

580. The announcement of the Hutton Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly on 18 July, reinforced the Government's position that additional reviews were not needed.

581. The Government maintained that position until January 2004, backed by three votes in the House of Commons (on 4 June, 15 July and 22 October 2003) rejecting a succession of Opposition motions calling for an independent inquiry into the use of pre-war intelligence.

582. Mr Blair's initial response to growing criticism of the failure to find WMD was to counsel patience.

583. After the publication of the ISG Interim Report, the Government's focus shifted from finding stockpiles of weapons to emphasising evidence of the Iraqi regime's strategic intent.

584. Once President Bush made clear his decision to set up an independent inquiry, Mr Blair's resistance to a public inquiry became untenable.

585. After the announcement of the Butler Review, the UK Government's focus shifted to the content of the next ISG report, the Status Report.

586. The Government, still concerned about the nature of the public debate on WMD in the UK, sought to ensure that the Status Report included existing ISG material highlighting the strategic intentions of Saddam Hussein's regime and breaches of Security Council resolutions.

587. Mr Blair remained concerned about continuing public and Parliamentary criticism of the pre-conflict intelligence, the failure to find WMD and the decision to invade Iraq. After the reports from the Hutton Inquiry, the ISG and the US Commission, he sought to demonstrate that, although "the exact basis for action was not as we thought", the invasion had still been justified.

588. The ISG's findings were significant, but did not support past statements by the UK and US Governments, which had focused on Iraq's current capabilities and an urgent and growing threat.

589. The explanation for military action put forward by Mr Blair in October 2004 was not the one given before the conflict.

Planning for a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq

The failure to plan or prepare for known risks

590. The information on Iraq available to the UK Government before the invasion provided a clear indication of the potential scale of the post-conflict task.

591. It showed that, in order to achieve the UK's desired end state, any post-conflict administration would need to:

- restore infrastructure that had deteriorated significantly in the decade since 1991, to the point where it was not capable of meeting the needs of the Iraqi people;
- administer a state where the upper echelons of a regime that had been in power since 1968 had been abruptly removed and in which the capabilities of the wider civil administration, many of whose employees were members of the ruling party, were difficult to assess; and
- provide security in a country faced with a number of potential threats, including:
 - internecine violence;
 - terrorism; and
 - Iranian interference.

592. In December 2002, the MOD described the post-conflict phase of operations as “strategically decisive”.²⁰¹ But when the invasion began, the UK Government was not in a position to conclude that satisfactory plans had been drawn up and preparations made to meet known post-conflict challenges and risks in Iraq and to mitigate the risk of strategic failure.

593. Throughout the planning process, the UK assumed that the US would be responsible for preparing the post-conflict plan, that post-conflict activity would be authorised by the UN Security Council, that agreement would be reached on a significant post-conflict role for the UN and that international partners would step forward to share the post-conflict burden.

594. On that basis, the UK planned to reduce its military contribution in Iraq to medium scale within four months of the start of the invasion²⁰² and expected not to have to make a substantial commitment to post-conflict administration.²⁰³

595. Achieving that outcome depended on the UK's ability to persuade the US of the merits of a significant post-conflict role for the UN.

596. The UK could not be certain at any stage in the year before the invasion that it would succeed in that aim.

597. In January 2003, the UK sought to persuade the US of the benefits of UN leadership of Iraq's interim post-conflict civil administration.²⁰⁴ Officials warned that,

²⁰¹ Paper [SPG], 13 December 2002, ‘UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq’.

²⁰² Minute CDS to CJO, 18 March 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Authorisation for Military Operations in Iraq’ attaching Paper CDS, ‘Chief of Defence Staff Execute Directive to the Joint Commander for Operation TELIC (Phases 3 and 4)’.

²⁰³ Minute Straw and Hoon to Prime Minister, 19 March 2003, ‘Iraq: UK Military Contribution to post-conflict Iraq’.

²⁰⁴ Minute Ricketts to Private Secretary [FCO], 7 February 2003, ‘Iraq Strategy’.

if the UK failed to persuade the US, it risked “being drawn into a huge commitment of UK resources for a highly complex task of administration and law and order for an uncertain period”.

598. By March 2003, having failed to persuade the US of the advantages of a UN-led interim administration, the UK had set the less ambitious goal of persuading the US to accept UN authorisation of a Coalition-led interim administration and an international presence that would include the UN.²⁰⁵

599. On 19 March, Mr Blair stated in Parliament that discussions were taking place with the US, UN and others on the role of the UN and post-conflict issues.²⁰⁶

600. Discussions continued, but, as the invasion began:

- The UK had not secured US agreement to a Security Council resolution authorising post-conflict administration and could not be sure when, or on what terms, agreement would be possible.
- The extent of the UN’s preparations, which had been hindered by the absence of agreement on post-conflict arrangements, remained uncertain. Mr Annan emphasised to Ms Short the need for clarity on US thinking so that UN planning could proceed²⁰⁷ and told Sir Jeremy Greenstock that he “would not wish to see any arrangement subjugating UN activity to Coalition activity”.²⁰⁸
- Potential international partners for reconstruction and additional Coalition partners to provide security continued to make their post-conflict contributions conditional on UN authorisation for Phase IV (the military term for post-conflict operations).²⁰⁹

601. Despite being aware of the shortcomings of the US plan,²¹⁰ strong US resistance to a leading role for the UN,²¹¹ indications that the UN did not want the administration of Iraq to become its responsibility²¹² and a warning about the tainted image of the UN in Iraq,²¹³ at no stage did the UK Government formally consider other policy options, including the possibility of making participation in military action conditional on a satisfactory plan for the post-conflict period, or how to mitigate the known risk that the UK could find itself drawn into a “huge commitment of UK resources” for which no contingency preparations had been made.

²⁰⁵ Paper Iraq Planning Unit, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Phase IV: Authorising UNSCR’.

²⁰⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 19 March 2003, columns 931-932.

²⁰⁷ Telegram 501 UKMIS New York to FCO London, 21 March 2003, ‘Iraq Humanitarian/Reconstruction: Clare Short’s Visit to New York’.

²⁰⁸ Telegram 526 UKMIS New York to FCO London, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq Phase IV: UN Dynamics’.

²⁰⁹ [Paper FCO, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Phase IV Issues’.](#)

²¹⁰ [Minute Drummond to Rycroft, 19 March 2003, ‘Iraq Ministerial Meeting’.](#)

²¹¹ Minute Ricketts to Private Secretary [FCO], 7 February 2003, ‘Iraq Strategy’.

²¹² Public hearing, 15 December 2009, page 5.

²¹³ [Paper Middle East Department, 12 December 2002, ‘Interim Administrations in Iraq: Why a UN-led Interim Administration would be in the US interest’.](#)