an invasion of Iraq, properly addressed?

960. The MOD advice and Mr Hoon's minute of 15 October argued that a combat role would be time limited, and that it would help the UK avoid a significant and protracted military involvement in Iraq post-conflict.

³⁷⁶ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 36.

³⁷⁷ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 45-46.

961. As Sir David Manning foresaw in his advice of 16 October, however, far from reducing the risk of significant commitments post-conflict, contributing ground forces created significant obligations and responsibilities for the UK post-conflict.

962. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that there was a sense that it was better to be in Iraq at the beginning of any operation, rather than go in later for a peacekeeping operation without having prior experience and information.³⁷⁸ There were also concerns that would require more troops for longer.

963. Sir Kevin Tebbit confirmed that one of the arguments for offering land forces for combat operations was that the MOD had not wanted “to get caught in the role of follow-on forces because then we could find ourselves even more bogged down and under even greater pressure to stay for longer than we felt ... sensible”.³⁷⁹ The UK had been caught anyway, although Sir Kevin suggested that taking part in the invasion had made it easier to reduce UK force levels after the conflict than it would have been if the force had deployed only for post-conflict tasks.

964. The recognition of that responsibility in the planning for post-conflict operations is addressed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

Did the need to maintain the Army’s morale influence the decision?

965. The MOD and No.10 both raised the question of whether there could be an issue of managing morale if the Army was not involved in combat operations.

966. The balance of the evidence suggests that none of the key decision-takers regarded that as a decisive factor in the decision, which would clearly have been inappropriate.

967. Mr Campbell wrote in his diaries that, at the meeting on 31 October, Adm Boyce had said that some inside the Army were irritated not to be more involved.³⁸⁰ Mr Campbell commented that Adm Boyce was “hard to read, sometimes giving the impression none of them wanted anything to do with this, then at others giving the impression they all wanted to be off to the front line”.

968. In his book, *The New Machiavelli*, Mr Powell wrote that Adm Boyce had told No.10 that the Armed Forces wanted to participate on the ground at “division strength with their own command”; and that it would damage morale if they were restricted to a mere supporting role from sea and air while the Americans and others carried out the ground campaign.³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 47.

³⁷⁹ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 56.

³⁸⁰ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

³⁸¹ Powell J. *The New Machiavelli: How to wield power in the modern world*. The Bodley Head, 2010.

969. Asked if the argument was that it would sustain morale in the Army had been a factor in the decision, Mr Powell told the Inquiry:

“The military indicated to us that it would be important for morale that we were involved properly, yes.”³⁸²

970. Asked about Mr Powell’s evidence to the Inquiry on morale, General the Lord Walker, Chief of the General Staff from April 2000 to February 2003, told the Inquiry that that was “not something” he had had “any anxiety about”. There might have been “expressions of exasperation” at the “lower levels” in the Army if it was not involved, but it was not an issue as far as he was concerned.³⁸³

971. Asked how important the issues of morale and the standing of the British Army had been in terms of not wanting to be left out of a major campaign, Gen Jackson told the Inquiry that, if it had gone ahead without a land component, he thought “the army would have been, to put it mildly, rather disappointed”.³⁸⁴

972. Asked if the issue had been discussed by the Army Board, Gen Jackson stated that he could not remember precisely, but he had “very little doubt that the Army Board’s view would have been as I have just outlined”. He had been “mystified” in relation to the thinking behind the “opening offer”, but over the autumn [of 2002] a “more balanced contribution came into being”.

973. Asked whether the impact of Army morale had been a factor which had been put to him, and through him to Mr Blair, Mr Hoon replied:

“I don’t recall the argument being put to me in quite those terms. I ... was well aware of the tremendous qualities of our Armed Forces and their desire to be used and ... participate.

“So there was a sense, particularly amongst the Army, that they didn’t want to be left out. But ... I wouldn’t have regarded that ... as something that you put on the table and say it was a major factor in the decision-making.”³⁸⁵

974. Mr Hoon added that there was a sense that the Army “wanted to play their part”, and that made the decision easier because they were saying “if necessary we can play our part”.

975. Mr Hoon’s own comments on that point in the minute he sent to Mr Blair, which differed from the MOD position, approved by Adm Boyce, set out in Mr Johnson’s advice of 11 October, supports that position.

³⁸² Public hearing, 18 January 2010, page 91.

³⁸³ Public hearing, 1 February 2010, page 7.

³⁸⁴ Public hearing, 28 July 2010, pages 10-12.

³⁸⁵ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 48-49.

976. Mr Straw told the Inquiry:

“The interesting thing ... was that from an early stage it was the Chief of the Defence Staff who had argued very strongly that if we were going to get involved in the military action, the Army had to be there, because they would be unhappy and cross if they weren't. I don't trivialise the way it was put across ... So we could have provided facilitation and then go[ne] in afterwards, which would not have meant standing down the troops we had in theatre and it was essentially what the Spanish and the Italians did.”³⁸⁶

977. Asked about the weight he had attached to Adm Boyce's advice on morale, Mr Blair told the Inquiry that he had asked:

“... the military for their view, and their view in this instance was that they were up for doing it and that they preferred to be right at the centre of things ... that was my view too. I thought, if it was right for us to be in it, we should be in it there alongside our principal ally, the United States.”³⁸⁷

978. Mr Blair wrote in his memoir that in late 2002, Adm Boyce had “said he would have a real problem with the Army if they were not fully involved”.³⁸⁸

979. Asked about Mr Blair and Mr Powell's comments, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that, “of course the Army would want to be engaged in a war”.³⁸⁹ If they had been unable to deploy because of the firefighters' strike and:

“... everybody else went to war you can imagine how they would have felt. They are trained to fight. They are the most professional army in the world. They would be sitting around and hosing down houses while the Marines, the Navy and Air Force would be busy. What do you think they would think? They would be disappointed they weren't involved. So yes. It would have been untruthful of me not to represent that to the Prime Minister which I did.

“It was not a factor of saying if you don't do this the Army are going to mutiny or to want to go home or whatever. Of course not. It would be wrong not to have apprised him of the fact that the Army would be dismayed if they weren't engaged ... particularly having been as successful as they had been during Desert Storm in 1991.”

980. Asked whether, in relation to Package 3, the Chief of the General Staff had been reluctant to take on “yet another commitment” or was “nervous about being left

³⁸⁶ Public hearing, 2 February 2011, pages 105-106.

³⁸⁷ Public hearing, 29 January 2010, pages 60-61.

³⁸⁸ Blair T. *A Journey*. Hutchinson, 2010.

³⁸⁹ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 31-32.

out”, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry he did not “recall ... any reluctance”; “it was just a professional judgement ... an option which he could deliver”.³⁹⁰

Were the other risks of offering ground forces fully identified and considered?

981. The decision to offer ground forces (Package 3) to the US for planning purposes was a significant step. Once the offer was made, it would have been difficult to withdraw. This constrained the UK’s subsequent policy choices.

982. There is no evidence that the extent to which the offer of Package 3 might constrain the UK’s future choices was a factor in Mr Blair’s decision.

983. The risks associated with the decision, and with other options, were not examined by senior Ministers in a collective discussion on the basis of coherent inter-departmental analysis and advice.

984. The decision to offer Package 2 – UK maritime and air forces, Special Forces and niche capabilities – to the US for planning purposes in September 2002 was relatively uncontroversial and was not seen as exposing the UK to significant risk.

985. The offer of significant forces for ground operations for planning purposes was not the same as a decision to commit the forces to military operations, but it did raise more difficult issues of both a practical and political nature.

986. The advice for Mr Hoon and Mr Blair in October 2002, however, did not explicitly address a number of crucial strategic issues which had previously been identified, including:

- the implications of the mismatch between US and UK strategic objectives;
- the risk of having to make a choice between the US and the UN route because of tension between the US military timetable and that for UN inspections;
- the degree to which offering Package 3 and deeper engagement in US planning might constrain future choices more than the offer of Packages 1 and 2; and
- the potential damage to the UK/US relationship if the UK subsequently decided it would not participate in military action.

987. Sir Kevin Tebbit had set out his concerns in his minute to Mr Hoon of 3 July and his letter to Sir David Manning of 19 July.

988. The issues had also been identified in the papers prepared for the Chiefs of Staff.

989. While it would theoretically have been open to the UK to withdraw the offer at any time, the Chiefs of Staff themselves considered, on 9 October, that a UK withdrawal

³⁹⁰ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 48-49.

after Exercise Internal Look, in December 2002, would have unpalatable diplomatic consequences.

990. Mr Hoon's minute of 15 October was sent to Mr Straw, Mr Brown and Sir Andrew Turnbull, and Mr Watkins' advice of 29 October was sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Mr Brown and to Mr Bowen. The issues were discussed in two meetings chaired by Mr Blair, on 17 October and 31 October, at which Mr Straw was present as well as Mr Hoon and Adm Boyce.

991. In the context of questioning about the Government's decision-making machinery and whether Mr Blair was being given military advice which addressed the implications and challenges, Sir David Manning stated that he was sure that the MOD was "intent on giving him the best advice they possibly could about the military commitment".³⁹¹

992. Mr Blair had expressed his concerns about cost and Treasury officials had raised the issues with Mr Brown, but Mr Brown was not at the meetings on 17 and 31 October.

993. As Section 7 sets out, decisions of this importance, which raise a number of challenging questions, are best addressed by a Cabinet Committee. Collective and regular consideration by a small group of senior Ministers, whether or not formally designated as a Cabinet Committee, would have been able to explore more thoroughly:

- what the UK was seeking to achieve;
- how its national interests might best be served;
- the options available and their advantages, disadvantages and risks; and
- whether offering Package 3 to the US at that time was the best option in the circumstances.

994. There would also have been advantages in ensuring the MOD analysis was examined by a small group of senior officials before advice for Ministers was finalised.

995. Mr Blair had told Cabinet on 24 October that "military options" would be discussed in due time. Cabinet did not discuss military action until 17 March 2003.

UK pursuit of the northern option

Discussions with the US about Turkey's position

996. Following the agreement to offer Package 3 to the US, the UK military preference for land operations remained in the North although, by early November, the US was suggesting that the UK should look at other options.

997. On 31 October, Mr Hoon telephoned Secretary Rumsfeld to inform him of the decision to offer Package 3 and that a UK contribution might comprise a divisional HQ,

³⁹¹ Public hearing, 30 November 2009, page 52.

an armoured brigade, artillery and logistic support for an operation in the North.³⁹² That was, “of course, all subject to final political decisions here on recourse to military action”. Mr Hoon asked to be alerted to any slippage in US military planning timetables.

998. Referring to the potential difficulties with Turkey, Secretary Rumsfeld asked if UK forces would be available for operations in the South. Mr Hoon replied that the UK was open to ideas but had so far focused on the North because the US would have plenty of their own forces in the South and space would be limited.

999. Sir David Manning flew to Washington on 31 October for talks with Dr Rice, Mr Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, and Mr Armitage.

1000. Sir David advised Mr Blair that he had told Dr Rice that the UK “continued to plan for a possible UK military role in northern Iraq, if the shooting started”.³⁹³

1001. Sir David wrote that they had discussed:

- Whether a UK military force would be permitted to transit through Turkey.
- The fact that “the UN inspection timetable was now out of sync with the timetable for possible military action beginning in early January”. He had asked “whether we might now be looking at the second of the original ‘windows’ ie a campaign next winter rather than this”. That had not been ruled out but the conversation had shifted to the prospects for internal regime change sparing the need for military action. The best chance of securing that was “a very tough UN resolution accompanied by threatening military preparations, in the hope that Saddam’s system would implode under the strain”.

1002. Other issues discussed, including Sir David’s suggestion of “a new wariness at the heart of the [US] Administration”, are addressed in Section 3.5.

1003. Mr Rycroft reported a “strong impression” that the US expected “Turkish objections to a UK military presence to be insistent and difficult to overcome”. There had been a mixed response to the question of whether the US would be prepared to expend political capital helping the UK.³⁹⁴ Mr Rycroft added:

- Mr Armitage had told Sir David that the US would do “whatever is necessary” to get the UK into Turkey.
- Secretary Powell had told Sir David Manning on 1 November that he was unsure about Turkey’s real position and had “lots of military questions” about the northern route.

³⁹² Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 31 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Military Options’.

³⁹³ Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 3 November 2002, ‘Visit to Washington: Talks with Condi Rice’.

³⁹⁴ Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 1 November 2002, ‘Iraq: US views, 1 November’.

- “Less encouragingly”, Dr Rice had implied that the US would not be prepared to expend much political capital in securing Turkey’s agreement to a UK deployment through Turkey.

1004. The British Embassy in Washington reported on 1 November that it has been made abundantly clear to the US Administration that there were likely to be difficulties in mounting UK operations through Turkey, and the NSC and Secretary Rumsfeld had accepted this. Some senior voices in the US Administration were strongly advising the UK to consider other options.³⁹⁵

1005. In Washington on 5 November, Sir Kevin Tebbit pressed senior officials in the State Department, Pentagon and NSC to press the Turkish Government on UK military deployments in Turkey.³⁹⁶

1006. Sir Kevin argued that a UK contribution in the North “made the greatest political and military sense”, and that Turkish misgivings about a Kurdish state and lack of support for Turkey’s EU candidacy were “misplaced”. He had explained that all the UK’s planning had “thus far been predicated on the northern route” and the UK “had not considered alternatives”. He believed other options “would present both political and military problems”. The military package the UK was considering had been “tailored” to that role and “was not something that could be fitted in anywhere”.

1007. Senior members of the US Administration offered differing views on the strength of Turkey’s concern. Those in the Pentagon and NSC suggested that the UK should look at other options. One official in the NSC suggested that, if it was not feasible for the UK to operate from the South or West, it was “imperative” that the UK should tell the US “as clearly as possible”.

1008. Sir David Manning and Mr Powell were concerned by the position Sir Kevin had taken.

1009. Mr Powell asked: “Why on earth has he gone down this track?”³⁹⁷

1010. Sir David replied: “I wish I knew. The MOD seem to have their own agenda. I can only assume they are mad keen still on their northern option (Package 3).”³⁹⁸

1011. Mr Powell wrote that he would talk to Mr Hoon.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Telegram 1429 Washington to FCO London, 1 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

³⁹⁶ Telegram 1446 Washington to FCO London, 6 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

³⁹⁷ Manuscript comment Powell on Telegram 1446 Washington to FCO London, 6 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

³⁹⁸ Manuscript comment Manning on Telegram 1446 Washington to FCO London, 6 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

³⁹⁹ Manuscript comment Powell on Telegram 1446 Washington to FCO London, 6 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

Military planning for the northern option

1012. When the Chiefs of Staff met on 6 November they noted that there were two options for the employment of a UK land force in the North: either integration in a division under US command or the formation of a separate division, for which the UK would provide the HQ and a square brigade, possibly sweeping up Coalition partners.⁴⁰⁰

1013. The meeting was also informed that:

- The total UK contribution “currently remained Medium Scale” and it did not follow that the UK contribution would increase in the event that Op FRESCO was no longer required.
- Ministers had “yet to be exposed” to work on a “Force-on-Mind and media strategy” to cover the period immediately after the UN resolution was adopted.
- Package 3 had been “well received by the US”.
- Until further notice, discussions on UK deployment through Turkey would be “taken forward through the US”.

1014. The Chiefs of Staff also considered a short paper produced by PJHQ on the practicalities of conducting military operations during an Iraqi summer.⁴⁰¹ The paper concluded that military operations would be possible but at reduced tempo and with increased risk.

1015. The Chiefs of Staff noted the advice and asked for a revised paper within a month.⁴⁰²

1016. Sir David Manning sent Mr Blair the MOD paper and Mr Bowen’s minute summarising its contents.⁴⁰³ Sir David also wrote that he had sought Secretary Powell’s views when he had been in Washington the previous week.

SPG PAPER, 6 NOVEMBER 2002

1017. A fifth version of the SPG paper ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’ was produced on 6 November.⁴⁰⁴ This set out three “broad Courses of Action (COA) to deliver the end state”:

- **Diplomatic & Coercion:** a UN resolution and inspections. The UK Government’s main effort (“ME”) was creating and sustaining the resolution of the international community. Saddam Hussein would need to be convinced that the international community was “serious, but equally that compliance” would “reap its rewards” and he was “not in a zero sum game”. The SPG judged

⁴⁰⁰ Minutes, 6 November 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴⁰¹ Minute Reith to PSO/CDS and SECCOS, 5 November 2002, ‘Warfighting in Iraq in the Summer’.

⁴⁰² Minutes, 6 November 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴⁰³ Manuscript comment Manning to Prime Minister, 8 November 2002, on Minute Bowen to Manning, 8 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Fighting in the Summer’.

⁴⁰⁴ [Paper \[SPG\], 6 November 2002, ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’.](#)

that a coercive strategy “**must offer carrots as well as sticks**” to “**achieve a change**” in the behaviour of the Iraqi regime “**without conflict**”. It also required a “**continued credible threat of force**”.

- **Diplomatic/Force:** UN inspections failed “at some point” and the international community resorted to the use of force “with UN authorisation”.
- **Force:** Early failure of the UN route and either no UN resolution or an inadequate one and a US-led Coalition resorting to the use of force without a UN mandate.

1018. The section on post-conflict issues had been substantially revised. It stated that the “lasting impression of Coalition legitimacy and success” would be “determined by the nature of the Iraqi nation” that emerged after the conflict. That had the potential to “prove the most protracted and costly” phase of the campaign.

1019. In its summary of the implications of the post-conflict phase for military planning, the paper stated:

- “• The impact of any enduring commitment on other operations would be significant. A recommendation on the size of force the UK is prepared to commit must be prepared, at least for the key six months following any operation ...
- Planning for Resolution Phase operations must be complete before the start of offensive operations. Any UK land force HQ must have the capacity to conduct offensive and Resolution Phase operations concurrently.
- ... clarity on post-Resolution Phase and likely UK contribution will be needed before operations commence.”

1020. The post-conflict issues raised by the SPG are addressed in Section 6.4.

1021. A new section addressed the problems the Coalition would face if Saddam Hussein adopted a “Fortress Baghdad” strategy. The SPG stated that the Coalition could not “engage in drawn out urban conflict”:

“Loss of tempo, rising casualties and humanitarian efforts would undermine Coalition will to continue and rapidly alienate regional supporters.”

1022. The SPG proposed:

- maintaining the moral and legal high ground by minimising civilian casualties, collateral damage and own casualties;
- trying to avoid fighting in built up areas and to “guard and bypass” towns and cities, including denying access to Baghdad, during offensive operations;
- attempting decapitation of the regime;
- isolation of security forces still loyal to the regime and subversion through “aggressive” information and psychological operations;
- dominating the rest of the country and implementing the “resolution phase”;

- “when ready”, conducting “operations to complete the defeat of the surviving loyal elements”; and
- ensuring that a “massive humanitarian aid effort” was available “to provide life support to non-combatants”.

1023. Other new points identified in the paper included:

- Draft objectives for a northern option remained under consideration by the Pentagon.
- The UK was “seeking to place” force generation and preparation efforts “in an appropriate framework to determine their effect and timing” in the “Force on Mind campaign”.
- The adoption of the UN track meant that the timing of a military operation might “shift to the point of failure of UN processes” and might be required in “hot months”. The SPG’s initial assessment was that the UK would “**be able to continue operations**” but it was “feasible that, at some point”, the risk might “**become unacceptable**”.
- Mitigation measures were being identified to address the risk of attacks using chemical and biological weapons and residual hazards after the military campaign.
- The CENTCOM plan included “sequential ground attack into Iraq from SE Turkey to coincide with the main effort attack of V Corps forces in the South ... the northern option ... built upon the 4th Infantry Division of the US Army”. That might “include UK Package 3 forces pending political decision”. Command and control procedures and the likelihood of delivering a Corps Headquarters for the force had “yet to be determined”.

1024. The preference for the northern option was stressed by Major General Robin Brims, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 1st (UK) Armoured Division, when he met Lieutenant General David McKiernan, Commander, Coalition Forces Land Component Command, on 10 November.⁴⁰⁵ Although possible operations in the South were discussed, Maj Gen Brims reported that Lt Gen McKiernan and his superiors wanted UK forces to be used in the North.

1025. Brigadier Albert Whitley was deployed to Lt Gen McKiernan’s HQ in Kuwait in early November as Senior British Land Advisor (SBLA).⁴⁰⁶ He was “involved in planning for UK military action and participation” and asked by Lt Gen McKiernan, in the absence of a dedicated Corps headquarters, to lead a joint UK/US team to plan an attack from Turkey.

1026. On 11 November, Maj Gen Fry asked for more guidance on the likely Phase IV tasks for the UK; and whether he should assume that a general role in Phase III

⁴⁰⁵ Minute GOC 1(UK) Armd Div to CJO, 10 November 2002, ‘Meeting with Lt Gen McKiernan (CFLCC)’.

⁴⁰⁶ Statement Whitley, 25 January 2011, page 3.

implied involvement in Phase IV.⁴⁰⁷ If so, he asked where the UK would want to be. After highlighting some of the advantages and disadvantages of the North and South, he asked whether the UK would be prepared to be involved in operations against Baghdad.

1027. The MOD has been unable to locate any response to this request.⁴⁰⁸

Adoption of resolution 1441

Resolution 1441 was adopted on 8 November 2002.⁴⁰⁹

The content of the resolution and the Explanations of Vote provided by the members of the Security Council are addressed in Section 3.5.

US REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FROM ALLIES

1028. The US asked the UK and other allies for military support on 15 November.

1029. The US formally requested UK and other allies' support on 15 November on the grounds that "planning for potential military action is both necessary to increase the pressure on Iraq to comply with the will of the international community and prudent in the event it again refuses to do".⁴¹⁰

1030. The US request, which was handed to Mr Hoon on 18 November, included:

- "full access, basing and overflight at bases in Britain, Diego Garcia and Cyprus";
- an armoured division (minus);
- special operations forces;
- "Royal Navy and Air Force units, including maritime patrols and aircraft";
- explosive ordnance disposal;
- "Financial/material resources for a military campaign and for post-conflict efforts";
- "constabulary forces and humanitarian assistance as part of post-conflict stability efforts"; and
- "nuclear/biological/chemical defense assets".

1031. Mr Hoon replied to the US request on 26 November.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Minute DCJO(Ops) to ACDS(Ops), 11 November 2002, 'COS COA Paper: Military Strategic Guidance'.

⁴⁰⁸ Letter MOD to Iraq Inquiry, 1 November 2012, [untitled].

⁴⁰⁹ UN Security Council resolution 1441 (2002).

⁴¹⁰ Letter Williams to McDonald, 18 November 2002, 'Iraq – US Request for UK Support' attaching Paper, 15 November 2002, 'Request for UK Support'.

⁴¹¹ [Letter Hoon to Farish, 26 November 2002, \[untitled\] attaching Paper \[undated\], 'United Kingdom Response to United States Government Talking Points delivered on 18 November 2002'](#).

1032. The key points were that the UK:

- Assured the US “of its continued determination to see the disarmament of Iraq, by peaceful means if at all possible, but by force if necessary”.
- Applauded “the leadership shown by the US Administration” and congratulated it on the “successful negotiation ... of resolution 1441”. The unanimity of the Security Council had sent “a powerful message from the international community to Iraq” which would be “strongly reinforced by the US Administration’s initiative to build and sustain the widest possible support for any further action that may prove necessary”.
- Confirmed that the “forces and facilities listed in the US request” were “available as a basis for planning” and were those that the UK “would expect to make available”. Military staff and officials would “remain ready to ... engage fully in further detailed planning and development of military options, including refinement of the potential UK contribution within the broad scale of effort ... indicated”.

1033. Mr Hoon commented that the issue of UK support to military action had “been the subject of bilateral work for some time” and he had, therefore, not repeated the detail. He was “very grateful for the excellent access” given to the UK and was “keen to maintain the close co-operation” that had “already been established”.

PJHQ’S PROPOSAL TO EXPLORE OPTIONS IN THE SOUTH

1034. After the adoption of resolution 1441, significant questions about Turkey’s position remained.

1035. Mr Westmacott reported that a Turkish statement on 8 November had welcomed the adoption of resolution 1441 and that it hoped Iraq would comply quickly; and that there was relief that the resolution made “war a little less likely”.⁴¹²

1036. PJHQ reported on 11 November that Maj Gen Fry was concerned that the difficulties with Turkey had not been fully acknowledged.⁴¹³ The paper being developed for the Chiefs of Staff should, therefore, examine both northern and southern options.

1037. No discussion of Iraq is recorded in the minutes of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 13 November.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Telegram 416 Ankara to FCO London, 12 November 2002, ‘Iraq: UNSCR 1441: Turkish Reactions’.

⁴¹³ Email MA/DCJO to MA1/DCDS(C), 11 November 2002, ‘Meeting with Lt Gen McKiernan’.

⁴¹⁴ Minutes, 13 November 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

1038. Mr Hoon was advised on 14 November that:

“While it seemed likely that Turkey would accept US forces, negotiations would be protracted. The extent to which the US would press the Turks on our behalf was not clear.”⁴¹⁵

1039. The “public posture on specific military preparations” should remain “low key”.

1040. Lt Gen Reith proposed that options in the South should also be explored.

1041. The paper considering options for a UK land contribution, submitted by Lt Gen Reith to the Chiefs of Staff on 18 November, advised that many of the assumptions behind the force levels in Package 3 offered to the Americans for planning purposes were no longer valid.⁴¹⁶ The US had “embraced the wider significance of the North” and allocated a US division to that axis, but it had withdrawn the offer of a US armoured brigade operating under UK command. The northern option would require a Corps level (three-star) HQ, which had “yet to be found”; and there was a US aspiration that the UK would contribute to and lead any “three-star” HQ in the North. The uncertainties about Turkish co-operation were also “a concern, preventing reconnaissance and creating logistic uncertainty”.

1042. PJHQ had, therefore, “developed” four potential courses of action “in line with current US thinking: one in the North and three in the South, which were “feasible, although they [would] all require provision of an additional manoeuvre brigade”.

1043. In the South, the UK would operate under US command. The paper expanded on the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action, including whether they offered a “high profile and worthwhile role” for the UK.

1044. Lt Gen Reith wrote:

“Without Turkish co-operation, UK forces may be either excluded from participation or, if agreement is reached late, have their ability to participate in the early stages of the campaign in the North compromised. This would impact on the strategic simultaneity the plan is designed to achieve. To date, UK policy has been to allow the US to act as the principal interlocutors ... The results ... have left our position uncertain.

“... If a decision is not made soon, the UK may need to engage directly with Tu[rkey] to achieve resolution.”

1045. Lt Gen Reith recommended discounting options of integrating a UK brigade within a US division in the North and a UK division operating independently of the US. He suggested that it would be “feasible” for the UK and US to construct a Corps

⁴¹⁵ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 14 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Briefing’.

⁴¹⁶ Minute CJO to DCDS(C), 18 November 2002, ‘Options for the UK Land Contribution’.

headquarters and that: “Command at 3-star level would restore the UK lead in the North, and also indicate tacit agreement for ownership of the northern Area of Operations (AO) in Phase IV.”

1046. Lt Gen Reith advised that the northern option:

“... could result in UK long-term leadership of the region during post-conflict operations: a position which the US would appear to favour. It would be a challenging area to control and develop, particularly in preserving regional stability between the Turks, Kurds and Sunnis. Whilst the UK has the necessary experience and capability, the challenges do need to be assessed in line with UK strategic guidance.”

1047. In relation to operations in the South, the paper identified three options for a UK division:

- Operating as a “manoeuvre formation” within US V Corps.
- Operating as a “manoeuvre formation” within US I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF).
- Operating as a “second echelon force” within US V US Corps.

1048. The paper considered that:

- Command and Control arrangements would be “less complex than in the North”.
- The “shortened and simplified LOC [lines of communication] make all southern COA attractive ... However, it should be recognised that US plans are well advanced in the South, there is very limited logistic space available ... deployment would require considerable synchronisation with the US.”
- “A post-conflict positioning of the UK division in the South could be attractive. The range of problems appears less-complex and diverse, the long-term force structure requirements could be reduced and local conditions are likely to be more conducive to development and influence. The northern ... Gulf ... is also a traditional area of UK influence.”

1049. Lt Gen Reith concluded:

- Four options were “achievable” and offered “worthwhile tasks”, but the UK needed to “reduce risk in its timetable for deployment and RSOI [Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration]”.
- All four feasible options would require “a UK division with integral capability for manoeuvre”.
- The northern option offered “a high profile and worthwhile role for the UK”.

- Without confirmation of Turkey's support, the UK would "need to continue planning for a southern option as well". The roles envisaged in the South were "worthwhile but less high profile" and there was an "implicit ... risk of the UK engagement in operations in Baghdad" in two of the three options.

1050. The Chiefs of Staff were asked to indicate which course of action in the South they would prefer, and were reminded to consider "where we wish to be at the end of Phase III, as this could impact directly on any UK involvement in Phase IV".

1051. The Inquiry has not seen any detailed analysis underpinning Lt Gen Reith's conclusion that southern Iraq would be more manageable in the post-conflict period than the North.

MOD ADVICE FOR NO.10, 19 NOVEMBER 2002

1052. The MOD told No.10 on 19 November that the option of a military campaign launched on 6 January 2003 appeared to have lapsed, and the timelines were "uncertain".

1053. Mr Hoon recommended that the UK should press the US for clarity on the Turkish position.

1054. If the UK had to "fall back" on a role in the South, it would be looking for a role in the invasion rather than providing follow-on forces.

1055. MOD concerns about the importance of post-conflict operations and the need for work on the implications for the UK approach to the campaign are addressed in Section 6.4.

1056. Following the visits to the US by Sir Kevin Tebbit and Adm Boyce and in advance of the NATO Summit in Prague on 21 November and the planned debate on Iraq in the House of Commons on 25 November, Mr Watkins sent Sir David Manning an update on military discussions with the US.⁴¹⁷ He set out the themes which had emerged and registered a number of concerns, including the need to press the US to clarify Turkey's position.

1057. Mr Watkins wrote that there was a need to "continue military preparations to underpin the diplomacy/inspection track, without bringing forces to an unsustainable level of readiness". There was "a sense ... that the realistic timetable for action was slipping" but there had been "no US political endorsement of any later date for planning purposes".

1058. Mr Watkins advised that the US continued to describe the northern front "as an essential part of the plan", but there was no clear agreement with Turkey "who had declined to be definitive pending the appointment of a new Government". The US might

⁴¹⁷ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 19 November 2002, 'Iraq: Military Planning after UNSCR 1441'](#).

be “in for a long and expensive negotiation” and it was clear that the US priority would be “to secure basing” for its “own ground forces”.

1059. Mr Hoon believed that the UK should “up the ante” with the US, and: “Press for clarity on the Turkish position, one way or the other ...”

1060. Mr Hoon wanted Sir David Manning to:

“... reinforce with Condi Rice the need for the President to try to unblock this. If we do have to fall back on a southern role we should try to ensure that it is as part of the main effort rather than as follow-on forces.”

1061. Addressing UK military preparations, Mr Watkins wrote that the option of a military campaign launched on 6 January 2003 seemed to have “effectively lapsed” and the timelines were “uncertain”. The US military position was described as “get ready, but not too ready”, because they did “not want to bring too large a force to too high a pitch of readiness”.

1062. Mr Hoon recommended continuing with military preparations to keep options open, and suggested that the debate in the House of Commons on 25 November provided an opportunity to make some public reference to them.

1063. There was “a sense in the US” of “two broad timelines in play, implying two different plans”. The first was a “high-impact event to which the US might feel the need to respond quickly at short notice”. The second was a decision that a material breach had occurred which would be followed by a “more deliberative build-up to military action”.

1064. Each scenario was “problematic”:

- The first would effectively hand the initiative to Saddam Hussein; it might provoke a rapid response, but that could not be decisive because it could not involve sufficient land forces to take control of Iraq, “unless ... it leads ... to regime collapse, a scenario in which the US seem to invest quite a lot of hope”.
- The second would give Saddam Hussein time which he “might be able to exploit diplomatically and militarily”. A deliberate campaign “would require some 60-90 days’ build-up, and the time will soon come when the question has to be confronted of whether it is sensible to contemplate fighting in the summer”. A “common understanding” needed to be reached with the US and plans “shaped accordingly”.

1065. Addressing the issue of “Timetable and Triggers”, Mr Watkins wrote:

“To some extent, triggers are now under Saddam’s control and so cannot be slotted into any firm timetable. Moreover, what constitutes a ‘violation’ and/or ‘material breach’ remains undefined: many in the US are reduced to saying ‘we’ll know when we see it’, which is not a suitable base for planning.”

1066. The MOD was also concerned that:

“Lack of clarity in US thinking about possible triggers for military action needs to be resolved quickly, particularly in relation to the No-Fly Zones.”

1067. If a Coalition aircraft was shot down, it would, “under long-standing plans, trigger a massive US response”, which the US might use to trigger a wider campaign.

1068. Mr Hoon recommended working “quickly to reach an agreed US/UK view on triggers ... well before we are confronted with it in practice”, and explaining to the US that hostility in the No-Fly Zones should be met only by “self-defence responses”.

1069. Mr Watkins also drew attention to the importance of planning for the “aftermath” of military action: “This needs to guide thinking on the conflict phase, for all sorts of reasons”. Mr Hoon believed that the UK should: “Continue trying to influence US thinking on the aftermath, recognising that this is not something which can be neatly separated from any conflict phase”.

1070. Copies of Mr Watkins’ letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Mr Brown, and to Mr Bowen.

1071. The discussion within the UK Government on the timetable and triggers for military action following the adoption of resolution 1441 is addressed in Sections 3.6 and 5.

UNCERTAINTIES ABOUT THE NORTHERN OPTION

1072. Adm Boyce decided on 20 November that it would be premature to discuss alternative options with the US while the UK was still trying to force a decision from Turkey. The northern option remained the firm preference of the Chiefs of Staff.

1073. The Chiefs of Staff also asked Lt Gen Reith to look at the option of providing two UK brigades.

1074. On 20 November, the Chiefs of Staff considered the options identified by Lt Gen Reith on 18 November.⁴¹⁸

1075. The Chiefs of Staff were informed that the US had offered the UK a light brigade, but that was not suitable for the operation in the North. Lt Gen Reith would examine other options including the provision of two UK triangular brigades.

1076. Adm Boyce asked for:

- further advice on the northern force structure, including the employment of the ARRC; and
- “... further clarification on timelines before considering the Southern COAs.”

⁴¹⁸ Minutes, 20 November 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

1077. Adm Boyce “was also clear that while the main effort was to force a decision from Tu[rkey] ... the time was not right to open up alternative planning options with the US”.

1078. The Chiefs of Staff also discussed:

- the debate on potential triggers for military action;
- the possibility of the rapid collapse of the Iraqi regime without military action; and
- the need to respond quickly to the formal US request for UK forces. That would be “unspecific” and would refer to further discussions in December.

1079. In CENTCOM, Maj Gen Wilson continued to tell his colleagues that the UK was “North, North and North”, “but that it would be imprudent to dismiss other options if the Turkish door were to remain closed indefinitely”.⁴¹⁹

1080. On 21 November, Mr Blair confirmed that the UK would provide military support to the US if that was necessary.

1081. Mr Blair met Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Leader of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi Justice and Development Party (AKP), in London on 20 November.⁴²⁰ Mr Blair congratulated Mr Erdoğan on his election victory, and in the context of discussions on a range of issues, including UK support for EU membership for Turkey, the record of the meeting states they agreed the UK and Turkey “should keep in close contact over Iraq”.

1082. In his bilateral discussion with President Bush at the NATO Summit in Prague on 21 November, Mr Blair confirmed that the UK would support the US militarily if necessary.⁴²¹

1083. In response to a request for his views on military planning, Mr Blair said there was a need to be ready for military action early in the New Year and as soon as possible after it became clear that there was a material breach.

1084. In a meeting with Mr Hoon, Secretary Rumsfeld suggested that the UK should look at using its forces elsewhere than the North.⁴²²

1085. Mr Hoon replied that “deploying our forces to, say, Kuwait would affect our timelines”.

1086. The meeting agreed Adm Boyce’s suggestion that the UK “should keep planning with CENTCOM for a northern operation, while looking at possible fallbacks”.

⁴¹⁹ Minute Wilson to CJO, 20 November 2002, ‘Iraq Contingency Planning and Related Issues’.

⁴²⁰ Letter Rycroft to Sinclair, 20 November 2002, ‘Turkey: Prime Minister’s Meeting with Erdoğan, 20 November’.

⁴²¹ Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 21 November 2002, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with President Bush, 21 November’.

⁴²² Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 22 November 2002, ‘Bilateral with Donald Rumsfeld: 21 November 2002’.

1087. Mr Hoon also sought clarification of the potential US response if Iraq shot down an aircraft, reminding Secretary Rumsfeld of the UK interpretation of the legal constraints on any response.

House of Commons debate, 25 November 2002

The House of Commons voted on 25 November to “support” resolution 1441 and agreed that, if the Government of Iraq failed “to comply fully” with its provisions, “the Security Council should meet in order to consider the situation and the need for full compliance”.⁴²³

Mr Blair’s statement to the House of Commons on 25 November and the subsequent debate on Iraq, which was opened by Mr Straw, are addressed in Section 3.6.

Before the debate, Mr Hoon agreed with Mr Blair and Mr Straw that, when he closed the debate, he should address the state of contingency planning, including the potential requirement for the call-up of military reserves. That would:

“... be done in a low-key way, making clear that this was precautionary planning and that the context was our continued hope that Iraq would disarm peacefully in co-operation with the inspectors.”⁴²⁴

In his speech closing the debate, Mr Hoon stated:

“Neither Britain nor the United States is looking for a pretext for military action, which is always a grave step, and which will certainly be a last resort. No member of the Government will risk British lives unnecessarily.”⁴²⁵

Mr Hoon stated that continuing with “the prudent preparations and planning necessary for military action” was the “only responsible course”. But that did “not mean a commitment to take such action in any circumstances”. It did mean that appropriate steps were being taken “to ensure that British forces” were “ready”, and that they had “the training, equipment and support” that they would need “to undertake military action, should it prove necessary”.⁴²⁶

Addressing the US request to “a number of countries” for “support in the event that military action proves necessary”, Mr Hoon stated:

“Although no decision has been made to commit UK forces to military action, discussions with the US will continue so that an appropriate British contribution can be identified should it prove necessary.

“... There is no inevitability about military action. The US is clear about the fact that the issue is Iraqi disarmament ...

“Those who have accused the US of unilateralism should consider carefully. The US Government have followed an impeccably multilateral approach, first in building unanimous Security Council support for resolution 1441 and now in seeking to build broad-based support for military action should it be required ... within the limits

⁴²³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 November 2002, column 132.

⁴²⁴ Letter Rycroft to Watkins, 22 November 2002, ‘Iraq, Military Planning After UNSCR 1441’.

⁴²⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 November 2002, column 123.

⁴²⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 November 2002, column 124.

imposed by these uncertainties, we have been considering the contribution we might be able to make if military action ultimately becomes necessary.

“At this stage it would be inappropriate to go into details of the size and shape of forces that might be involved, for two specific reasons. First, as events unfold and time passes, plans will inevitably evolve. It would be misleading to describe specific force packages today as if they had some permanent and definitive status ... Secondly, as I am sure the House appreciates, I have no intention of assisting Saddam Hussein’s contingency planning.”⁴²⁷

1088. By late November, there was growing recognition that the delay was likely to affect the UK’s readiness to deploy ground forces in time to participate in the initial stage of the US plan; and that Turkey’s agreement might not be forthcoming.

1089. Maj Gen Fry’s advice, submitted to Adm Boyce on 22 November, suggested that it would take some four months from the order to deploy for the northern option (whether Package 2 or 3), and more than five months for the southern option.⁴²⁸

1090. Maj Gen Fry provided a discussion paper on the potential UK response to a Running Start to military operations on 25 November.⁴²⁹ He asked the Chiefs of Staff to confirm if it wished the UK to be involved in early action against Iraq and the extent to which the UK should seek to match US timelines for the northern axis.

1091. The paper stated that the UK’s ability to match US timelines for Package 3 and the Amphibious Ready Group was “in doubt”, but the UK position was “recoverable” if a range of measures were “taken in the near future to reduce the overall risk and time”. Early notification of the forces involved and availability of civilian shipping were identified as the most critical measures.

1092. Maj Gen Fry wrote that much of the information had been provided orally and the paper lacked some of the detail which would normally be required by the Chiefs of Staff.

1093. In a manuscript comment to Adm Boyce, one of his staff wrote that:

- The UK “could look v. silly if we could not take part in a running start”.
- There was: “No argument for not starting” preparations for the call-out of Reserves.

⁴²⁷ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 November 2002, columns 126-127.

⁴²⁸ Minute DCJO(Ops) to PSO/CDS, 22 November 2002, ‘Potential Operations in Iraq – Northern and Southern Timelines’.

⁴²⁹ Paper DCJO(Ops) [to COSSEC], 25 November 2002, ‘The UK Response to a Running Start for Combat Operations – COA2’.

- The deployment of the Amphibious Ready Group was “still to be decided”. Demand for logistics and support helicopters “concurrent with Package 3” would “detract from main effort for dubious military effect”.⁴³⁰

1094. In his manuscript comments Adm Boyce indicated his agreement with the first two comments above, and wrote “Yes” alongside the request for confirmation that the UK should be involved in early action.⁴³¹

1095. The Chiefs of Staff meeting on 27 November was informed that:

“If the UK wished to match US timelines and UK political expectations, Ministerial approval for a more forward leaning military posture was required.”⁴³²

1096. Maj Gen Fry stated that neither the ARG, which was “an integral part” of the US plan, nor Package 3 could meet US aspirations for a Running Start. PJHQ had identified a series of measures which would allow them to “close towards or match US timelines”.

1097. The Chiefs of Staff invited PJHQ to refine its advice with a view to seeking convergence with US timelines.

1098. A “Post Meeting Direction” instructed PJHQ to provide advice “on the advantages and disadvantages of deploying the ARG”, including deploying “manoeuvre elements” [Royal Marines] and the implications for chartered shipping.

1099. In Adm Boyce’s absence, the meeting was chaired by ACM Bagnall.

1100. The MOD informed No.10 on 29 November that the US political strategy remained unclear but CENTCOM was seeking to reduce the lead time between a political decision and military action.

1101. A gap was developing between the readiness of US and UK forces, which would need visible action to address.

1102. If Turkey did not agree to UK forces, more political guidance would be needed before the MOD could go far in developing other options.

1103. Sir David Manning wrote to Mr Watkins on 27 November, requesting a note for Mr Blair on the progress of US planning.⁴³³ He asked: “Are our Chiefs of Staff content with the US plans and ready to support them?” He also asked how the UK would participate if the northern option was not available.

⁴³⁰ Manuscript comment [unattributed] to CDS on Minute DCJO(Ops) to COSSEC, 25 November 2002, ‘The UK Response to a Running Start for Combat Operations – COA2’.

⁴³¹ Manuscript comment CDS on Minute DCJO(Ops) to COSSEC, 25 November 2002, ‘The UK Response to a Running Start for Combat Operations – COA2’.

⁴³² Minutes, 27 November 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴³³ Letter Manning to Watkins, 27 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

1104. Advice to Mr Hoon on a draft response noted that it:

“... deliberately does not answer directly the question, (which looks like a hospital pass), whether the COS [Chiefs of Staff] are content with the US plans and ready to support them ... CENTCOM ... is keeping options open. It is probably misleading to think of the US as having firm plans ... We also need to beware of allowing the tail to wag the dog. What we need to know first is whether the US government has a political plan and strategy with which HMG is content.”⁴³⁴

1105. The MOD advised Sir David Manning on 29 November that it was “misleading to talk of firm ‘plans’”, not just because of unresolved practical issues such as Turkish co-operation, but also because the US political strategy remained “unclear”.⁴³⁵

1106. There had been “a significant shift in US military planning” as CENTCOM sought to “reduce the lead times between a political decision and military action”. Secretary Rumsfeld had signed a number of deployment orders to take effect in early January, and the US was “increasingly moving beyond pure planning into at least some actual forward deployments”. That would have the advantages of improving the prospects of any “running start” operation, and provide better options for a rapid stabilisation mission in the event that the Iraqi regime suddenly collapsed, while keeping open the possibility of more deliberate build-up before the summer of 2003.

1107. A “gap” between the UK’s readiness and that of the US was:

“... now beginning to develop ...

“... the employment of the amphibious element (yet to be endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff) of Package 2 and the additional land contribution in Package 3 are falling increasingly behind their US counterparts in terms of readiness.”

1108. As any steps to close that gap would require “further visible activity”, Ministers would “need to consider how far they are prepared to go and how they would present such steps publicly, against a background of continuing uncertainty, including on Turkey”.

1109. The MOD stated that US planning on the North remained “very much work in progress”, but it was “clear that a UK-led division could play a significant role, both during and immediately after conflict”: “But the foundation for this – Turkish acceptance of a UK force – is not in place.”

1110. If Turkey was ruled out:

“... we would need to discuss here and with the US what other role we could play; in particular, whether ... they would be prepared to adjust their timings and sequencing

⁴³⁴ Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State, 29 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning – Interim Response to Sir David Manning’.

⁴³⁵ Letter Watkins to Manning, 29 November 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.

in such a way as to allow a UK force to play a role in the main effort. But we are conscious that the current Package 3 was constructed and agreed on the premise of playing a role in the North, and more political guidance would be needed before we could go far in developing other options.”

1111. On 3 December, Mr Straw was warned that Turkey might not be able to meet all requests for support.

1112. Mr Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Secretary of Defense, met Mr Hoon on 2 December in London.⁴³⁶

1113. The record of the meeting noted that it would be difficult to secure the UK’s passage through Turkey, although there were some indications that might be possible as long as UK forces did not linger long in northern Iraq. Mr Hoon was reported to have said that would suit the UK as they wished to get forces in and out quickly.

1114. At a separate meeting with Sir Kevin Tebbit and Adm Boyce the same day, Mr Wolfowitz asked if there would be a delay if UK forces were switched to the South.⁴³⁷ Adm Boyce:

“... responded that there was no plan for the South, and that if [Gen] Franks wanted [the] UK in [the] South, he would have to articulate what the scope and task would be. All that could be said with any confidence was that a time premium would have to be paid.”

1115. In a meeting in Ankara on 3 December, Mr Straw told Mr Abdullah Gül, the Turkish Prime Minister, that the UK would probably make similar requests to the US for Turkish support.⁴³⁸ Mr Straw was warned that the Turkish Government would need the permission of Parliament to allow foreign troops on Turkish soil and that Turkey might not be able to meet all requests; if the UK were planning to send forces it must talk to Turkey.

1116. Mr Westmacott observed that there was “no doubt that Turkish co-operation would be hard to obtain in the absence of a new SCR [Security Council Resolution] specifically authorising military action”.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶ Letter Watkins to McDonald, 2 December 2002, ‘Meeting with Wolfowitz – 2 December 2002’.

⁴³⁷ Minute SECCOS to PSO/CDS and PS/PUS, 2 December 2002, ‘Visit to UK of US Deputy Secretary of Defense – Record of MOD/FCO/Cabinet Office Roundtable Meeting – 2 Dec 02’.

⁴³⁸ Telegram 457 Ankara to FCO London, 3 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Meeting with Turkish Prime Minister, Ankara, 3 December’.

⁴³⁹ Telegram 462 Ankara to FCO London, 4 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Visit to Ankara: Overview’.

JIC Assessment, 6 December 2002: 'Iraq: Military Options'

1117. A JIC Assessment of Iraq's military options on 6 December confirmed that a massive coalition ground force would be required to be certain of toppling Saddam Hussein and highlighted the possibility of Iraqi attacks on Coalition Forces in the event of a phased start to a military campaign.

1118. At the request of the MOD, the JIC evaluated Iraq's military capabilities and "what military options Iraq has, and which it is likely to pursue a) during Coalition air strikes and b) during a Coalition ground attack".⁴⁴⁰

1119. In the JIC discussion on 4 December, the draft was described as "an important paper which highlighted the gaps in our knowledge". The judgements were based "largely on a mixture of observation and past experience", but the Assessment "did not quite do justice to the intelligence"; the judgements "could be made more confidently". The Assessment needed to bring out more clearly the risks of a phased attack and unpack the risks involved in possible scenarios, such as the possible use of CBW before Coalition Forces were properly assembled and urban fighting: "Nothing short of a massive deployment would guarantee overthrowing the regime."⁴⁴¹

1120. In the Assessment issued on 6 December, the JIC's Key Judgements were:

- Saddam Hussein would "initially seek international pressure to halt Coalition [military] action". If that failed, he would "seek to inflict serious casualties on Iraq's neighbours and on coalition forces in order to undermine the Coalition's will to fight on".
- Saddam Hussein "would use chemical and biological weapons (CBW) if he faced defeat. He might also use them earlier in a conflict, including against coalition forces, neighbouring states and his own people. Israel could be his first target."
- Iraq had "contingency plans to weather coalition air strikes while maintaining government control over the country. Iraq's integrated air defence system would be overloaded by an all-out Coalition attack and would quickly become far less effective ..."
- "A ground attack might fracture Saddam's regime, but only a massive Coalition force is guaranteed to topple him. The smaller the initial Coalition force, the more likely Iraqi forces are to resist. A phased Coalition attack could allow Iraq to claim military successes."
- "If the Special Republican Guard and Republican Guard [RG] remained loyal and effective they could inflict serious casualties on Coalition Forces in urban warfare."

⁴⁴⁰ [JIC Assessment, 6 December 2002, 'Iraq: Military Options'](#).

⁴⁴¹ Minutes, 4 December 2002, JIC meeting.

- “Other Iraqi responses might include seizing hostages as ‘human shields’; using non-lethal BW in a deniable manner; suicide attacks; or a ‘scorched earth’ policy with the aim of creating a humanitarian or environmental catastrophe. At some point, motivated by revenge, Saddam would seek to inflict the maximum damage on his enemies, whether Iraqi or outsiders.”⁴⁴²

1121. The JIC stated that the paper was “not intended to be a comprehensive review of all Iraq’s options”.

1122. The JIC assessed that Saddam Hussein knew that “an Iraqi military victory over a US-led Coalition was implausible”. If attacked, he would “initially seek international pressure to halt Coalition action”. If this failed, he would seek to “drag out the fighting” and “would be increasingly likely to use chemical or biological weapons ... to undermine the Coalition’s will”.

1123. The assessment of Iraq’s ballistic missiles and chemical and biological weapons is addressed in Section 4.3.

1124. The JIC assessed Iraq’s options during Coalition air strikes and during a ground campaign.

1125. On the former, the Assessment stated that:

- Iraq had “contingency plans to weather Coalition air strikes while maintaining government control”, but its air defence system would be overloaded by a Coalition attack.
- Iraqi airforce and naval capabilities were “very limited”.
- Iraq might attack Kurdish areas before a ground attack started for a number of reasons, including to “divert Coalition air effort” and to “engage in ground fighting earlier than it had planned”. Iraq’s ground options “would be severely limited” once the Coalition had established control of the air.

1126. A ground attack might fracture Saddam Hussein’s regime, but the JIC continued to judge that “only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam”. If the Coalition pursued a phased campaign (the “rolling attack”), the JIC stated that Saddam Hussein would have a number of options. He would “probably seek an opportunity to inflict casualties” including on internal “enemies” and he would “take advantage of every opportunity to cause the Coalition political problems”. The JIC judged that the smaller the initial Coalition force, the more likely Iraqi forces were to resist.

1127. The JIC anticipated that the Iraqi army could establish positions within urban areas, but “most R[egular] A[rmy] defences are likely to be constructed further forward, nearer Iraq’s borders, or along key roads and at junctions”. Physical barriers, “water barriers (created by flooding or by the destruction of bridges), minefields, or possibly

⁴⁴² [JIC Assessment, 6 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Options’](#).

even CBW-contaminated areas”, could be created “to channel Coalition Forces into urban areas or ‘kill zones where artillery, or CBW, would be used”.

1128. Iraq’s “strategy would rely heavily on a static defence, largely because the Iraqi military’s ability to conduct manoeuvre warfare is very limited, even in the R[epublican G[uard]”. If Iraqi defensive positions were:

“... left behind the front lines by a rapid coalition advance, many RA units would probably surrender rather than fight ... [P]rovided that the security and military organisations central to the regime’s survival ... remained effective, Saddam would accept the sacrifice of virtually any forces or territory ... Provincial cities would be defended, but ultimately ... only Baghdad would be politically vital, as its capture would be a final symbol of defeat of the regime. Although Iraqi forces would look for the opportunity to counter-attack, only a few RA units and the RG would be capable of doing so ... And we judge that Saddam would not be willing to risk the RG units held around Baghdad except in a final defence ...”

1129. The JIC identified that other Iraqi responses might include:

- seizing foreign hostages as “human shields”;
- CBW terrorism;
- using non-lethal BW agents in a deniable manner;
- suicide attacks; and
- a “scorched earth” policy with the aim of creating a humanitarian or environmental catastrophe.

1130. The JIC identified the policy implications as:

- “If an attack does not precipitate regime collapse and if Saddam’s key forces remain loyal, they could inflict damage and casualties on coalition forces, the Iraqi people or Iraq’s neighbours.”
- “A slow-start Coalition would increase these risks.”
- “Clear messages to the Iraqi military might reduce their willingness to obey orders to use CBW, but we cannot rely on this being the case.”

1131. A handwritten note from Sir David Manning to Mr Blair drew the Prime Minister’s attention to the risks of a phased attack – the “ugly start”.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴³ Note (handwritten) Manning to Prime Minister, 7 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Options’.

Agreement to visible preparations for military action starting in January

1132. On 5 December, the MOD sought Mr Blair's agreement for further and visible preparations to preserve its ability to be ready for an air campaign and amphibious operations by early March.

1133. In response to the instructions issued during and after the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 27 November, Lt Gen Reith submitted a paper outlining steps for aligning the UK's Force Packages with US timelines, for consideration by the Chiefs of Staff on 4 December.⁴⁴⁴ He warned that action was required or the UK might only be able to offer Package 2, without the Amphibious Task Group; and that Package 3 might have to be reconfigured. Other preparatory action would be needed "if we do not wish to miss the boat".

1134. The Chiefs of Staff noted on 4 December that decisions on visible preparations would be required by 7 December to meet a mid-February timetable for a political decision in the US.⁴⁴⁵

1135. A member of OD Sec reported to Sir David Manning that "it was clear from the discussion" that the US was planning for "a hybrid (or 'ugly') start to any military campaign".⁴⁴⁶ Gen Franks was "moving as many assets into theatre as quickly as is logistically possible, with a view to being in a position to launch military action from the middle of February".

1136. Mr Watkins wrote again to Sir David Manning on 5 December, setting out what the UK would need to do to be able to react in the timescales implied by its assessment of the US plans.⁴⁴⁷

1137. Summarising the letter, Mr Watkins wrote:

"... to keep options open for significant UK military participation ... we need to press ahead with further preparations. None of these would constitute a final commitment to military action and the initial ones can be done without further parliamentary announcement. But many of them would be visible, and our presentational posture will need to become more forward leaning."

1138. The US had "no formal position on the date by which they must be ready to act". It had a wide range of options, but assuming that a political decision to take military action on 15 February (known as "P Day"), the MOD expected the air campaign and amphibious operations to start in early March. The main ground effort would commence about 60 days after the decision, ie mid-April. The US military intention was to minimise

⁴⁴⁴ Minute CJO to COSSEC, December 2002, 'Operations in Iraq – Alignment with US Timelines'.

⁴⁴⁵ Minutes, 4 December 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴⁴⁶ Minute OD Sec [junior official] to David Manning, 4 December 2002, 'Iraq: Military Planning'.

⁴⁴⁷ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 5 December 2002, 'Iraq: Military Planning'](#).

the lead times for operations to allow the maximum time for the “UN/diplomatic process to unfold”. The MOD warned that US forces would reach a peak of readiness in February and that a “use it or lose it” argument might come into play in Washington.

1139. Turkey remained “a key uncertainty”. The MOD understood that basing for US land forces had not yet been agreed, but “preparatory activity (reconnaissance visits, etc)”, looked “like at least an amber light”. The Pentagon had told the MOD that Turkey had given “neither a definite Yes nor a definite No” to UK forces. Mr Straw had received a “similar response ... with some suggestion that their position might depend on the details of any UK request” (in his discussions on 3 December). Turkey and the UK “ought to” have bilateral discussions.

1140. The MOD was considering with the FCO the “best approach to securing Turkish agreement, taking into account our wider interests”. The MOD judged that there was unlikely to be any progress until after the meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen (12 to 13 December). Action could include a visit by Mr Hoon accompanied by Adm Boyce, who had “developed a good rapport with his opposite number”, and Sir Kevin Tebbit who would draw on “his extensive experience of Turkey”.

1141. It was “increasingly difficult, for both US and UK staffs, to plan and prepare in the abstract without knowing where the UK land package will be based”. While there were risks that Turkey could “interpret ... UK preparations as taking their acquiescence for granted”, the UK could not wait for an answer from Turkey if it wished “to remain aligned with US planning”. Although those preparations were “not particularly tied” to a northern option, there were presentational risks such as the media concluding that the UK was “all dressed up with no place to go”.

1142. The MOD stated that the steps required to bring the additional air and naval forces in Package 2 into line with US timescales were “relatively limited”, but a “significant readiness gap” was developing between US and UK “amphibious and land forces”.

1143. The actions proposed by the MOD included:

- Deploying additional naval forces for “maritime interdiction operations, force protection, defensive mine warfare and logistics support” around 22 January 2003.
- Nominating and informing units in the ATG and bringing their readiness to five days’ Notice to Move from the beginning of January and chartering four ships to support the ATG by 19 December, with the intention that it would deploy around 16 January.
- Bringing the RAF elements of Package 2 to 10 days’ Notice to Move or less on 27 December, and pre-positioning weapons and equipment in Turkey on 30 December.

- Commencing initial preparations, procurement and training for “earmarked elements” of the “land package” the following week and placing holding contracts on commercial shipping by 17 December.
- Planning for the mobilisation of Reserves “without actually proceeding to call-out”.

1144. At that stage:

- CENTCOM’s plans for the North required “the lead Division, currently 1 (UK) Armoured Division” to cross into Turkey in mid-April, “followed by the US 4th Infantry Division”. The option needed more work, including the possibility of a US brigade being seconded to the UK, “so the precise composition of the UK land package will have to be kept under review”. But as it had “the longest lead-time of all”, action to improve its readiness could not be delayed if the UK was “to have any chance of being ready from mid-February onwards”.
- The ATG comprised a Royal Marine Commando Group and HM Ships Ocean and Ark Royal, two destroyers or frigates, three Landing Ships Logistic (LSL) and support ships, which would operate (with the US) to conduct operations in the Northern Gulf and ashore from the beginning of the air campaign.

1145. The MOD warned that the steps would become visible and that the “current low-key” media handling which was “operating at the limits of credibility, would need to be replaced with a rather more pro-active approach”. The preparations would also need to be “viewed in the wider political context ... not least the progress of inspections and their reports to the UNSC, and the continuous assessment of Iraqi compliance”.

1146. The letter concluded that, unless the UK was “prepared now to foreclose military options”, Mr Hoon believed “that we need to proceed with the further preparatory steps” identified. That was “a question of cocking the pistol, not firing it” and the timelines would be adjusted if the US “were to shift its focus to later in 2003”. But the UK could not “afford to lose any more time if we are to have a chance of re-aligning our readiness with that of US forces”.

1147. Copies of the letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Mr Brown, and to Mr Bowen.

1148. In relation to Turkey, Sir David Manning commented:

“Recent indications on other channels are that Turks are very reluctant to budge on UK forces.”⁴⁴⁸

1149. During Oral Questions in the House of Commons on 9 December, Mr Hoon confirmed that the UK had responded to the US approach seeking support; and that

⁴⁴⁸ Manuscript comment Manning on [Letter Watkins to Manning, 5 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’](#).

preparations were continuing to enable UK forces “to participate in military action should that be required”.⁴⁴⁹

1150. Mr Hoon also assured the House that:

“... no military decisions whatsoever have been taken on military action against Iraq. That situation will be reported to the House should it change.”

1151. Gen Reith told the Inquiry:

“I ... briefed Geoff Hoon ... early in the week that we had until Friday to go to trade for ships; otherwise, we wouldn't meet the window that the Americans were potentially looking at before the real heat of the summer came in, in 2003. He said to me 'You have been telling me ... week by week that we have to do this, and now you are telling me you are giving me another deadline.' I said, 'this is the deadline'. He said 'You know, we need to keep our options open' ... I said 'Well, actually if we don't go to trade by the end of this week, then we don't have any options, we are not going'. He then went to the Prime Minister and we were then authorised to go to trade.”⁴⁵⁰

1152. On 10 December, Mr Johnson advised Mr Hoon on the options in the event of an “ugly start” and land force options if Turkey did not agree to transit.⁴⁵¹

1153. The land force options were:

- UK forces with the US main effort in the South;
- a follow-on force after the US main effort in the South;
- ground forces only for the aftermath; and
- not providing ground forces at all.

1154. Mr Johnson advised that only the first option would provide “the sort of high profile role in war-fighting on the ground which we have previously judged important”.

1155. Mr Johnson also wrote that there were limits to what could be done to improve readiness before a clear political decision. Calling out Reservists and deploying some force elements and equipment as soon as they were available would start “to use up some of our one-shot capabilities”. That:

“... would cause us problems if it turned out that the campaign was not going to start until later in the year. Deploying early also runs the risk of finding later that we are in the wrong locations.”

⁴⁴⁹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 9 December 2002, columns 13-14.

⁴⁵⁰ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, pages 35-36.

⁴⁵¹ [Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 10 December 2002, 'Iraq: Military Planning – Briefing for Meeting with Prime Minister on 11 December'](#).

1156. Sir Kevin Tebbit commented that advice to Mr Hoon rather underplayed “the issues surrounding the Amphibious Force and the point that they will probably be there earlier for an ‘ugly’ [start] than ground forces”.⁴⁵²

1157. Sir David Manning drew Mr Blair’s attention to the uncertainties if operations started before mid-February or Turkey refused to agree to the transit of UK troops.

1158. Sir David Manning advised Mr Blair that the “two key working assumptions” were that “US forces must be ready to move by 15 February”, and that they would be “able to transit Turkey”.⁴⁵³ The February date was “a guess”, but it fitted with what he had been told by Dr Rice “about putting pressure on Saddam and resolving the Iraqi issue sooner rather than later”. Sir David’s view was that Turkey would probably agree to the transit of US forces “in the end” but it was “not at all certain that agreement to US transit will extend to [the] UK”.

1159. Sir David recommended that Mr Blair authorise the MOD to proceed, although he commented that the letter was “silent on two major uncertainties”:

- what would happen if Saddam provoked a start earlier than 15 February; and
- whether there was a Plan B for UK forces in the event that Turkey refused transit.

1160. Sir David also raised concerns about the MOD’s media handling strategy which he thought they should discuss with Mr Campbell.

1161. Sir David proposed that Mr Blair should discuss the issues with Mr Hoon and possibly Adm Boyce after his (Sir David’s) return from Washington:

“In particular, they [the MOD] need to explain how we handle ‘ugly’ start; and what we do if the Turks won’t let us deploy for the northern option.”

1162. Mr Blair authorised the preparatory steps requested, including those relating to land forces, but asked that there should be “no change in media handling until a media strategy has been drawn up and agreed with No.10”.⁴⁵⁴

1163. Mr Blair also asked for a meeting with Mr Hoon explicitly to discuss how the UK “would handle a possible ‘ugly start’, and what our options would be for UK land forces if Turkey refused transit”.

1164. Mr Campbell’s advice on a media strategy is addressed in Section 3.6.

⁴⁵² [Manuscript comment Tebbit on Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 10 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning – Briefing for Meeting with Prime Minister on 11 December’.](#)

⁴⁵³ [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 6 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.](#)

⁴⁵⁴ [Letter Rycroft to Watkins, 9 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning’.](#)

Iraqi declaration, 7 December 2002

In response to resolution 1441, Iraq submitted a declaration of its WMD and missile programmes on 7 December.

The evaluation of the declaration is addressed in Sections 3.6 and 4.3.

1165. Mr Blair was advised on 11 December that there was impatience in the US Administration and it “looked intent on military action in February/March”.

1166. Sir David Manning and Sir Richard Dearlove had a joint meeting with Dr Rice and Mr George Tenet, the Director of Central Intelligence, in Washington on 9 December.⁴⁵⁵

1167. Sir David reported to Mr Blair that Dr Rice had “made no effort to hide the fact that the Administration would now be looking to build the case for early military action ... probably mid/late February as we suspected”. But she had “denied that military planning was dictating the timetable”.

1168. Mr Blair agreed that visible preparations for military action could begin in January 2003.

1169. Mr Blair, Mr Hoon, Adm Boyce, Sir David Manning and Sir Richard Dearlove met on 11 December.⁴⁵⁶

1170. In relation to military planning and the issues raised in Mr Watkins’ letter of 5 December, Mr Rycroft recorded that:

- Mr Hoon and Adm Boyce had “updated” Mr Blair “on US and UK military planning, including on the need to align the readiness of US and UK forces”.
- Mr Blair “was content that military preparations from January would become increasingly visible. These should be presented as sensible contingency preparations against the possibility that Iraq would not comply with UNSCR 1441.”

1171. The record of the meeting does not refer to any discussion of the options if Turkey refused transit for UK land forces.

1172. In his diaries, Mr Campbell wrote:

“We went over the various military options. It would be possible to do something fairly quickly but TB didn’t believe GWB wanted ‘an ugly start’ ... Geoff was very

⁴⁵⁵ [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq’.](#)

⁴⁵⁶ [Letter Rycroft to Watkins, 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Preparations’.](#)

much on the Rumsfeld end of the market at the moment. CDS was a bit more engaged. David felt that the US were in a very different position.”⁴⁵⁷

1173. Mr Hoon’s Private Office wrote to Mr Rycroft on 12 December, recommending a more pro-active media strategy to explain the military preparations.⁴⁵⁸ That included a proposal for a background briefing for defence correspondents and a briefing for “talking heads” on 17 December.

Agreement to a role for the Royal Marines in the initial stages of an invasion

1174. Notwithstanding continuing uncertainties over Turkey’s position, PJHQ advised on 9 December that ground operations might begin sooner than had previously been anticipated and sought endorsement for a role for the Amphibious Task Group early in the campaign.

1175. The possibility of deploying a Royal Marine Commando Group was first identified by Maj Gen Fry on 30 August 2002 when he advised that “a timely effect in the South could probably only be achieved by the ARG in support of the US MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force]”.⁴⁵⁹

1176. Advice submitted to the Chiefs of Staff on 19 September stated:

“Within the maritime element of Package 2 the Amphibious Ready Group with an embarked Commando offers a high readiness, flexible small scale land contribution ... [T]his force package can be sustained throughout, provided it is integrated with USMC [US Marine Corps] forces, and does not proceed beyond a point from which it can be sustained from ... afloat resources. This clearly restricts its operational utility, but does present an opportunity for ‘boots on the ground’, if the UK decision is not to commit beyond Package 2.”⁴⁶⁰

1177. Mr Watkins informed No.10 on 20 September that further work, on whether it would be possible to include a Commando Group in Package 2, was under way.⁴⁶¹

1178. By the middle of October, the Commando Group had been incorporated into Package 2.⁴⁶²

1179. On 9 December, Lt Gen Reith put forward a proposal seeking COS “endorsement for” an early role for the Amphibious Task Group in operations against Iraq.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

⁴⁵⁸ Letter Williams to Rycroft, 12 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning – Presentational Strategy’.

⁴⁵⁹ Minute Fry to DCDS(C), 30 August 2002, ‘PJHQ Update on Planning for Operations Against Iraq’.

⁴⁶⁰ [Paper SPG, 19 September 2002, ‘Iraq Package Options – Military Strategy Commentary’.](#)

⁴⁶¹ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 20 September 2002, ‘Iraq: Potential UK Contribution to Any Military Action’.](#)

⁴⁶² [Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 11 October 2002, ‘Iraq: UK Contingency Planning’.](#)

⁴⁶³ Minute CJO to COSSEC, 9 December 2002, ‘Contingent Operations by the UK Amphibious Task Group’.

1180. Lt Gen Reith stated that it “would bring considerable strategic exposure for the UK at the earliest stage of the campaign”. It “was consistent with UK objectives” and provided “valuable strategic, operational and presentational effect”.

1181. Lt Gen Reith advised that US ground operations against Iraq in the South were “now planned to commence simultaneously with the air campaign” and the US intention was to establish a second Sea Point of Disembarkation at Umm Qasr. This was “essential” to allow the rapid build-up of forces. The US plan entailed securing the “oil nodes”, the capture of Umm Qasr and the al-Faw peninsula, and clearance of mines in the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway.

1182. The plan had been developed with UK input, was “well advanced”, and was “heavily reliant” on the UK to achieve its aims. The ATG “would be based around” 40 Commando Group and the plan envisaged a two company helicopter-borne amphibious assault capability. The ATG’s landing craft would “provide flexibility” a “simultaneous ... surface assault”, but it was “more likely to be used for logistic support”.

1183. On 11 December, Maj Gen Fry advised the Chiefs of Staff that:

“The operation had important economic and environmental strands as well as being militarily essential. UK participation would enable the operation to complete 10 days sooner than if the US went alone and would ensure UK participation in land operations at P+ a few days, well ahead of the Main Effort in the North at P+60 ... For the operation to go forward, the areas of risk that needed to be managed were SH [support helicopters] and Medical ... The SH risk was not to be underestimated, but should be managed by sequencing ... Until the TU [Turkey] question was resolved, an operation in the North was a complete uncertainty and, by accepting risk on SH, the ATG task would ensure UK land participation.”⁴⁶⁴

1184. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that committing the ATG would ensure the UK’s participation in operations, although there would be risks if support helicopters were needed for operations in both the North and South.

1185. Adm Boyce directed that a submission to Mr Hoon should be prepared “summarising CJO’s paper in accordance with his instructions”.

1186. Mr Hoon’s agreement to planning for a discrete British role in securing a bridgehead in the initial stages of a military campaign was sought on 11 December.

1187. Adm Boyce briefed Mr Hoon on the planning for deployment of the ATG and development of a discrete British role in seizing a bridgehead.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Minutes, 11 December 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴⁶⁵ Minute Bowen to Manning, 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq: CDS Briefing of Mr Hoon’.

1188. The details of the proposal were set out in a minute to Mr Hoon's Private Office on 11 December.⁴⁶⁶

1189. Mr Hoon was advised that the ATG would "make a significant difference to the viability of the US plan". US ground operations were "now planned" to begin simultaneously with the air campaign, and that a second point of disembarkation was required "to enhance logistic flow and to prevent Iraqi destruction of key oil production and distribution nodes". That required the capture of Umm Qasr and the al-Faw Peninsula and the clearance of mines from the Khawr Abd Allah waterway. US planning for the operation had "developed with UK input", and was "well advanced". Unless the role was undertaken by the ATG, the US would have to "divert other forces, at a cost of several days' delay and increased risk", including a "strategic delay" to US follow-on operations in Basra and crossing the Euphrates, and an increased risk of the destruction of oil supplies.

1190. Iraqi options for defending the peninsula and hampering Coalition maritime forces included land-based anti-ship missiles, some artillery and mortar capability. An Iraqi troop presence of some 2,000-3,000 could "in theory be reinforced by the Iraqi 51st Mechanised Division based at az-Zubayr and al-Basra" but the US plan was "designed to prevent such reinforcement being attempted". If it were attempted, "coalition forces should be able to defeat it with ease".

1191. Mr Hoon was advised that the ATG would be "based around 40 Commando Group embarked in HMS Ocean, supported by HMS Ark Royal" and other ships. The force would be commanded by a Royal Navy officer, "who would command both the amphibious and MCM elements of the ATG". It "was possible, subject to further work" that US forces "could be placed under UK command".

1192. Mr Hoon was also advised that:

- "Previous concerns that it might not be possible to support the ATG concurrently with other elements of the UK force packages ... have been assuaged. Although supporting resources will be stretched, the stretch is judged to be manageable."
- Further work was "looking at the possibility of making a second RM Commando available for follow-on or aftermath operations".

1193. Mr Hoon was asked to:

- note that the Chiefs of Staff had endorsed securing the al-Faw Peninsula and mine clearance operations as "a role for the ATG, judging that it would be consistent with UK objectives and provide valuable strategic, operational and presentational effect"; and

⁴⁶⁶ [Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 11 December 2002, 'Iraq Military Planning: Amphibious Task Group'](#).

- agree that “subject to the usual caveat that no political decision has been taken to commit UK forces, US/UK planning should proceed on the assumption that the ATG would undertake this role”.

1194. Sir Kevin Tebbit pointed out the need to identify the operational risks.

1195. When he saw the advice, Sir Kevin Tebbit, who had not been present at the Chiefs of Staff discussion on 11 December, wrote:

“What sort of risk assessment is being prepared? I assume the S of S [Mr Hoon] is aware that these would be lead elements in an operation where we are unlikely to have the benefit of surprise or of choice of territory (I assume the Iraqis will be aware that this is where we would have to go, more or less?) We need to make sure that the operational risks are stated in a clear and balanced way.”⁴⁶⁷

1196. Details of the proposal were sent to Mr Blair on 12 December. The operational risks were not explicitly addressed.

1197. Mr Hoon’s Private Office wrote to No.10 on 12 December stating that the maritime contribution set out in Mr Hoon’s letter of 15 October included an ATG; and that “as the US military plan has developed, it is clear that there is an important role for this Group”.⁴⁶⁸ Mr Hoon had “mentioned this” to Mr Blair on 11 December.

1198. The MOD stated that the ATG, and 40 Commando Group Royal Marines, would play a key role “on Day 1 of offensive operations”, for operations:

“... possibly of high intensity and could bring forward the decisive employment of armoured forces by up to 10 days. It also reduces the risk of destruction of oil infrastructure and the associated environmental damage. It has strategic and operational effect, and provides an opportunity for UK land involvement even if agreement cannot be obtained from Turkey for the northern option.”

1199. Details of the proposal, set out in an Annex to the letter, largely reflected the MOD’s advice to Mr Hoon, but it did not address the likely Iraqi defences.

1200. Copies of the letter were sent to the Private Office of Mr Straw and to Mr Bowen in the Cabinet Office.

1201. After the Chiefs of Staff discussion on 18 December, Lt Gen Reith was directed to add HQ 3 Commando Brigade and a second Royal Marine Commando to the Amphibious Task Group.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ [Manuscript comment Tebbit on Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq Military Planning: Amphibious Task Group’.](#)

⁴⁶⁸ [Letter Williams to Manning, 12 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning – Amphibious Task Group \(ATG\)’.](#)

⁴⁶⁹ Minute Reith to CDS, 19 December 2002, ‘Land Options Paper – Revised’ attaching CJO Paper ‘Land Options – Revised’.

1202. Mr Hoon announced contingency preparations and the planned deployment of a naval task group on 18 December.⁴⁷⁰

1203. At Cabinet on 19 December, Mr Hoon informed his colleagues that it was “increasingly necessary to make visible preparations” and that “a naval task group led by HMS Ark Royal would depart for exercises”. The US had not yet finalised its military planning but it was “already building up a formidable force and would be ready to use it”.⁴⁷¹

1204. The Cabinet Conclusions contain no reference to the deployment of the ATG, the deployment of a Royal Marine Commando Group, or the role they might play.

1205. Mr Blair said that “there would be an opportunity to discuss Iraq in the New Year”.

1206. Mr Straw’s report to Cabinet on 19 December, on Iraq’s declaration in response to resolution 1441 and the next steps for the weapons inspectors, are addressed in Section 3.6.

1207. In a minute on 30 December, primarily dealing with land options, Mr Hoon was informed that: “Unless otherwise instructed, the Amphibious Task Group (ATG) will begin to deploy from 16 January ...”⁴⁷²

1208. The deployment of the ATG was announced on 7 January 2003.⁴⁷³

1209. **The deployment of 3 Commando Brigade was seen as a way for the UK to make a valuable contribution to the land campaign if transit through Turkey was refused.**

1210. **When 3 Commando Brigade deployed into action, however, the landings did not go entirely as planned. That is addressed in Section 8.**

Mr Hoon’s statement, 18 December 2002

1211. Mr Hoon made a further statement on contingency preparations for military operations against Iraq to Parliament on 18 December.⁴⁷⁴

1212. Mr Hoon reported that he had “authorised a range of steps to improve readiness”. He also referred to the planned deployment of a naval task group in early 2003 to the Gulf and Asia-Pacific region for visits and exercises. That was “a routine deployment” that happened about every three years, but it remained “available for a range of potential operations if required”. The task group would be led by HMS Ark Royal and a nuclear-powered submarine would be “assigned to the group for part of its deployment”.

⁴⁷⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 December 2002, columns 845-6.

⁴⁷¹ Cabinet Conclusions, 19 December 2002.

⁴⁷² Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 30 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Update’.

⁴⁷³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 January 2003, columns 23-25.

⁴⁷⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 December 2002, columns 845-6.

“In addition, a mine countermeasures group” would deploy ahead of the group “to undertake a series of exercises and port visits in the Gulf region”.

1213. Mr Hoon added that the UK was also considering the deployment of “additional maritime forces early in the new year to ensure the readiness of a broad range of maritime capabilities, should they be required”.

Continued pursuit of the northern option

1214. Mr Hoon was advised on 11 December not to push the issue with Turkey until early January, and that the UK was likely to face increasing US pressure to look at other options.

1215. Mr Bowen, who had attended the briefing for Mr Hoon on 11 December, reported to Sir David Manning that Adm Boyce had informed Mr Hoon that the absence of a northern front was not now regarded as a showstopper.⁴⁷⁵ He added that “the one certainty appears to be that an extra 45 days must be allowed for deployment if planning were to switch from the North to the South”.

1216. Further advice on Turkey, including options for high level UK visits and actions after the Copenhagen Summit was provided for Mr Hoon on 11 December.⁴⁷⁶

1217. Mr Johnson wrote that: “We need clarity as soon as possible” because if the response was positive it would take some time to “thrash out all the practical details” and, if the response was negative, alternatives needed to be considered.

1218. Mr Johnson advised that: “We should not push the issue hard until the Turks have said Yes to the US request”. Mr Hoon’s visit scheduled for 6 to 8 January looked like the right opportunity. If Mr Hoon did decide to “push the issue hard” then “experience (eg over ISAF) suggests that only high-level engagement is likely to make a difference”.

1219. On “handling” Turkey, Mr Johnson stated that the northern option “came from our strategic analysis in the first place” and that deployment timelines were: “45 days’ [sic] shorter than to the South (though we could in theory solve this problem by buying up more sealift)”. Assuming a political decision was made on 15 February, “air elements” would be in action from early March and the main ground effort from mid-April. Although the UK would want to pre-position air weapons at the end of the year, it “would not need to deploy additional air and ground forces until 15 February”. Turkey was less likely to help the UK than the US.

⁴⁷⁵ Minute Bowen to Manning, 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq: CDS Briefing of Mr Hoon’.

⁴⁷⁶ Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning – Turkey Handling’.

1220. Addressing the option of dropping the northern option and telling the US that the UK wanted to switch to the South, Mr Johnson's minute stated:

- **Advantages:** Reduces risk of wasting our time and getting bogged down in negotiation. Improves chances of getting into the South in time for February/March.
- **Disadvantages:** Although General Franks has said that he will fit us into the South if required, we have no US political guarantee that they will fix it, or that they will give us a role in the main effort. And it would perhaps be odd to rule Turkey out when we have not asked them the question ourselves."

1221. The minute advised that the US priority would be getting its own forces into Turkey. The UK was "likely to come under increasing US pressure to look at going elsewhere". As time passed, the US might "feel less bound to try and meet our preferences for a substantial role in the South".

1222. Sir Kevin Tebbit commented on a draft of the note that "depending on how Copenhagen goes, plus CDS soundings of [General Hilmi] Özkök [Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces]", Mr Hoon would need to visit and that he would probably accompany him.⁴⁷⁷

1223. Sir Kevin wrote that European forces on Turkish soil would be "harder" for them than US forces, although Turkey was "better disposed" towards the UK. Other issues included the impact on Turkey's relations with the Kurds and the UK's attitude to the Kurds in 1920-32.

SPG PAPER, 13 DECEMBER 2002

1224. The SPG paper of 13 December concluded that a medium scale land contribution would be the maximum the UK could provide concurrently with Op FRESCO and provided a new analysis on urban operations.

1225. On 13 December, the SPG produced a sixth version of the 'UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq' paper.⁴⁷⁸

1226. The paper stated that a contribution at medium scale "in each environment (Package 3)" would be "the maximum achievable concurrently with Op FRESCO". It would take 129 days for deployment to Turkey to be completed. The UK was "likely to be two months late for 1st echelon operations unless resources [were] committed now".

1227. The need for a "coercive" information operations campaign to "help create the conditions for Iraqi regime collapse" had been added to the list of UK Military Strategic

⁴⁷⁷ Manuscript comment Tebbit on Email Sec(O)-Iraq-S to DG OpPol-S, 10 December 2002, 'Draft note on Turkey Strategy for SofS'.

⁴⁷⁸ [Paper \[SPG\], 13 December 2002, 'UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq'](#).

Objectives, underpinned by a section identifying the objectives and themes of such a campaign.

1228. The paper included a new analysis on urban operations in Iraq, which were described as “the ‘vital ground’ of any campaign against Iraq”. In contrast with the analysis in the previous version of the paper, the SPG stated that it would “not be possible, or desirable” for land operations “to avoid towns and cities”, where: “Any factional conflict following regime collapse or during the aftermath” was likely to take place. Baghdad would be “a special case”.

1229. Addressing the Coalition response, the paper stated that it could not:

“... engage in drawn out urban conflict since it lacks the experience training and specialist equipment to do so without heavy casualties. Such casualties, combined with loss of tempo and humanitarian effects may undermine coalition will to continue by alienating home, international and regional supporters.”

1230. The paper identified the need to understand the “infrastructure, culture, population, terrain, threats” in cities and commented that the US had invested thousands of man hours in analysing Baghdad, “but that relatively little work has been done on Tikrit, a city more likely to be the responsibility of those on the northern axis”.

1231. The SPG identified information operations and physical separation and the control of movement into and out of cities as “key conditions” for engagement.

1232. The paper also added an objective to develop a “broad military alliance against Iraq”.

1233. The SPG identified the post-conflict phase as “strategically decisive” and called for it to be “adequately addressed” in any winning concept. That is addressed in Section 6.4.

Proposals to increase ground combat forces and options for the South

1234. Adm Boyce decided on 18 December that the option of a division with two brigades should be developed for deployment in the North.

1235. Options for enhancing the Amphibious Task Group and deploying a second light brigade and follow-on forces should also be developed for the South.

1236. Submitting a paper on “Land Options” on 16 December, Lt Gen Reith stated: “The UK must now confirm its land contribution in order that final and detailed planning can take place.”⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ Minute Reith to COSSEC, 16 December 2002, ‘Land Options for the UK’ attaching Paper CJO, ‘Land Options for the UK’.

1237. The Chiefs of Staff were invited to agree that participation in the land campaign was “consistent with UK objectives” and to endorse the “approach to the delivery of a heavy or light land package”.

1238. Lt Gen Reith advised that a UK contribution from the North remained the preferred course of action; but the “constraints of Op FRESCO dictate that the best force package available is based on a divisional headquarters and a single high readiness UK brigade”, with a second brigade provided by the US. The disadvantage would be that it would lack manoeuvre capability.

1239. The UK could not deploy a heavy force to the South quickly enough to meet the expected US timeline for the start of offensive operations, and “a UK contribution for Phase 3 combat operations could only be achieved by light forces”.

1240. Lt Gen Reith added:

“The UK could mount two light brigades, potentially commanded at divisional level, although the US would prefer to deploy them separately under US control.”

1241. Lt Gen Reith advised the Chiefs of Staff that the heavy and light force options were “mutually exclusive”; and that a decision on which to deploy was “wholly dependent on confirmation of the Turkish position and must be made no later than 15 Jan[uary] ... to allow the light force to be generated in time”.

1242. In the detailed paper, Lt Gen Reith stated that the US plan for the northern axis had “enhanced the role of the UK division” and the UK’s tactical analysis confirmed that a minimum of two brigades would be required for the northern option.

1243. The constraints of Op FRESCO and the likely US timetable meant that the best option the UK could provide comprised a divisional headquarters, an armoured brigade of four battlegroups, a manoeuvre support task force (MSTF) built around a second brigade headquarters with combat support elements, and the 2nd Light Cavalry Regiment offered by the US. That would require the deployment of “circa 30,000” UK personnel.

1244. If Turkey did not co-operate and the UK still wished “to make a significant and early contribution to operations against Iraq”, the UK could deploy two light brigades and possibly a divisional headquarters for the southern axis.

1245. One light brigade would be based on an expanded ATG, comprising the Headquarters of 3 Commando Brigade and “up to three battalions”. The headquarters and one commando group (based on 40 Commando Group) could be in place by the end of February. The remaining units would be deployed by air.

1246. A second brigade would be based on 16 Air Assault Brigade, with up to three battalions.

1247. There was also a possibility of deploying additional high readiness forces and the US had asked for additional logistics support.

1248. If a decision was taken by 15 January, UK combat forces could be in the theatre by late March.

1249. The disadvantages of that option would be that the UK would “potentially, not hold its own area of responsibility or operate at the divisional level of command”, and 16 Air Assault Brigade would need to be extracted from Op FRESCO duties.

1250. On 18 December, Lt Gen Reith informed the Chiefs of Staff that:

- The US had identified 15 February as the optimum date for combat operations and was seeking to bring together the start of the air and ground campaigns.
- The US campaign plan had: “changed to an information operation supported by manoeuvre rather than vice versa. The centre of gravity was now the oilfields rather than Baghdad. Securing the oilfields would provide a means of funding Phase IV operations and the rebuilding of the infrastructure. It would also help avert an environmental disaster ...”⁴⁸⁰

1251. In discussion of the “Land Options” paper, Gen Walker took the view that a UK division operating alone in the North “represented the most sensible military solution, but accepted that Op FRESCO commitments precluded it from being taken in its present form”; it was likely to be available only for Phase IV operations.

1252. The Chiefs of Staff endorsed Lt Gen Reith’s request to take forward exploratory work on options for the South.

1253. The Chiefs of Staff also discussed a paper by Maj Gen Fry on the provision of a UK stabilisation force in the event of early military or regime collapse leading to a “loss of control”.⁴⁸¹

1254. Maj Gen Fry defined “early collapse” as the collapse of the Iraqi regime less than 60 days after the political decision to take military action (“P Day”), and “loss of control” as “the period between the collapse of the Iraqi regime and the establishment of an effective alternative providing law and order and security”.

1255. The paper stated:

“Rapid intervention by the Coalition may be required to stabilise the situation, including support to an interim government. Current Package 3 deployment timelines would limit the arrival of sufficient and appropriate UK military capability in time. Consequently there is a need to develop a contingency plan that would enable

⁴⁸⁰ Minutes, 18 December 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴⁸¹ Paper DCJO(Ops) [MOD], 16 December 2002, ‘Provision of a UK Stabilisation Force’.

the UK to gain an early footprint on the ground, providing influence in theatre and achieving strategic impact.”

If the collapse happened after more than 60 days, the UK land component would have reached full operating capability and would deal with the situation.

1256. Maj Gen Fry advised that, in order to provide a quick response, the stabilisation force was “likely to be light” and its role limited to “wider peacekeeping and ‘stabilisation’ tasks”. Those included controlling and denying access to WMD, security at key locations, disarmament and demobilisation. The paper set out a number of options for different scenarios.

1257. At the Chiefs of Staff meeting, Lt Gen Reith commented that any stabilisation force would depend on timing and availability of resources, and that there was a synergy between the southern option and a stabilisation force.

1258. The minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting included a “Post Meeting Note” stating that the commitment to Operation FRESCO might be reduced by “some 2,000 personnel”, and:

- The option recommended by Lt Gen Reith was not the preferred northern option, and a force package based on two UK high readiness brigades, each with three battlegroups, should be developed further, with the aim of providing a second manoeuvre “element”, within a manpower ceiling of about 33,000.
- Options for enhancing the Amphibious Task Group, and additional options for the South which would consider the utility of a second light brigade and the deployment of follow-on forces, should also be developed.⁴⁸²

MOD ADVICE TO NO.10, 19 AND 20 DECEMBER 2002

1259. The MOD provided an update on the military thinking for No.10 on 19 December and further background material the following day.

1260. No.10 was informed that:

- **Control of Iraq’s oilfields rather than control of Baghdad was seen as the strategic key to the control of Iraq.**
- **Keeping options open was likely to require visible steps early in the New Year, including call-out of Reserves and high profile maritime deployments.**
- **An early conclusion on whether the UK could deploy through Turkey was needed to define the land option.**

1261. In response to a request for an update on US military thinking, Mr Hoon’s Private Office wrote to Sir David Manning on 19 December to inform him that the beginning of

⁴⁸² Minutes, 18 December 2002, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

US ground operations would be synchronised as closely as possible with the beginning of air operations, which it was judged would lead to the rapid collapse of much potential opposition.⁴⁸³

1262. In addition, the US was now thinking of “an information operation supported by manoeuvre, rather than a manoeuvre operation supported by information operation”. Control of Iraq’s oilfields (North and South), rather than control of Baghdad, was seen as the strategic key to control of Iraq. It would prevent the Iraqi regime from using oil as a weapon to cause a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe.

1263. It would also be essential to fund reconstruction. The US now recognised that stabilisation and reconstruction of up to two thirds of Iraq would need to begin before the military campaign had concluded. This was “bringing home to the US military the need for more planning effort to be devoted to ‘aftermath’ issues now”.

1264. Copies of the letter were sent to the Private Offices of Mr Straw and Mr Brown, and to Mr Bowen.

1265. The US plan for a military campaign, including that the Coalition would not fight for Baghdad in the initial phase of combat operations, is addressed in Section 8.

1266. The MOD had not yet reached a conclusion on the alternative options if Turkey refused transit.

1267. Mr Straw told Secretary Powell that, in the light of reports about the latest US military planning, the UK was “anxious about whether this was the right approach”.⁴⁸⁴

1268. In response to a request for background material on US and UK military thinking and preparations, Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning on 20 December.⁴⁸⁵

1269. Mr Watkins highlighted “the continuing emphasis in US military planning on squeezing every possible day out of their timelines, both in preparation for and in the prosecution of any campaign”. As a result, the UK assumptions about detailed timings were “potentially subject to acceleration at short notice”. Keeping options open was:

“... likely to require visible steps early in the New Year ... including a first call-out of reserves in the first half of January and high profile maritime deployments around the middle of the month.”

1270. An early conclusion on whether the UK could deploy through Turkey “and thus on the shape of the UK land contribution” was also needed.

1271. Mr Watkins concluded that there would be “an increasingly pressing need to satisfy ourselves that the US has an overarching political strategy with which the

⁴⁸³ Letter Williams to Manning, 19 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Evolving US Military Thinking’.

⁴⁸⁴ Letter McDonald to Manning, 19 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Colin Powell, 19 December’.

⁴⁸⁵ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 20 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Christmas Reading’.](#)

Government is content". If that envisaged military action in the timescales to which US military planners were working, there would be a need to address campaign objectives. That would be "necessary to fill the current gap between" the UK's "existing policy objectives and the likely nature of any US-led military operations, the scale and intensity of which should not be underestimated".

1272. The MOD provided seven annexes with more detailed information.

1273. Annex A addressed "Evolving US military thinking".

1274. Annex B, addressing UK military preparations, stated that there was a need to identify and address shortfalls in manpower and equipment in units nominated for operations, and that they would require significant training.

1275. In addition, the MOD:

- had approached the market to charter shipping; and
- was making preparations for call-out of Reserves.

1276. Annex C provided a snapshot of current UK and US force levels in the region and a projection of the probable build-up of forces based on Package 3 as currently endorsed and the ATG with 3 Commando Brigade. The ATG was now planned to be in theatre by mid-February and would transit the Suez canal 15 days earlier than previously planned; 7 Armoured Brigade could be in theatre by mid-March, but deployment of the full Package 3 would take a further 30 days.

1277. Annexes D and E, setting out the UK force packages originally approved by Ministers and an update on the ATG, stated that the MOD had strengthened the amphibious element of the force to include the Headquarters of 3 Commando Brigade, which would command both UK and US forces, and earmarked 42 Commando Group, to deploy by air after the ATG if required. The ATG was due to depart from the UK from 16 January. HMS Ark Royal would deploy as a second helicopter landing platform without its fast jets.

1278. Sir David was told the options for the land contribution were "under review"; and that: "There are some large and difficult issues here."

1279. Annex F was a "short note" on the options. It described Package 3, "previously endorsed by Ministers for planning purposes" as "a divisional HQ commanding a single square armoured brigade with appropriate divisional and logistic support", and that the MOD had assumed "for some time" the US would provide a similar brigade. The US had "now decided" to offer a lighter regiment, but that would mean the UK-led division would be "unbalanced, and its mission ... more risky".

1280. The MOD was “therefore” looking at alternatives, which would take account of:

- The scope for releasing sufficient units from Op FRESCO to allow “Package 3 to be reconfigured for operations in the North as a division of two brigades”.
- “Options for embedding a single ... brigade in a US division (North or South)”.
- Options for the South where further work was needed to assess whether an armoured formation could be delivered “within US timelines, and to consider alternatives involving lighter forces”.

1281. The MOD could not be “fully confident” that it had “a conclusion on these choices”.

1282. Annex G was a copy of the 13 December SPG paper, ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’, which identified the post-conflict phase as strategically decisive.

1283. Sir David commented to Mr Blair that not all of the information in Mr Watkins’ letter of 20 December had “yet appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph*”, which carried a story on 22 December that the Royal Marines would lead a sea-borne invasion of southern Iraq.⁴⁸⁶

1284. Mr Hoon had raised concerns about the leak with Sir Kevin Tebbit; and Mr Watkins had asked the MOD to review – and prune back – its distribution lists.⁴⁸⁷

MOD ADVICE TO MR HOON, 20 DECEMBER 2002

1285. Mr Hoon was informed on 20 December that UK plans were being reviewed in the light of changes in US plans and there might be a need for early decisions.

1286. The military’s preferred option would be to deploy two UK brigades for the northern option although that would require 4,000-5,000 more personnel and changes to Op FRESCO.

1287. A “heavy” brigade would not be able to arrive in the South until mid-April, but would have “particular utility for post-conflict operations”.

1288. Mr Hoon was reported to be reluctant to take any risks with Op FRESCO.

1289. Adm Boyce discussed Iraq with General Joseph W Ralston, Commander EUCOM, on 19 December.⁴⁸⁸

1290. Gen Ralston indicated that planning activity in Turkey was being delayed pending receipt of political clearance to proceed by the Turkish military. Gen Ralston expected

⁴⁸⁶ Manuscript comment Manning on [Letter Watkins to Manning, 20 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Christmas Reading’](#).

⁴⁸⁷ Minute Watkins to PS/PUS [MOD], 23 December 2002, ‘Sunday Telegraph Article: 22 December 2002’.

⁴⁸⁸ Minute MA/CDS to PS/SofS [MOD], 20 December 2002, ‘CDS visit to SHAPE – EUCOM Issues’.

that it would be more difficult to get clearance for a UK deployment through Turkey than for a US one.

1291. In response to a question from Gen Ralston about whether the UK would contribute forces for deployment through Turkey, Adm Boyce said that “the critical path was for the US to negotiate access with Turkey first”.

1292. On 19 December, Lt Gen Reith submitted a revised paper on the land options, to the Chiefs of Staff for discussion in a meeting chaired by Adm Boyce the following afternoon.⁴⁸⁹

1293. Lt Gen Reith reported increased US optimism that the Iraqi regime would collapse “early” and a desire to achieve the “closest possible coincidence” between the start of the air and ground campaigns. That would require earlier readiness for ground forces. There was some scepticism about the practicality of achieving a target date of mid-February in the North, but an attack in the North might begin “much earlier than has previously been expected”, which Lt Gen Reith recommended the UK should aim to meet.

1294. The North remained the favoured option for UK land operations. Package 3 had been expanded to comprise a divisional HQ, two brigades, each with three battlegroups, and a total force level of 32,000. That would mean penalties for Op FRESCO.

1295. The paper also identified an option of contributing a single brigade, of four battlegroups, to a US formation before deployment of the full division. That would need about 25,000 personnel.

1296. In the South, 16 Air Assault Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade could initially operate under the command of a US division. For the former, units would need to be withdrawn from Op FRESCO. Both brigades were seen as having options for war-fighting and stabilisation roles. Preparations for the deployment of 16 Air Assault Brigade would depend on a decision not to deploy a division in the North no later than 15 January, “the last safe moment for a decision to switch the main effort from a northern axis”.

1297. Lt Gen Reith advised that a “heavy” brigade could not arrive in the South before the middle of April and further time would be needed for readiness and integration. It would have “particular utility for post-conflict operations”.

1298. If a UK division was deployed to the North, 1 (UK) Div HQ would take command; for other options, 3rd (UK) Mechanised Division would take the lead.

1299. Lt Gen Reith also recorded that he had been directed to add 42 Commando and HQ 3 Commando Brigade to the Amphibious Task Group.

⁴⁸⁹ Minute Reith to CDS & various, 19 December 2002, ‘Land Options Paper – Revised’ attaching Paper CJO, ‘Land Options – Revised’.

1300. Mr Johnson alerted Mr Hoon to the potential need for early decisions on 20 December.⁴⁹⁰

1301. Mr Johnson wrote that Package 3 was being reviewed in the light of changes in US force plans. Adm Boyce, Gen Walker and Lt Gen Reith recommended that an option with two UK brigades each with three battlegroups should be the preferred option; although it would require 4,000-5,000 more personnel than the “currently endorsed package of 28,000”, and a change to Op FRESCO plans.

1302. Mr Hoon was advised “we should have reached a conclusion on Turkey by the middle of January”. An alternative option of deploying one brigade of four battlegroups to be integrated within the US 4th Infantry Division had also been identified. Planning could be calibrated to allow a switch to that option if the deployment of a division was ruled out.

1303. The work on possible options in the South was not addressed in the minute.

1304. In preparation for a telephone conversation with Adm Boyce on 22 December, Mr Watkins sent Mr Hoon a handwritten minute setting out the background to Mr Johnson’s minute, which had been received late on 20 December following a meeting between Adm Boyce and Lt Gen Reith.⁴⁹¹

1305. Mr Watkins advised that:

- Mr Johnson’s minute did not seek any decisions, but Adm Boyce was “looking for a steer” on whether to call in staff over Christmas to prepare for deployments in the first few days of January, “rather than mid-January as currently assumed”.
- There was “some suspicion about the provenance of the information about US intentions”, which had come from CENTCOM. Mr Watkins’ own contacts with Secretary Rumsfeld’s office suggested that political decisions about visible US actions had not yet been taken. There was a risk, not for the first time, of the UK getting ahead of the US Government’s position.
- Deploying equipment before the planned visit to Ankara risked “a diplomatic own goal”.
- The UK Government’s communications plan assumed a start date of 7 January.
- Mr Blair would be on holiday abroad until 5 January.

1306. In a separate minute produced by one of his Private Secretaries the previous evening, Mr Hoon was advised that military “plans seem to be changing very rapidly and

⁴⁹⁰ Minute Johnson to PS/Sof S [MOD], 20 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Early Decisions’.

⁴⁹¹ [Minute \(handwritten\) Watkins to SofS \[MOD\], 21 December 2002, ‘Iraq: CDS Phone Call: 22 December’.](#)

incoherently without any real reference to the UN or political timetable”.⁴⁹² Mr Hoon might ask Adm Boyce a number of questions, including:

- When a decision on Turkey was needed?
- Whether it was “still worth pursuing Turkey given the difficulty the US” was having?
- Whether there was “a worthwhile role for any heavy forces” if Turkey was not available.
- “When do we bite the bullet and rule out the heavy land option? Or are we content to march them up to the top of the hill just for force on mind? How would we cope with the morale implications?”

1307. Mr Hoon would “need to see properly considered and realistically argued submissions” if early decisions were needed.

1308. The record of the conversation with Adm Boyce stated that, in relation to the work on land options, Mr Hoon was reluctant to take any risks with Op FRESCO’s capability.⁴⁹³

1309. Mr Hoon was content, for planning purposes, with the assumption that an initial tranche of Reservists would be called out on or about 9 January. That would “be subject to clearance from No.10 in due course”. He also wanted to avoid any clearly visible increase in activity “over and above what he [had] foreshadowed in his Statement in the House [of Commons] on 18 December before 6 January”, because of the “need to balance the diplomatic and military tracks”.

1310. Mr Hoon noted that further advice on preparations would be provided and that it would be helpful to have a clearer sense of the US planning timetable.

Planning Directive for Lt Gen Reith, 30 December 2002

Adm Boyce issued a Planning and Preparation Directive on 30 December.⁴⁹⁴ That gave Lt Gen Reith: “authority to undertake the necessary preparations, including reductions in Notice to Move and overt training, in order that UK forces identified for potential operations in Iraq are in all aspects ready for Coalition military operations”, including ensuring 16 Air Assault Brigade was ready for operations.

The Directive stated: “The codeword for the preparatory phase of this operation, and if UK forces are subsequently required to commit to action in the execution phase, is TELIC.”

On Phase IV, it stated:

“Delivering HMG’s [Her Majesty’s Government’s] declared end state is likely to require UK engagement in follow-on operations but the possible scale and duration

⁴⁹² Minute Williams to SofS [MOD], 20 December 2002, ‘Military Planning for Iraq’.

⁴⁹³ Minute Watkins to Hd Sec (Iraq), 23 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Early Decisions’.

⁴⁹⁴ Paper CDS, 30 December 2002, ‘CDS Planning and Preparation Directive for Operation TELIC’.

of ‘aftermath operations’ are uncertain and are in urgent need of clarification from US planners at all levels.”

Formal planning for the southern option began on 3 January when Maj Gen Brims, was briefed on the concept by PJHQ.⁴⁹⁵ Major General Wall, Chief of Staff to the UK National Contingent Commander and, subsequently, GOC 1 (UK) Div, wrote that initial planning with the US 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF) was conducted in Atlanta in early January, which enabled Maj Gen Brims to start to shape the order of battle and build the division as a formation.

The Planning and Preparation Directive was superseded by a first version of the Execute Directive on 4 March 2003.

Mr Hoon’s statement, 7 January 2003

1311. On 7 January, Mr Hoon announced the decision to deploy additional maritime forces, including an amphibious capability and an order to enable the call-out of Reservists.

1312. That was presented as a necessary part of a policy of maintaining the pressure on Saddam Hussein to persuade him to disarm. Mr Hoon stated that no decision had been taken to commit UK forces to military action.

1313. The Government’s policy objectives for Iraq were also published on 7 January.

1314. Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 3 January alerting him and other colleagues to the need to take and make public decisions on the call-out of Reservists.⁴⁹⁶ He planned an announcement to the House of Commons on 7 January as part of a broader statement on Iraq strategy.

1315. Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning later that day to inform him that Mr Hoon would also want to announce the need for significant force movements, including the deployment of the Amphibious Task Group.⁴⁹⁷ Mr Watkins recorded that the MOD had “confirmed to the US that the Group now includes HQ 3 Commando Brigade and 42 Commando, together with 40 Commando as originally planned”.

1316. Mr Straw made a Written Ministerial Statement on the Government’s policy objectives for Iraq to the House of Commons on 7 January 2003. In his later oral statement, Mr Hoon commended the objectives to the House of Commons.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Report Wall, 6 October 2003, ‘Post Operation Report – Version 2 Operation TELIC’.

⁴⁹⁶ Letter Hoon to Prime Minister, 3 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Call-out of Reserves’.

⁴⁹⁷ Letter Watkins to Manning, 3 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Update on Military Planning and Draft Statement’.

⁴⁹⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 January 2003, columns 23-25.

1317. Mr Hoon also announced arrangements for the first call-out of Reservists in support of possible operations against Iraq and the deployment of “a number of additional vessels and units later this month, which will represent a significant amphibious capability”, including the headquarters 3 Commando Brigade, and 40 and 42 Commandos “with all supporting elements”.

1318. Mr Hoon concluded:

“None of that means that the use of force is inevitable ... no decision has been taken to commit those forces to action ... But ... as long as Saddam’s compliance with ... resolution 1441 is in doubt ... the threat of force must remain and it must be a real one.”

1319. Mr Straw’s and Mr Hoon’s statements are addressed in more detail in Section 3.6.

The end of the northern option

1320. By the beginning of January 2003, uncertainty about Turkey’s agreement to the deployment of ground forces had reached a critical point.

1321. Mr Hoon and Mr Blair were advised that there were considerable uncertainties about the UK role in US plans if Turkey refused transit for ground forces.

1322. Mr Westmacott reported on 23 December 2002 that the Turkish media was reporting US requests for a full Turkish commitment to preparations for military action; and that no decisions appeared to have been taken. There was little public support in Turkey for a war with Iraq.⁴⁹⁹

1323. On 24 December, Mr Straw and Secretary Powell discussed the fact that 80 percent of the Turkish public were against any co-operation with the US/UK on ground troops.⁵⁰⁰

1324. Mr Straw and Secretary Powell spoke twice on 30 December.

1325. In their first conversation, Secretary Powell asked where a Turkish refusal to the deployment of UK forces would leave the UK.⁵⁰¹ Mr Straw replied: “in some difficulty” but he knew there were contingency plans. He would “get back” to Secretary Powell.

1326. Mr Straw and Secretary Powell also discussed the possibility that the military would be ready to take action but there would be no casus belli.

⁴⁹⁹ Telegram 481, Ankara to FCO London, 23 December 2002, ‘Turkey/Iraq: More US Pressure’.

⁵⁰⁰ Letter Straw to Manning, 24 December 2002, ‘Conversation with Powell: Iraq’.

⁵⁰¹ Telegram 671 FCO London to Washington, 30 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Conversation with US Secretary of State, 30 December’.

1327. In their second conversation Mr Straw told Secretary Powell that:

“Following the latest news from Turkey, we could provide an amphibious task force in the South. We might also put in an armoured brigade in the South.”⁵⁰²

1328. Mr Straw also cautioned that the armoured brigade would take an extra 45 days to arrive.

1329. Mr Hoon was advised on 30 December that it seemed increasingly unlikely ground forces would be allowed to operate from Turkey and that the ground forces options were under review.⁵⁰³

1330. The US was reviewing the military plan “and considering what role a UK ground force could play in the South”. Mr Johnson stated:

“We had of course offered the existing land package on the assumption that it would operate in the North. Ministers have not endorsed any assumptions about a possible role in the South, which is more likely to be for follow-on, or aftermath, tasks.”

1331. Mr Hoon was advised that, at present, there was “no clear role for any [of the options being examined] in the South”; the UK needed “first to hear from the US ... what possible roles they may now envisage for UK land forces.

1332. Mr Westmacott advised on 31 December that despite a series of meetings in Christmas week, there were still no decisions although the Turkish Parliament had approved the renewal of the authority for US and UK aircraft to continue to operate from Incirlik over the northern No-Fly Zone.⁵⁰⁴ In his view it was unlikely that Turkey would be forthcoming on Iraq during Mr Hoon’s planned meeting the following week. Turkey was likely to wait until after Dr Blix’s report to the UN Security Council on 27 January before consulting Parliament.

1333. On 2 January 2003, Mr Westmacott advised that he had not detected any particular hostility to a UK military presence: “The key point was that Turkey would rather not have any of us.” Mr Hoon’s visit should help to clarify the picture.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Letter Straw to Manning, 30 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Colin Powell, 30 December’.

⁵⁰³ Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 30 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Update’.

⁵⁰⁴ Telegram 483 Ankara to FCO London, 31 December 2002, ‘Iraq: More Turkish Prevarication Despite US pressure’.

⁵⁰⁵ Telegram 1 Ankara to FCO London, 2 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Turkish Options’.

1334. In his letter of 3 January about the announcement of the ATG deployment on 7 January, Mr Watkins alerted Sir David Manning to the need to reconsider options for the UK's ground contribution because of doubts about transit through Turkey.⁵⁰⁶ He advised:

“It may ... be necessary to take decisions next week to give us time to train additional units for Operation FRESCO ... freeing up units that, under new plans, might deploy to the South.

“In the meantime, we are continuing with preparations to enable a ground force contribution of at least an armoured brigade (and its Divisional HQ) to deploy as soon as possible.”

1335. In his minute of 3 January on the way ahead on Iraq over the next few weeks, which is addressed in Section 3.6, Mr Straw informed Mr Blair that Turkey would not allow US or UK troops through on the ground and that was “leading CENTCOM to re-think”; and that “must have an impact on the robustness of the overall plan, and the timelines”.⁵⁰⁷

1336. Mr Straw's minute was not sent to Mr Hoon.

1337. On 3 January, Sir David Manning and Dr Rice discussed the possibility of a military attack without the northern option.⁵⁰⁸ In the light of the previous advice about its importance, Sir David said that he was “uneasy”.

1338. In an update on Iraq for Mr Blair on 3 January, which is also addressed in Section 3.6, Sir David Manning wrote that he was worried that US strategy was in danger of being driven by the tempo of military planning which assumed decisions in mid-February.⁵⁰⁹ A “long hard look at the current state of the military planning” was needed: “Too much looks like hurried improvisation, half thought out strategy”, which assumed that Saddam Hussein would collapse “in short order”.

Mr Hoon's visit to Turkey, January 2003

1339. After Mr Hoon's visit to Ankara on 7 and 8 January 2003, the UK formally ruled out the northern option.

1340. Mr Hoon, Sir Kevin Tebbit, Lt Gen Pigott and Mr Lee visited Turkey on 7 to 8 January to “discuss a range of topics, including Iraq”.⁵¹⁰

1341. Mr Hoon told Secretary Rumsfeld on 7 January that he would emphasise the importance of the northern approach for a successful military campaign during his visit

⁵⁰⁶ Letter Watkins to Manning, 3 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Update on Military Planning and Draft Statement’.

⁵⁰⁷ [Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 3 January 2003, ‘Iraq – Plan B’](#).

⁵⁰⁸ Letter Manning to McDonald, 3 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Condi Rice’.

⁵⁰⁹ [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 3 January 2003, ‘Iraq’](#).

⁵¹⁰ Letter Watkins to Manning, 7 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Rumsfeld’.

to Ankara.⁵¹¹ The US and UK were discussing possible roles for UK forces in the South. The UK was “ready to play a significant role there, provided it made sense in terms of the overall plan”.

1342. Mr Westmacott’s overview of the visit reported that although Turkish interlocutors had spelled out their concerns, they had given “tentative agreement to the start of military planning talks”.⁵¹²

1343. The British Embassy Ankara reported that Mr Hoon had told all his interlocutors that “the UK, like Turkey, wanted a peaceful outcome to the crisis if possible; but our best chance of achieving it lay in making a credible show of coalition readiness to use force if necessary”.

1344. The UK “understood” Turkish concerns:

“... about legitimacy (which we shared), domestic and regional politics. But we needed to start high level military planning talks now if Saddam Hussein was to get the message. We and the United States were also convinced that, if military action proved necessary, it would be quicker, cleaner, and more effective if it was done with the support and facilitation of Turkey. A northern route land forces option ... with a thrust from the South, made the most sense ... UK military involvement was under consideration.”

1345. Mr Hoon was advised to lodge a formal request.

1346. Records of the meetings in Ankara on 8 January circulated by Mr Watkins demonstrated that Mr Hoon had argued that the UK objectives published on 7 January were similar to Turkey’s objectives:

“... we too wished to avoid war. But we had to demonstrate the seriousness of our intent ... Visible military preparations might make war less likely.”⁵¹³

1347. The UK was in close touch with CENTCOM on a possible land package and Adm Boyce was “ready to come out to discuss the details”.

1348. The Turkish response was guarded. It had a number of concerns about the political, economic and humanitarian consequences of military action. All chances for a peaceful resolution had to be exhausted. There was no public support for a war and, therefore, no guarantee of Parliamentary support.

1349. Mr Hoon wrote to the Turkish Defence Minister on 9 January seeking confirmation of approval for early military planning talks.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ Letter Watkins to Manning, 7 January 2003, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Rumsfeld’.

⁵¹² Telegram 8 Ankara to FCO London, 8 January 2003, ‘Defence Secretary’s Visit to Ankara: Overview’.

⁵¹³ Letters Watkins to Manning, 9 and 10 January 2003, ‘Defence Secretary’s Visit to Ankara: 8 January 2003’.

⁵¹⁴ Telegram 19 Ankara to FCO London, 15 January 2003, ‘Follow-up to Defence Secretary’s Visit’.

1350. When Adm Boyce visited Turkey in late January, Mr Westmacott reported that there were no instructions to reply to Mr Hoon's letter.⁵¹⁵

1351. At Cabinet on 9 January Mr Hoon reported his visit to Turkey and the sensitivities about actions involving Iraq.⁵¹⁶

1352. Other issues discussed are addressed in Section 3.6.

1353. Mr Blair told Cabinet that there would be an "in-depth" discussion on Iraq the following week.

1354. Adm Boyce updated Gen Myers on the outcome of the visit on 9 January and outlined the UK's "commitment to operations in southern Iraq."⁵¹⁷

1355. The report of the discussion also stated that the US could stay poised for military operations for 3-4 months.

1356. On 11 January, Mr Straw discussed the Turkish position with Secretary Powell, including the need to avoid Turkey being drawn into any conflict in Iraq and the practicalities of the northern option.⁵¹⁸

1357. Reporting from the British Embassy Washington showed that similar concerns about permission had been discussed during Mr Ricketts' visit.⁵¹⁹

1358. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that it was not until early January that the northern option was "absolutely blocked off" after he and Mr Hoon went to Ankara "to make one final effort to clarify what was going on", including to secure "overflight rights for aircraft and supplies".⁵²⁰ But it had become "increasingly difficult to rely on the northern option" from late November into December.

1359. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that his awareness of the difficulties with Turkey grew "towards the end" of 2002.⁵²¹ The UK had been alerted to the likely attitude of Turkey by Secretary Powell. When Mr Hoon had visited in early January 2003 he had had "a very rapid history lesson"; "all they were talking about was what had happened in the 1920s and Britain could not entirely be trusted".

1360. Mr Hoon stated that he did not think the decision to abandon the northern option was taken until after his visit to Ankara, when he formed the view that "we would never

⁵¹⁵ Telegram 33 Ankara to FCO London, 24 January 2003, 'CDS's Call on Turkish CHOD: Iraq'.

⁵¹⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, 9 January 2003.

⁵¹⁷ Minute Zambellas to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 10 January 2003, 'CDS Telephone call to CJCS: 9 Jan 03'.

⁵¹⁸ Letter Straw to Manning, 13 January 2003, 'Iraq: Conversation with Colin Powell, 11 January'.

⁵¹⁹ Telegram 46 Washington to FCO London, 14 January 2003, 'Iraq: US Military Planning'.

⁵²⁰ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 55-56.

⁵²¹ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 58-60.

get an agreement from Turkey. That was the point at which we took the decision ... the actual decision didn't come until I came back from Turkey."⁵²²

1361. Mr Hoon added that the US did not abandon hope of securing Turkey's agreement to the deployment of 4th Infantry Division until much later, and that it had stayed in the eastern Mediterranean until after the start of the invasion.⁵²³

1362. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry: "I went with Geoff Hoon to Ankara ... to ... finally see whether we could achieve agreement with the Turks."⁵²⁴

1363. Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry:

"I felt slightly embarrassed, to be absolutely honest, because having been head of chancery in the Embassy in Ankara for three and a half years, I thought I knew my Turks. I thought they were going to be supportive, and I of all people should have realised that the idea of the Brits going into Kurdistan ... re-awoke some very sensitive Turkish nationalist memories of how we behaved in the 1920s when they felt we were flirting with the idea of a Kurdistan as part of a way of dismantling the Ottoman empire."

...

"So we miscalculated there, and I have to say, I should have known better myself."⁵²⁵

1364. Sir Kevin added:

"I think we thought we could provide reassurances that would overcome the Turkish objections, and unfortunately the Turks were reasonably polite and accommodating to let us feel that might actually be the case."⁵²⁶

1365. Sir Kevin confirmed that he was referring to both military and civilian views:

"The problem was also they had an election, and there was a certain amount of chaos in Turkey about the stability of their arrangements, and I – we were encouraged to think that even at the last moment there might be a vote which would enable us to go there."

1366. In response to a question about whether he recalled that the views of the FCO and the Embassy in Ankara were not dissimilar from his own, Sir Kevin told the Inquiry that he did not:

"... recall being out on a personal limb ... [M]y sense was that we were getting mixed messages, and that we need to clarify the situation, not that we were being

⁵²² Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 60.

⁵²³ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 60-61.

⁵²⁴ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 15.

⁵²⁵ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, pages 15-16.

⁵²⁶ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 16.

told by everyone that it was not on. Had that been the case, we would have stopped much earlier.”⁵²⁷

1367. At the time he gave evidence, Sir Kevin had not had the telegrams from Ankara drawn to his attention.⁵²⁸

1368. Sir Kevin confirmed that there had been a majority vote in the Turkish Parliament but that it was not sufficiently large to approve the deployment.⁵²⁹

1369. In relation to Mr Hoon’s visit in January 2003, Mr Lee told the Inquiry:

“As I recall ... that was a sort of last throw of the dice really, that everyone else had tried, hadn’t had an outright ‘no’, but hadn’t had any sort of encouragement either. So we should try this. He [Hoon] should go, speak to his opposite numbers, as many people as possible in the Turkish hierarchy, and see what the result would be. The outcome of that visit was, I think, the realisation dawned that Turkey was not going to agree. So things moved on, away from the northern option.”⁵³⁰

Should the UK have addressed an alternative to the northern option earlier and more seriously?

1370. The need for a northern axis for any invasion of Iraq was suggested to the US by the UK military in July 2002.

1371. The MOD’s preference for a discrete role in northern Iraq was identified in July 2002 and it remained the preferred option until the end of the year.

1372. The evidence set out in this Section catalogues the advice, offered by PJHQ to the MOD and the MOD advice to Mr Hoon and Mr Blair between July and December 2002, on the strategic rationale for both northern and southern axes of attack in an invasion of Iraq, and the advantages of the northern option from the UK’s perspective.

1373. The proposal reflected long-held and legitimate judgements about the difficulties which could arise during operations if ground forces at a brigade level or below were embedded within US structures.

1374. A briefing note for Mr Hoon on 11 December 2002 explicitly confirmed that the northern option “came from our strategic analysis in the first place”.⁵³¹

⁵²⁷ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, pages 17-18.

⁵²⁸ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 17.

⁵²⁹ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 18.

⁵³⁰ Private hearing, 22 June 2010, pages 29-30.

⁵³¹ Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 11 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Planning – Turkey Handling’.

1375. Asked when during the summer of 2002 the idea that the UK would lead on the northern option had arisen, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that it:

“... was a fairly early part of the planning process, that we’d come from Turkey. We weren’t going to lead it ... we’d have been part of the American force ...”⁵³²

1376. Asked where the idea had originated, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that it was “to a certain extent American-driven” but there was a dormant “NATO plan to go through Turkey” that could have been “dusted off and re-shaped to deal with this particular operation”.⁵³³

1377. Lt Gen Fry told the Inquiry that he had “previous [experience] ... in ... Kurdistan” where he had been deployed in 1991.⁵³⁴ He had taken the view, at the time “and ... still”, that the northern option offered “demonstrable military advantage”. That included less significant geographical challenges and more freedom of manoeuvre.

1378. Gen Reith recalled that the UK had suggested a second axis from the north to fix the six to eight Iraqi divisions lined up along the edge of the Kurdish zone and prevent them moving south, although he could not recall the exact timing.⁵³⁵

1379. Gen Reith told the Inquiry:

“What happened with the northern option was that, when we had suggested it to them [the US], they then came back and said to us, ‘Well, perhaps the UK could do the northern option as a discrete entity.’”⁵³⁶

1380. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that his recollection was that the possibility of an attack on two axes to divide the Republican Guard had been identified and discussed before Lt Gen Pigott’s visit to CENTCOM at the end of June; and that Lt Gen Pigott had persuaded the US military to consider a northern option.⁵³⁷

1381. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that he was “pretty confident” that the UK had “persuaded” the US “about the northern option”.⁵³⁸

1382. By late October 2002, the US had adopted a northern axis as an essential element of its campaign plan and decided to allocate its 4th Infantry Division to that task.

1383. The MOD’s initial aspiration was to lead the operation from the North. But, by late October 2002, the US had adopted a northern axis as an essential element

⁵³² Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 22.

⁵³³ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 50.

⁵³⁴ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, pages 14 and 17.

⁵³⁵ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 14.

⁵³⁶ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 23.

⁵³⁷ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 22-23.

⁵³⁸ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 43.

of the campaign plan and decided to allocate its 4th Infantry Division to that task. That precluded a UK lead.

1384. Asked if the UK never talked about leading it, Lord Boyce replied: “No, and it would remain on the table right until January 2003.”⁵³⁹

1385. Asked whether the northern option was the UK’s preference or something the US “very much wanted” the UK to do, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that it was “probably a bit of both”. If Turkey had agreed, it would have been a “sensible way” of deploying a UK division alongside the US 4th Division.⁵⁴⁰

1386. Asked whether given the southern No-Fly Zone had been more difficult than the northern one, the UK had been more comfortable operating in the North, Lord Boyce replied that was:

“... correct and it’s also true that we felt we would be more compatible with the [US] 4th Infantry Division than with other American divisions ...”⁵⁴¹

1387. Lord Boyce added that they were also concerned about the relatively small area of Kuwait for the entry of forces, and that it depended “hugely on the host nation support”, although he acknowledged that the latter was also true for Turkey.⁵⁴²

1388. Lord Boyce subsequently told the Inquiry:

“... we thought that the North made sense to fix the Iraqi forces in that part of the country, to do what we could to secure the oilfields before they got trashed by Saddam Hussein and also to do what we could to preserve the Kurdish state up there and make sure there was not an assault on the Kurds from either the Turks or the Iraqis.

“So it appeared to be a neat option ...”⁵⁴³

1389. Asked for the reasons why the military advice appeared to stress the North rather than the South, Sir Kevin Tebbit told the Inquiry that he did not think there had been a “particular UK dimension”:

- The UK had “particular concerns” about the consequences if Saddam Hussein moved his troops into the Kurdish area. He did not recall that directly influencing military planning, but it was “recognised very actively” at the political level.
- The UK had a military interest in the operation of the northern No-Fly Zone.

⁵³⁹ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 22.

⁵⁴⁰ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 23-24.

⁵⁴¹ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 53.

⁵⁴² Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 54.

⁵⁴³ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 13.

- It was “clear in [the] planning” that it was very important to secure the northern oilfields to prevent Saddam causing a humanitarian and environmental disaster and to preserve the resources for rebuilding Iraq.⁵⁴⁴

1390. Sir Kevin added:

“So there were very strong reasons for a force to ... fix the North, and strong reasons therefore, for the UK to regard that as an appropriate role for us to help with.”

1391. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that part of the practical problem was that the Kuwaiti border with Iraq was “relatively short” and, unlike the conflict in 1991, Coalition Forces could not cross the Saudi border. That meant “a lot of soldiers were being funnelled through a relatively narrow area”. He had been concerned that those forces would be “highly vulnerable” to chemical and biological weapons.⁵⁴⁵

1392. The judgement that southern Iraq was the most likely area for the first use of chemical or biological weapons against Coalition Force, and against the local population, was contained in the JIC Assessment of 19 February 2003, ‘Southern Iraq: ‘What’s In Store?’.⁵⁴⁶

1393. Asked by the Inquiry in May 2010 about the benefits of the northern option as he had understood them, Sir Kevin replied they were:

- the need to “shut the door” to prevent Saddam Hussein retreating north;
- to “avoid what would otherwise be a very politically difficult situation with the Kurds and the Turks”;
- squeezing from both directions provided “a much better way of outmanoeuvring your opponent”;
- concerns about “a real bottleneck through Kuwait”; and
- the Kurdish Autonomous Zone was a “fairly stable area”, which “looked rather easier than fighting one’s way or helping to fight one’s way up Iraq”.⁵⁴⁷

1394. Sir Kevin recognised that the mountainous terrain in south-eastern Turkey and the length of the logistics supply lines would have posed challenges, but he thought Adm Boyce and “a lot of military men would have liked” to have had the northern option.⁵⁴⁸

1395. Lt Gen Reith expressed reservations about the relative advantages and disadvantages of the northern option in November.

⁵⁴⁴ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, pages 51-53.

⁵⁴⁵ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 62.

⁵⁴⁶ [JIC Assessment, 19 February 2003, ‘Southern Iraq: What’s In Store?’](#).

⁵⁴⁷ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, pages 13-14.

⁵⁴⁸ Private hearing, 6 May 2010, page 14.

1396. Gen Reith told the Inquiry that the North was “quite a difficult area” and “over time, and particularly with the Turkish elections, and ... my sense of a lack of enthusiasm by the Turks ... for me, as the planner, it became less and less attractive as an option”.⁵⁴⁹

1397. Gen Reith added:

“... I was unhappy with the logistic support required and the tenuous lines of communication to actually get our logistic support to our forces.

“It was very, very tight ... it was very mountainous ... we were going to have to use the river Tigris as our protection on our left flank ... it wasn’t an attractive military option for what would have been, at best, a division plus.”⁵⁵⁰

1398. Gen Reith told the Inquiry that discussions started with the US about where in the South a land package might best be employed after his paper of 18 November. He added that the Americans moved from thinking that the UK would definitely be going to the North to “maybe we [the UK] should be doing the South”.⁵⁵¹

1399. Other evidence given to the Inquiry suggested that the relative advantages and disadvantages of the northern and southern options might have been more balanced than some of the briefing offered to Mr Hoon and Mr Blair suggested.

1400. Gen Jackson told the Inquiry that the “relative logistic challenge” of the southern option was “probably logistically simpler” than the northern option.⁵⁵²

1401. Asked about his assessment of the risks and liabilities for the UK when he saw that the position was shifting from the North to the South, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry:

“Timing would have been one ... our transit ... was going to take slightly longer. There was ... a risk of the actual logistic effort but that was mitigated by the fact the Americans were going to help us ... desertification of some of the kit ... required some effort ... But the Americans ... were particularly helpful in making room for us in Kuwait ...”⁵⁵³

1402. Lord Boyce added that “substantial effort” had already been made on the southern option and that working alongside the Amphibious Task Group helped the logistics support, and:

“... whatever risks there were in switching to the South, in many senses were outweighed by some of the benefits ...”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁹ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 25.

⁵⁵⁰ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 27.

⁵⁵¹ Private hearing 15 January 2010, pages 34-35.

⁵⁵² Public hearing, 28 July 2010, page 18.

⁵⁵³ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 23-24.

⁵⁵⁴ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 24-25.

1403. Asked about the assessment of the Iraqi opposition, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that he had not thought that Iraq's fighting capability was going to be "any more challenging than ... in the North".⁵⁵⁵

1404. Lord Boyce added that "one of the advantages" of the South which emerged "as the battle plans started to develop" was that "we were to be given an area of operations ... which would ... make it a cleaner operation" for the UK than working alongside the US 4th Infantry Division:

"Our job ... as we saw it, was going to be to fix the Iraqi or defeat the Iraqi divisions in the South to make sure the Americans had untrammelled progress towards the North without having to worry about their rear or their flank ... That gave us a very clear mission ..."

1405. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry:

"Our feeling was that actually it [the South] might be ... an easier place to deal with than the North, or further north I mean, because ... the vast majority of the people in the South were Shia as opposed to the more heavy or original mix of Sunnis further north where we thought there would be problems between the Sunnis and Shia once the country – once we got past war end. Therefore, we were dealing with one sector which hopefully would be working together ... and would be cooperative ... as we tried to ... regenerate the country after the fighting was over."⁵⁵⁶

1406. In oral evidence, witnesses offered different views about their perception of Turkey's position in late 2002 and early January 2003.

1407. Maj Gen Wilson had reported on 17 July 2002 that US planners had been asked to look at plans for a scenario without Turkey.

1408. DSF 1 told the Inquiry that he had informed Lt Gen Pigott "in about November" that UK ground forces were "not going through Turkey".⁵⁵⁷

1409. The Inquiry asked Sir Richard Dearlove at what stage he judged that the Turkish route would not be possible.⁵⁵⁸ He told the Inquiry that "in the summer some time" it was "clear that the Turkish General Staff ... were not going to agree to a British military deployment through Turkey".

1410. Sir Richard added:

"... in the autumn, it became clear that there was going to be no British military deployment through Turkey. The Turkish generals ... were not going to change their minds."

⁵⁵⁵ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 25-26.

⁵⁵⁶ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 26-27.

⁵⁵⁷ Private hearing, 2010, page 19.

⁵⁵⁸ Private hearing, 16 June 2010, pages 44-45.

1411. Asked if he had offered any advice to the military, Sir Richard replied:

“... I would have reported that instantly ... I was in touch frequently. Mike Boyce and I were regularly talking to each other. But ... it was evident. It would have been evident on the attaché military channels at about the same time.”

1412. Asked why, when he had taken the view in October 2002 that Turkey was not likely to agree to the deployment of UK forces, the MOD had persisted, Sir David Manning replied:

“Yes, but ... I was wrong about a lot of military things. So there’s no reason why I should have been right about this one. I think probably ... because the Americans were telling our military, don’t worry, we will fix it, and ... certainly the Americans themselves were surprised at how difficult the Turks proved to be ...”⁵⁵⁹

1413. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that the decision on 8 January 2003, to switch to the South:

“...wasn’t a sort of cold shock for everybody ... The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and clearly the Secretary of State for Defence had ... been exposed to the ... contingency planning we were doing, should we have to go South.”⁵⁶⁰

1414. Subsequently Lord Boyce told the Inquiry:

“We imagined in the very early stages that because there was a NATO plan giving access to come through Turkey to go towards Iraq, but that was something which should not present a great difficulty. Certainly when I spoke to the Chief of the Turkish General Staff, General Özkök, in the very early days, September/October or so, there didn’t appear – well, he didn’t seem to think it would be a particular problem.”⁵⁶¹

1415. Lord Boyce added that “we rather thought” Gen Özkök “had more power than he probably did”, or was prepared to exercise after the Turkish election of a new Government. The MOD “persevered for probably longer than we should have done in trying to get a route through Turkey”.⁵⁶²

1416. Asked whether there had been cautionary advice from the FCO about Turkey’s position, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry:

“I can’t recall at any time being told to back off. As you said, we pressed on and we pressed on until the bitter end when we had to make a final decision.”⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 103.

⁵⁶⁰ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 92.

⁵⁶¹ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 13.

⁵⁶² Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 14-15.

⁵⁶³ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 15.

1417. Lord Boyce stated that the US:

“... started giving us warnings ... around late October/November ... that we were probably pushing against a closed door, but we still even then carried on believing we might do it, because ... that particular option seemed to be the more sensible one ... if we were going to commit a large-sized landforce, because ... Kuwait is a small country.”⁵⁶⁴

1418. Asked about Sir Richard Dearlove’s evidence, Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that he could not recall talking to him about the issue but Gen Özkök was “certainly not saying ‘Don’t bother to darken my door again’”.⁵⁶⁵

1419. The northern option remained the primary focus for UK planning until early January.

1420. The Inquiry accepts the strategic rationale for a northern axis, including the aspiration to provide a framework which would allow other nations to make a military contribution.

1421. There are questions, however, about whether the UK should have given serious consideration to the alternatives for the UK, and discussed them with the US, at an earlier stage.

1422. The UK recognised, from July 2002 onwards, that the proposed northern option for UK land forces depended on Turkey’s agreement to the transit of foreign forces; and that might be difficult to obtain. There were serious doubts about whether the Turkish Government would permit the transit of UK (or US) troops.

1423. Before the election of a new Government in Turkey, the JIC assessed on 30 October 2002 that Turkey’s opposition could be overcome with US pressure.

1424. The UK received mixed messages from Washington and Ankara during the autumn of 2002.

1425. The warning signs that Turkey might well refuse to permit the deployment of UK forces led both Lt Gen Reith and the US Administration to suggest that the UK should develop alternatives to the northern option.

1426. The UK decided US assistance would be essential for securing Turkey’s agreement and that the US should take the lead in talks with the Turkish Government elected in November 2002.

1427. The position taken by Mr Hoon, Sir Kevin Tebbit and Adm Boyce in discussions with the US Administration about the UK commitment to the northern

⁵⁶⁴ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 15-16.

⁵⁶⁵ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, page 16.

option may in part have been driven by tactical considerations, and the need to maintain the maximum pressure on the US to pursue agreement for the deployment of UK ground forces with Turkey.

1428. Mr Blair had asked on 6 December 2002 for advice on the options for UK land forces if Turkey refused transit.

1429. Adm Boyce did not instruct Lt Gen Reith to develop options for the South until 18 December 2002.

1430. Mr Hoon was advised that the decision on a switch to the South could be taken after his visit to Ankara in January 2003.

1431. From late July until late December 2002, Adm Boyce advised Ministers that the UK was not in a position to generate the forces necessary to conduct combat operations at divisional level without US support.

1432. Until the middle of December 2002, Ministerial decisions and military planning and preparations were based on advice that the deployment of a single combat brigade, with four battalions, in a northern option and the possible deployment of a Royal Marine Commando Group to southern Iraq, were the maximum which could be deployed given the requirements of Op FRESCO and the timescale for military operations envisaged by the US.

1433. When the US asked the UK to deploy to the South, there was little time to:

- prepare and consider a detailed analysis of the options before decisions were taken; and
- plan for and implement the deployment for operations which at that stage it was anticipated might start by early March.

1434. The implications of the switch to the South in mid-January and the increase of the combat force to three brigades for equipping the forces deployed are addressed in Sections 6.2 and 6.3.