

19. By early March, the US Administration was not prepared to allow inspections to continue or give Mr Blair more time to try to achieve support for action. The attempt to gain support for a second resolution was abandoned.

20. In the Inquiry's view, the diplomatic options had not at that stage been exhausted. Military action was therefore not a last resort.

21. In mid-March, Mr Blair's determination to stand alongside the US left the UK with a stark choice. It could act with the US but without the support of the majority of the Security Council in taking military action if Saddam Hussein did not accept the US ultimatum giving him 48 hours to leave. Or it could choose not to join US-led military action.

22. Led by Mr Blair, the UK Government chose to support military action.

23. Mr Blair asked Parliament to endorse a decision to invade and occupy a sovereign nation, without the support of a Security Council resolution explicitly authorising the use of force. Parliament endorsed that choice.

The UK decision to support US military action

24. President Bush decided at the end of 2001 to pursue a policy of regime change in Iraq.

25. The UK shared the broad objective of finding a way to deal with Saddam Hussein's defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and his assumed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes. However, based on consistent legal advice, the UK could not share the US objective of regime change. The UK Government therefore set as its objective the disarmament of Iraq in accordance with the obligations imposed in a series of Security Council resolutions.

UK policy before 9/11

26. Before the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 (9/11), the UK was pursuing a strategy of containment based on a new sanctions regime to improve international support and incentivise Iraq's co-operation, narrowing and deepening the sanctions regime to focus only on prohibited items and at the same time improving financial controls to reduce the flow of illicit funds to Saddam Hussein.

27. When UK policy towards Iraq was formally reviewed and agreed by the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP) in May 1999, the objectives towards Iraq were defined as:

“... in the short term, to reduce the threat Saddam poses to the region including by eliminating his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes; and, in