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# **The Iraq War, 2003 Transcript**

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## **The Iraq War, 2003**

Professor Vernon Bogdanor

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the last of six lectures on political crises in Britain since 1945. Next year's series will be six lectures on I think a much less controversial topic, the history of the monarchy from Queen Victoria to the present day, because the Iraq War, I suspect, is the most controversial of the topics I am discussing and certainly not yet history but a live political issue in that it still arouses very strong feelings. Indeed, a friend of mine, to whom I said I was giving these lectures, said, "I hope you get out alive after it..."

Of course, these feelings and attitudes greatly influence people's opinions of Tony Blair, who has become, in some circles at least, a political pariah, in large part because of Iraq. You may have read in yesterday's Times that there were reports of a new attempt to impeach him for misleading Parliament and to bring him before the International Criminal Court, and particularly in the Labour Party, this feeling is quite strong I think, though Blair is the only Labour leader who has ever won three elections in a row, two of them with the largest majorities Labour has ever secured. Critics of Blair allege that he secretly agreed with George Bush, the American President, on regime change in Iraq and created a false pretext to make an illegal war appear legal. He then bullied the Attorney General to provide legal justification for the War and deceived his Cabinet and Parliament to gain support for it. Critics say the War was not only illegal but the greatest British foreign policy disaster since Suez.

So, electorally, Iraq has cast a shadow over Blair's reputation, and perhaps the Chilcot Report, which is due in July, will help to remove that shadow – we do not know. But as I said before, I must be the only person in the country who is glad that the Chilcot Report has not yet appeared because I do not think I could face the task of reading what are apparently over two and a half million words about it. It is, of course, possible that everything I say today may be overtaken by the report.

Now, a second way I think in which this lecture differs from the others in the series is that Britain played a subordinate role in the War to the United States, and Blair was sometimes called the poodle of President Bush, though I will try and show that was not wholly fair, but the point is the War would almost certainly have occurred, even if Britain had not participated in it. At one point, President Bush said to Blair, "I appreciate the difficulties you are having with your Party. I shall quite understand if you do not join us." And then our role would have been, as it was during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, when Harold Wilson's Labour Government broadly supported America but without participating, but Blair said he would not take that position, that he would join the Americans, but if the War was a failure, it was not just a British failure, obviously it was an American one as well – it would have taken place whether Britain had participated or not.

I am not going to take sides in the debate on the War, persuade you that one side was right or the other wrong. What I want to do is lay out the issues involved as fairly as I can and then leave you to make up your own minds, but one conclusion I have come to, which I will state at the outset, is whether you think Blair or Bush were right or wrong, it seems to me that they acted in good faith. They did not, in my view, seek to deceive the public or Parliament to gain support for the War, and nor did they have hidden motives, such as the desire to gain oil from Iraq, and I hope my lecture will give clear evidence to support that judgement. Now, that does not mean I think they were necessarily right in their decisions. That is for you to judge. But it does mean they took their decisions with the best of intentions and in good faith. They may have been wrong, and you must decide that, but I think they were not wicked in that sense.

Now, the War was fought against Saddam Hussein, the ruler of Iraq, and he had come to power in Iraq in 1979. He was brutal and ruthless, even by the standards of the other dictatorships of the Middle East, and he was a representative of the Ba'ath Party, whose ideas were formed in the 1940s by two Syrian intellectuals and they were based on the ideas of Italian Fascism and German Nazism. The Ba'ath Party's ideology was secular, anti-religious, and also anti-communist, but the political leader Saddam Hussein most admired was Stalin and he took Stalin as his model, and he proved I think a fairly apt pupil.

Five days after coming to power, he called a meeting of leading members of the Ba'ath Party and he announced there had been a plot against his leadership and he read out the names of 66 people present, whom he said had been involved in the plot, who were ordered outside. Then he told the remainder of those present at the meeting that they had to act as a firing squad to shoot these 66, which they duly did.

At a later stage, the prisons became overcrowded with political prisoners, so one of Saddam's sons took 15,000 of those serving the longer sentences and shot them to make room for more. Saddam's sons were in fact as homicidal as he was and likely to succeed him in due course.

The Dutch United Nations Rapporteur for Human Rights said the brutality of the regime was, and I quote, "so grave that it has few parallels in the years that have passed since the Second World War" and that "the prevailing regime of systematic human violations remains a threat to peace and security in the region".

In 1980 Saddam became at war with Iran, which lasted eight years and ended inconclusively and cost over half a million Iraqi lives. During that war, he used chemical weapons on Iranian troops.

In 1988, to put down a revolt of the Kurds in the north of Iraq, he forcibly relocated Kurdish civilians in the north from their homes, killing at least 50,000 and probably many more. He used chemical weapons on the Kurds, that is, on his own people, something even Hitler had not done in peacetime, killing around 5,000 and causing birth defects in others. 6,000 Kurds fled to Turkey as a result.

Before Saddam Hussein came to power, Iraq had been developing a nuclear weapon and had been aided in this by the French and in particular by Jacques Chirac when he was Prime Minister of France in 1974-6. There was a nuclear facility at Osirak in Iraq, known to critics of the French as "Ochirac". That was bombed and destroyed by the Israelis in 1981, and Israel was condemned by the international community, but it is worth considering how politics would have developed if Iraq had become a nuclear power.

Saddam continued to develop nuclear weapons and also chemical and biological weapons. His Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, was to tell Richard Butler, the Australian head of the inspectors in Iraq, that "We made biological weapons in order to deal with the Persians and the Jews".

In 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait to replenish his oil supplies, which had been badly hit by the war with Iran. This was the second time he had invaded a neighbouring state, and the first time since 1945 that one UN member had annexed another. In response, the UN passed Resolution 678, which you can see there, in which the member states of the United Nations, cooperating with Kuwait, were authorised to use all necessary means to evict Iraq from Kuwait and also to restore international peace and security in the area, and that is important because they could have said just to evict Iraq from Kuwait but they did not, they added a second point that Iraq had to comply with, namely, to restore international peace and security in the area.

A coalition, authorised by the UN, because the phrase "all necessary means" implies force if necessary, led by the United States but including the Arab States, drove Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait after a 38-day campaign, and he, very wisely, rapidly withdrew his troops, and the coalition then stopped. Some wanted the coalition forces to go further, to remove him from power, but it had no mandate from the UN for regime change. The UN mandate was to remove Saddam from Kuwait and secure peace in the area. But the fact that Iraq had not been invaded enabled Saddam to boast that he had been undefeated and he thought his mistake had been to invade Kuwait before he had nuclear weapons and said he would not make that mistake again.

Many in the West not only hoped but assumed that this humiliation would lead to Saddam's overthrow, but it did not. They encouraged revolts against him, but they did not support these revolts. There were two revolts against him: first from the Kurds in the north; and secondly, from the Shia Muslims in the south, who were the majority in Iraq. Both were repressed with great brutality, but the West then, after that, established safe havens and no-fly zones in these areas, so as to prevent Iraqi planes from flying over them, and the Kurds gained de facto autonomy in their own area in the north and established a government there which approximated to some of the norms of democracy, with greater popular control certainly than in Iraq but also in the other Arab States.

Saddam repressed not only the Kurds - that is fairly well-known - but also the Shia in the south, and there were unconfirmed reports that he had used poison gas on them as well. But there were, it was thought, around 50,000 Shia deaths and many more fled the country. The figures are unclear. But the Australian director of the inspectors, who later came to Iraq, said that "For Saddam Hussein, chemical warfare is as normal as crowd control." It was estimated that, up to the time of the Gulf War, from 1988, he had killed around half a million of his own citizens.

Now, after the war, the United Nations granted an armistice, that is peace on conditions, and the condition was that Saddam disposed of his weapons of mass destruction, under UN supervision, or rendered them harmless. He was also required to abstain from supporting international terrorism. That was UN Resolution 687. Saddam was given 90 days to comply with that Resolution and sanctions were imposed until he complied, though the sanctions did not include food, medicine and humanitarian supplies.

The reason for this provision was that, while Iraq was not alone in developing or seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction, and no doubt some other nasty dictatorships also were developing them, Saddam alone had used them and used them more than once, so this was what was passed.

From 1991, although there was a 90-day limit, Saddam Hussein played cat-and-mouse with the UN inspectors who were authorised to secure Resolution 687. In 1996, his son-in-law defected to Jordan and said that the UN inspectors had not noticed it but he was breaking the Resolution and was actually developing weapons of mass destruction. The son-in-law was asked if he would come back to Iraq and said he would be granted an amnesty if he did. Very foolishly, he accepted that and was killed. From March 1996, after the son-in-law's revelations, Saddam denied the inspectors access to key facilities and documents, and in August 1998, he ceased all cooperation.

The UN then passed a resolution demanding compliance, a unanimous resolution of the Security Council, 15-0, and Saddam backed down, but three weeks later, the chairman of the inspectors said that Iraq was still not cooperating but placing new restrictions on inspectors. This was during the time in office of President Clinton – it was before Bush – and Clinton said, “Instead of the inspectors disarming Saddam, Saddam has disarmed the inspectors.” And America, under Clinton, and Britain, under Blair, responded with a bombing campaign, and that was undertaken without UN support – it was unilateral. This is important because Bush was often accused of ignoring the United Nations, but that process began under Clinton, and it began because of various terrorist attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and because of the worries about Iraq.

In autumn 1998, the Republican-dominated Congress in America passed an act, which Clinton signed, called the Iraq Liberation Act, which adopted regime-change as official American policy. It did not authorise military action to remove Saddam, but it allowed money to be sent to the Iraqi opposition and authorised various methods to undermine him. All this happened, let me stress, under Clinton. Regime-change was now official American policy, and this was almost as great a turning point in American policy as what happened after 9/11. The Americans were beginning to say we cannot rely on the United Nations to deal with these threats and we can't really trust the Saddam regime.

Now, Saddam Hussein failed to appreciate this. He thought, in my view, that democracies were too hesitant to resist him and that he could continue to play for time.

Tony Blair, the new British Prime Minister, or at least became Prime Minister in 1997, said that he was going to follow what he called “an ethical foreign policy”, and in March 1999, without UN authorisation, he committed troops to Kosovo to counter what he regarded as a Serbian threat of genocide against the Albanian Muslim population. He could not get UN authority for it because the Russians would have vetoed it because Serbia was Russia's ally. NATO began a 78-day bombing campaign of targets throughout Yugoslavia, which led to the end of the Serbian dictator, Milosevic. The argument for that was humanitarian relief, and it was supported by Robin Cook, who was the Foreign Secretary, who was to resign over Iraq. In Iraq, humanitarian relief was a secondary consideration, it was not the main or even the only legal justification for the war, but Kosovo, for some, provided a precedent for action taken without UN approval for a purpose which many believed was justified.

The International Court of Justice disapproved of the invasion of Kosovo, and the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee said that it was “of dubious legality in the current state of international law but justified on moral grounds”, and it was supported by the EU and NATO, which did not support the Iraq War, though many members did.

Now, this was the context then in which 9/11 came about, which was the worst single terrorist threat in the history of the world and made people feel there was a threat of unlimited destruction and unlimited casualties, and that fundamentally altered British and American policy towards Iraq.

Some in the American Administration believed that there were links between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist organisation which had been responsible for 9/11, but most in the American Administration did not, and the British Government did not. Saddam Hussein, it is fairly clear, was not involved in 9/11, but he welcomed it, said it was a due punishment for America's crimes, and he was involved, contrary to 687, in international terrorism. He offered \$10,000 to the families of suicide bombers in Israel and was later to offer the same sum to any Iraqi who killed a UN relief worker in northern Iraq. The link with terrorism shed further light on the nature of the regime, but was not the basis for the alteration of policy. What changed was the calculus, because it meant that Britain and America were no longer prepared to put up with Saddam's playing for time, and they said, by comparison with other rogue states – North Korea, for example – it is not only he has got the capability to make weapons of mass destruction but, as had already been shown, he had the firm intention of using them, and the regime of containment and ineffective sanctions, they said, had run its course. He had been given 90 days in 1991. It was now 10 years later, and the international community now had to show that Saddam could no longer flout UN resolutions but had to comply, and that meant a policy of deterrence backed up by force. That was a change, again, a further change in British and American policy which Saddam failed to appreciate.

Bush and Blair both came to the conclusion that the policy of containment, as it had been carried out so far, inspections and sanctions were insufficient, and indeed the sanctions were eroding and harming Iraqis because the money for money and food was being appropriated by him and put into his own coffers. Russia, with some support from France, was watering down sanctions. Both countries had commercial interests in Iraq.

In the 1990s, John Major's Government was accused of allowing dual-use goods to be sold in Iraq, that is goods that could be used to make weapons of mass of destruction, in breach of sanctions, but the Russians and French were breaking sanctions on a much greater scale and profiting from the fact that British Governments, on the whole, did their best to ensure compliance with sanctions. Sanctions were also being broken by the neighbouring states, Syria and Jordan, and Saddam was selling oil on the black market to them, and 200,000 barrels a day were being sold, in defiance of sanctions. So they were not working effectively, and there was a danger of Saddam using this oil revenue, people thought, to make weapons of

mass destruction.

The calculus changed in the sense that Britain and America thought it was much more dangerous than it seemed in the past to allow Saddam to be in possession of weapons of mass destruction, precisely because his past behaviour had shown he would use them. So, there was a link between weapons of mass destruction and regime change, in this obvious sense, that the very nature of the Iraqi regime and its past actions meant these weapons would be a much greater danger to the civilised world than the possession of such weapons certainly by a democracy or even by other rogue regimes, which were much more cautious about using them. As we have seen, America had adopted a policy of regime-change in 1998, largely because of this, and that case seemed even stronger after 9/11.

Now, all this certainly altered – 9/11 did alter the attitudes of the Bush Administration. Bush had won the presidency primarily on domestic issues, and his first meeting with Blair, in February 2001, Bush said his priorities were education, welfare and reducing the size of the state, and at first, his policy on Iraq was a continuation of Clinton's before 1998, simply containing Saddam by tightening sanctions, as his Secretary of State, Colin Powell, put it, "Keep Saddam in his box." Now, all that changed after 9/11, and in October 2002, there was a Joint Congressional Resolution authorising the use of force in Iraq. It was passed by a majority of 296 to 133 in the House, and 77 to 23 in the Senate, and that was a larger margin than America supporting the Gulf War in 1991. It was supported by all the Republicans, but the Democrats were divided, though many Democrats voted for it. Joe Biden, the current Vice-President, voted for it, and so did Hillary Clinton and so did John Kerry, but Obama, who was not yet in the Senate, was against. The policy now was that UN resolutions must be firmly enforced, and if Saddam did not comply fully, force would be used to ensure compliance.

British policy was to support America, but on conditions. It is not true, as is often said, that Blair offered America a blank cheque. The British Ambassador, Sir Christopher Meyer, said that, at a meeting in Crawford in Texas in April 2002, Blair had pledged, and I use his words, "in blood", end of quote, to support Bush and regime-change. The difficulty with that was that Sir Christopher was not actually present at the meeting between Bush and Blair, and both deny this happened, and those who were present at the meeting deny it happened. But Blair insisted on two conditions for his support.

First, that Bush had to go to the UN and work through the UN, which was something that Bush was unhappy about doing and some of his Administration, particularly the Vice-President, Cheney, and the Secretary of State, Rumsfeld, did not want to do. Their line was Iraq is an enemy of America and has to be dealt with, and the UN is irrelevant. But Bush said he did not need further authority because he had the Joint Congressional Resolution of 1998, passed under Clinton, and the one of 2001. But Bush agreed, under pressure, that he would use the UN. He later very much regretted it.

Blair also insisted that America had to revive the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process because he said if that problem could be dealt with, the other Arab States would be much more sympathetic to the American position. Blair thought that Arab resentment against America, which was seen as Israel's protector, would be lessened, and there would be more Arab support for an attack on Iraq, if that proved necessary. Now, Bush agreed to that too, but the peace process led nowhere.

Contrary to what Sir Christopher Meyer implies, the Crawford meeting did not decide upon immediate regime-change, though it did lay out contingency plans. As yet, there was no definite commitment to war. The first choice was to continue to use diplomacy but with a different approach, and they argued that if Saddam was convinced that America in particular would use force, he might comply with his obligations, though perhaps they were pessimistic about whether he actually would. They said he had to be convinced there had been a change of view in America and Britain. As late as September 2002, Bush told Blair at Camp David, "I do not want to go to war but I will do it."

The problem facing Bush and Blair was clear; that Iraq had cheated before and Saddam had done everything he could to develop weapons of mass destruction. Resolution 687 had given him 90 days. We were now, in the autumn of 2002, 11 years, and the situation was unclear. If he was not hiding weapons of mass destruction, why was he playing cat-and-mouse with the inspectors? As we have said, they were excluded in 1998, they were re-admitted late in 2002 when British and American troops, to the extent of 250,000, were placed on Iraq's borders, in other words, when he seemed to face the threat of force, but people said he had a lot of time to hide the evidence between 1998 and 2002 - could the evidence be discovered? Before the Gulf War, the International Atomic Energy Authority had failed to detect Saddam's nuclear weapons programme.

In September 2002, the Government asked the Joint Intelligence Committee, that is the heads of the Secret Service, to produce a dossier as to the intelligence they had relating to Iraq, and this dossier became very controversial because it made this statement: "His military planning allows for some of the weapons of mass destruction to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them. Unless we face up to the threat, we place at risk the lives and prosperity of our own people." Now, reading that, you might think this meant they could be launched on Britain in 45 minutes, but the actual meaning was they related to battlefield weapons in Iraq or Iraq's borders, not to any attack on Britain. In a report on the intelligence in 2004, conducted by Lord Butler, who was Sir Robin Butler, had been Cabinet Secretary, he said the various judgements in the dossier

went, and I quote, "They went to, although not beyond, the outer limits of the intelligence available," and he said they should have made that clear and they should have made clear what the limitations of the intelligence were, that it was patchy and unclear. Perhaps all intelligence, particularly about a totalitarian state, is bound to be unclear. But he did say there was no deliberate attempt on the part of the Government to mislead and no evidence of culpable negligence or deliberate distortion. It is important to note the document was produced by the intelligence agencies, not by the Government. Blair wrote a forward to the report but he did not actually write the document. But it omitted caveats that the evidence was thin, unclear and uncertain, and Lord Butler said the 45-minute claim should not have been included.

However, it is fair to say, on the other side, that the 45 minutes was in no way crucial in the justification for war. It was not mentioned in the Commons debate on the war in March 2003, and became important only in hindsight.

The Butler report said that a little earlier, in March 2002, the intelligence advice was that "Iraq continues to develop mass destruction, though our intelligence is poor. It continues with its biological weapons and chemical weapons programmes. If it has not already done so, could produce significant quantities of biological warfare agents within days, and chemical warfare agents within weeks of a decision to do so. We believe it could deliver chemical and biological weapons by a variety of means, including ballistic missile warheads. There are also some indications of a continuing nuclear programme." The intelligence people said, "Saddam has used weapons of mass destruction in the past and could do so again if his regime were threatened."

Dr David Kelly, a Government scientist, was accused of leaking details of the Government's plans to the media and, very tragically, committed suicide when the media found this out. He was, ironically, in favour of the war, and he said that "The long-term threat remains – Iraq's development to military maturity of weapons of mass destruction, something only regime change will avert."

British intelligence services, and American for that matter, were much-criticised after the Iraq War, but it is important to note that it was not just the British and American intelligence services that believed Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. The intelligence services of almost every country, including those countries opposed to the war, France, Germany and Russia, also said the likelihood was that Saddam was developing them. Bush was told by the German Ambassador – and Germany was a country opposed to the war – and Germany said, "I think all of our governments believe that Iraq has produced weapons of mass destruction and that we have assumed they still have weapons of mass destruction."

In November 2002, the Security Council, by a unanimous majority, 15-0, passed Resolution 1441. It said that Iraq was still in material breach of 678 and 687 and it had, and I quote, "a final opportunity to comply within 30 days or face serious consequences". Now, this Resolution confirmed what the other Resolutions have said, that contrary to what many think, the onus was not on the inspectors to prove that he had these weapons of mass destruction. It was, particularly with 1441, the onus was on Saddam to show that he had them and was destroying them in conformity with earlier resolutions. Now, that was passed unanimously, as I say, and therefore no member state was in doubt that Saddam had not complied with the earlier resolutions and that he probably still had these weapons. No state it was unlikely Saddam had them anymore.

He had a week to respond and a further 30 days to comply, and the Resolution then said the UN was then to convene to consider the outcome. Now, five days after the Resolution was passed, Saddam allowed the inspectors in again. But the Resolution was ambiguous and deliberately so. It did not say whether or not a further resolution was needed to authorise military action. 678 had used the words "all necessary means" and that implies war. This one said "serious consequences", which does not necessarily imply war. It neither affirmed nor denied that you needed a further UN resolution to go to war. An attempt by Russia and France to insert language to the effect that military action required another resolution was defeated, but the resolution did not authorise force, and the Security Council rejected the words "all necessary means", which would have authorised force, because France and Russia would not have agreed to an explicit authorisation of force, nor to an automatic trigger, whereas Britain would not agree to an explicit commitment to a further UN resolution. So, the issue of whether a second resolution was needed was, at the least, uncertain, and you may say, if you are opposed to the war, you should not go to war on an uncertain or equivocal resolution.

Now, it was reasonable to suppose that another UN resolution was needed to authorise force, or at least that it would be for the Security Council to consider whether Saddam had complied, not for individual member states, and the Security Council had no reason to believe the Security Council had delegated authorisation for the use of force to Britain and America and those countries which supported them.

The problem was, suppose it was obvious that Saddam had not complied, but the Security Council, for reasons related to the politics of, for example, France and Russia, was not going to act, as in fact occurred, and that faced Britain and America with a difficult dilemma.

At first, Blair hoped for a second resolution. Bush, by this time, was getting fed up with the United Nations, but Blair said we had better try and get a second resolution, and he worked hard with the Americans to get one because, after all, he said, "You're in no doubt that Saddam still has these weapons." No one believed

he had complied. Had the opponents of a second resolution got cold feet or were they, as some alleged, perhaps unkindly, that France and Russia were influenced by their commercial contracts with Iraq? But what the French were now leading the dissidents in saying was that the inspectors needed more time, and the inspectors also said they wanted more time. They said, after 1441, we were getting a bit more cooperation and things were improving. They were not satisfactory – they did not say he has complied with the earlier resolution; they said we are getting somewhere.

It seems to me the position of the French and the inspectors was distorted because this had said 30 days and it was a final opportunity, and in 1991, had been given 90 days, and he still had not complied, and such compliance came about because of the threat of force. How could we be sure that more time would resolve the issue? The issue was not time but whether Saddam was willing to comply.

To take another example, South Africa, after the collapse of Apartheid, agreed to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, and did so within two years, and only nine inspectors were needed to verify that because post-Apartheid South African was perfectly willing to destroy its weapons of mass destruction. So, I think that was one weakness in the French position.

A further weakness is that the inspectors were not there as detectives. It was not their job to search out whether Saddam had these weapons of mass destruction. It was to verify that Saddam was complying with the UN Resolution, that the onus on him to say that he had, and it seems to me the French position is shifting the onus, the burden of proof, to the inspectors, and it was not with them, it was with Saddam to comply. And it was by no means clear that France, in particular, would ever support the use of force, and Jacques Chirac, who was now President of France, said as much. He said, on 10<sup>th</sup> March, “Whatever the circumstances, France will vote no to a second resolution.” So the argument of Blair and Bush was that he UN would then appear impotent and Saddam would have defied it. Now, I think no one thought he had actually complied with 1441, and after the invasion, the Iraq survey group discovered that Saddam had been instructing his experts and technical people not to cooperate since, once sanctions had gone, he hoped to re-start his weapons of mass destruction programme.

Paradoxically, the only method by which Saddam might have been made to comply without a war would have been a unanimous second resolution by the Security Council saying that if he did not, immediate force would be used, but such a second resolution was unobtainable, and if no such second resolution was unobtainable, it was likely that Saddam would not comply because he would be aware he did not have to face the threat of force. If the UN took no action, it would be, to paraphrase what Clinton said, the UN that was disarmed, not Saddam, since he would be aware he had nothing to fear in the event of non-compliance. As it was, the UN position seemed to be to tell Saddam, unless you comply within 30 days as we have demanded, we will give the inspectors more time and perhaps issue another ultimatum – if you do not comply, you will be given more time, and he had been given more time since 1991. Would there be another final opportunity? This was the final opportunity. It may be the French and others regretted their support for 1441 and thought it had gone too far, but it was very, very clear in its wording.

The majority of the permanent members of the UN Security Council did not support the use of force and the majority of elected members did not either. Was the intervention legal?

The Attorney General said it was, even in the absence of a second resolution, because he said that there was still a threat to international peace and security, and that 678 authorised force and set out the ceasefire conditions, and that 687 revived authority to use force under 678, whereas 1441 confirmed that Saddam was still in material breach. So, this was a breach of the armistice and the doctrine of implied authorisation to use force was there in previous UN resolutions.

Most international lawyers, not all, but most, think that argument is unsound because 678 authorised a coalition, supported by the UN, to take action. It did not delegate authority to Britain, America and their allies. None of the legal advisors in the Foreign Office believed that there was a legal justification for the war, and one deputy head resigned, and Robin Cook, Leader of the House and former Foreign Secretary, also resigned. The objection to the doctrine put forward by Goldsmith, the Attorney General, was that it was not for the parties of conflict to decide on their own case, and that 1441 would not have received unanimous support if those who supported it believed that it provided for immediate war in the event of non-compliance.

Let us assume that we think the war could not be justified in international law, and I said that was the view of the majority of international lawyers, though not all of them. Now, of course, international law is more amorphous and uncertain than domestic law and there are no means, as there are in domestic law, of enforcing it. You may remember, when I gave a lecture on Suez, that Aneurin Bevan, who was opposed to Suez, said there was only slogan worse than “My country, right or wrong” and that was “The United Nations, right or wrong”.

Could the actions of France and Russia be the real arbiter of international law, and if so, what had that to do with international morality? After all, the leader of Russia was an ex-KGB officer. Now, why should his judgement have anything to do with international law or morality? China was also opposed to the war, on the Security Council, but why should they, as a notoriously repressive regime, why should they be the arbiters of

international morality of law? This draws attention to the fact the United Nations is not a court but a political body, making decisions on political grounds – difficult to accept it's the fount of all morality in international affairs.

If Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, his position would be immensely strengthened. He could invade Kuwait or Saudi Arabia to get oil, and the costs of removing him would be horrendous, and if that happened, people in Britain and America would turn on Blair and Bush and say "Why did you not act against Saddam in time? You were criminally negligent. You have cost many lives, not only in the Middle East but the lives of British and American troops." I think people would not have accepted as an excuse that there was no support in the UN for action against Saddam.

A lot of people criticised British Governments in the 1930s, the Baldwin and Chamberlain Governments, for not stopping Hitler when he was weaker. They said he could have been removed with much smaller loss of life if you had dealt with him earlier. Now, any attempt to remove Hitler, I think, before 1938, would have aroused great opposition at home and had little domestic support, and in the 1930s, the League of Nations proved unable to prevent aggression by Mussolini in Abyssinia.

I have given the example of Kosovo, where Britain intervened without United Nations' support. There are other examples of regime change on that basis. The Indians intervened in 1971 to protect Bangladesh against attacks from Pakistan. They were condemned by the UN General Assembly. Tanzania intervened to remove General Amin in 1979, and the Vietnamese intervened in Cambodia to remove Pol Pot, a murderous dictator, in 1979. Now, in 1950, Britain and the UN had authority to resist the North Korean attack on South Korea because the Soviet Union, for various reasons, was boycotting the Security Council. Had they not been boycotting it, they would have vetoed it.

The political argument against war was that Saddam Hussein was no more of a threat than he had been since 1991 that containment and sanctions, though not working perfectly, were, in the words of Colin Powell that I have used before, "keeping him in his box". It had been partially successful. In the words of the Butler Report, it had frozen Iraq's nuclear programme and prevented her from rebuilding her chemical arsenal to pre-Gulf War levels. Ballistic missile programmes had been severely restricted. Biological and chemical weapon programmes had been hindered. No-fly zones gave some protection to the Kurds and Shia, and Saddam was not threatening his neighbours. But they also said, to the extent it was working, it was working only because of a threat of force, not because Saddam had had a change of heart, and the Butler Report quoted, with approval, the report of the Joint Intelligence Committee, "Playing for time, he would then embark on a renewed policy of non-cooperation." It concludes: "In sum, despite the considerable difficulties, the use of force in a ground campaign is the only option that we can confidently will remove Saddam and bring Iraq back into the international community." So, once the threat of force was removed, containment would no longer have worked.

Bush and Blair faced what I think is a cruel dilemma, in which there were no easy answers. They believed, if they failed to act, they would have to act later and in far less favourable circumstances, and that would be blamed for future generations of not confronting an evil dictator when it was possible to do so at much less a cost. It was the same dilemma faced by British Governments in the 1930s.

There was a last attempt to prevent war when the British and American Governments laid down five new conditions for Iraq to meet, including that the inspectors be allowed to conduct interviews with 30 Iraqi scientists involved in weapons of mass destruction outside Iraq so they could not be influenced by the dictatorship to give the answers that Saddam wanted. The inspectors added a further condition of their own, that Saddam publicly call on all Iraqis to cooperate with them, and that had no response from Iraq.

By 15<sup>th</sup> March, when the House of Commons debated this, it was 127 days since Resolution 1441, which had given Saddam 30 days, and he was now, the Commons was told, in breach of 17 United Nations resolutions. The Commons, for the first time in modern history, actually had a vote on the war. There was no vote in 1914 or 1939. And it was thought that, although there would be a majority for the war, there would not be a majority in the Labour Party, which meant that Blair would have to resign. Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary was preparing papers for a transition of Prime Minister. Jack Straw told Blair, "If you go next Wednesday with Bush and without a second resolution, the only regime change that will be happening is here!" But in the end, a majority of Labour MPs did vote for the war. Most Conservatives supported the war, although there were some prominent dissidents, including Kenneth Clarke. The Liberal Democrats were united against the war. Blair said, very unfairly I think, that they were united only in misjudgement and opportunism – that is unfair. They had a principled case against the war.

There was much popular opposition in Britain to it. There was a march in London which attracted, it is said, around a million people, the largest peacetime such demonstration in the country. It was the first occasion when both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster condemned the war, though once we went to war, public opinion turned round in its favour, as often happens. But before the war, the Times showed that 67% of British people were against the war, 90% of French were against the war, 86% of Germans, and also 93% of Spanish, though the Spaniards favoured the war, the Spanish Government joined the war, the coalition fighting the war. Blair told the Spanish Prime



Minister that the percentage of people in Spain supporting the war was roughly the percentage who believed that Elvis Presley was still alive.

People often say that governments should lead and not merely follow public opinion, and Blair in particular was often criticised for following public opinion and focus groups and spin and all the rest of it, but when a government does not follow public opinion, it is condemned for ignoring it, so perhaps you cannot easily win.

On 17<sup>th</sup> March, Blair and Bush met in the Azores. Bush said he wanted to come to London, but was advised that might not be wise. Bush issued a statement saying that Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours – “Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing.”

Six of the then-15 members of the European Union supported the war – Britain, plus Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, but all the 10 new accession states for 2004, in other words the ex-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, with recent memories of tyranny. Chirac said they had missed a good chance to be quiet and accused them of being badly behaved, which was not well-received in Eastern Europe. Of NATO members, 15 were in favour. Only Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Germany were against. But Blair was the only European social democrat leader to favour the war, apart from the Poles.

The Arab League, predictably, denounced the invasion, but Egypt allowed coalition warships to use the Suez Canal, and Jordan authorised deployment of US troops on its soil. Japan and, perhaps not surprisingly, South Korea also supported the war. In total, 40 countries supported it.

Perhaps at this point, without the advantage of hindsight, let me do a poll. How many of you, in what I have described so far – I have tried to be as fair as I can – how many of you would have voted for the war in the House of Commons?

Victory was achieved in the war in less than two months, with very few casualties. Iraq was a country the size of France or California. There were around a thousand British deaths, some from friendly fire. But no weapons of mass destruction were found, and some said that Blair and/or Bush were liars, that they deliberately said there were weapons of mass destruction, knowing it was false, so as to make a case for war. If you think about it, that is absurd. They were bound to be found out. If they knew there were no weapons there and they were going to war, it was bound to be found out, and leaving aside morality, it would be a very stupid thing to do, and it would have been a pointless deceit which they had known would have ruined their reputations, and as was clear, the intelligence services of countries opposed to the war, not just Britain and France, believed that he had them. And the idea that Blair had deceived was refuted by the report by Lord Hutton, a law lord, in 2004.

It is thought by some that Saddam’s strategy was to hide his weakness by pretending that he had weapons when he did not. But it is also possible, in that sort of state, that his subordinates were too frightened to tell him that his position was much weaker than he thought and that the UN had actually succeeded in getting rid of a lot of the weapons. I mean, anyone who told him something he did not want to hear would not survive for very long. It is very difficult to read the mind of a dictator, why he took the policy he did.

It is equally absurd to say, as some do, that we went to war for oil. There would be no problem for the West in getting oil from Iraq – Saddam would readily have sold oil in return for lifting the sanctions and the threat of inspections, would be happy to do that. After the invasion, the oil was used not for the West but to rebuild the infrastructure in Iraq.

I have said no weapons of mass destruction were found, and that is a general view, but it needs to be qualified. The report of the Iraq survey group said, in 2003, there was no active programme, but it also said that Saddam was a greater threat than we had known. Its second report, in September 2004, based on interviews with Saddam and his associates, said that Saddam wanted to recruit Iraq’s capacity for weapons of mass destruction after sanctions were removed and Iraq’s economy stabilised. The Butler report said that, prior to the war, the Iraqi regime had the strategic intention of resuming the pursuit of prohibited weapons programmes, including if possible its nuclear weapons programme, when UN inspection regimes were relaxed and sanctions were eroded or lifted. They also said he was importing dual-use goods, in breach of sanctions, and that, unknown to the United Nations, he maintained laboratories that could quickly be reactivated to produce weapons of mass destruction. They said that Iraqis were planning to produce several chemical warfare agents, including sulphur mustard, nitrogen mustard and sarin, and that their programme included the use of human subjects for testing purposes – in other words, to test biological poisons. So, he was certainly in breach of UN resolutions, and while you can argue the intelligence was mistaken, it can also be argued that those who believe in containment and the effectiveness of sanctions under the UN also were misjudging the seriousness of the situation because, since the UN was unaware of the laboratories, the inspectors might have concluded that the weapons had been destroyed, sanctions would have been abandoned, and Saddam would have been free to resume. As I say, the only constraint on him was the threat of force, and after a while, that threat would cease to carry conviction, even if the UN had been prepared to maintain it in face of the clearly declared opposition of France and other countries. It is possible that Saddam would have had a change of heart, that he would have become milder and ceased to be a menace, and that his homicidal sons, who would probably have succeeded him, would also have become gentler characters –

in other words, that the regime would have reformed itself, but I would not bet on that.

The aftermath was that there was an elected and legitimate government in Iraq, and there still is a legitimate government in Iraq, and the Kurdish areas became, for all practical purposes, independent. But that legitimate government was soon beset by huge problems – looting, corruption and civil war, and the intervention of the Al Qaeda terrorists, and also from Iran. These were defeated by coalition forces by 2010, with around 200,000 casualties, mostly Iraqi insurgents and Al Qaeda. The strategic effect of the war seems to have strengthened Iran, which had strong links with the Shia in the south of Iraq. In 2010, the Americans withdrew, perhaps a mistaken judgement, and that led to the incursion of Daesh, which now controls a part of Iraq.

Now, it is fair to say, I think, that much of the criticism of the war, not all but some of it at least, is retrospective, relating to what happened after the war rather than the war. If Iraq had settled down, as to some extent Kosovo has, I think criticism would be more muted.

However, when you look at the casualties, it is worth remembering that over 500,000 Iraqis had died in the unnecessary war with Iran, around 60,000 Kurds had been killed by Saddam, and many more displaced from their homes, 75,000 were killed in the first Gulf War, and around 50,000 Shias were probably killed in the 1991 reprisals, and at least 100,000 further civilian deaths under Saddam. In addition, Iraq, which had been richer than Portugal in 1979, by 2003 had 60% of its population dependent on food aid. Now, Saddam said that was because of sanctions, but it was not, because he was using the money for food, as I have said, for his own purposes. A third of Iraqi children in the centre and south of Iraq were suffering from chronic malnutrition, and 30 of a thousand children under five were dying, a figure worse than the Congo. As I say, this was because the money for food and medicines imported by the international community had been used by Saddam for his own purposes. Matters immediately improved when the coalition forces and a new Iraqi Government introduced a proper immunisation and nutrition programme, and by 2010, because the oil was used for the benefit of Iraqis, GDP per head was three times as high as it had been in 2003. So, it is a difficult balance to draw the judgement of whether things were better or worse.

In addition, for a very short time, other Middle Eastern dictatorships were very frightened by the Americans. Libya, in 2003, Colonel Gaddafi confessed he had been developing weapons of mass destruction and would now dismantle them, which he did. He said that six days after Saddam Hussein was captured at the end of 2003. Was that a coincidence? We do not know. Iran began to negotiate on its nuclear programme in October 2003, and Pakistan shut down the activities of its nuclear scientist, A.Q. Khan. For a short time, rogue and terrorist states became very frightened of what the Americans might do.

At this point, you might want to hear Blair giving a retrospective judgement. It is on Irish television, certainly, I think around 2010, after his memoirs had come out. He is interviewed on Irish television.

### *Recording*

*I: ...sitting in Downing Street, having a cup of coffee in the morning and listening to, say, a million people outside protesting. Did those protesters and the enormity of it at the time give you pause for thought?*

*TB: Of course, it – look, it's not them that gave me pause for thought, simply. The awesome nature of the responsibility of the decision – you should have pause for thought all the way through. But here's the thing: in the end, you have to decide this way or that. There is, unfortunately, no third way in it.*

*I: The number of soldiers that have died, British soldiers in Iraq, and the countless number of Iraqi civilians that have died – have you ever had a moment of a night where you might have shed a tear and said this is horrific? Did you ever cry about what's happened?*

*TB: As I say in the book, you wouldn't be human if you didn't feel emotional about it, and I actually explain one occasion when I did, when meeting the family of one of the soldiers, but let's also remember that if I had taken the opposite decision, or if America had taken the opposite decision, there were also people dying under Saddam, every year. Just one little thing which is worth pointing out: under Saddam, the child mortality rate in Iraq was the same as the Congo; now, it is down to a third of what it was – that's 50,000 or 60,000 children, extra children, living every year there. So, when you look at the history of this, unfortunately, this is not a case of this decision leading to bad consequences, this decision leading to good. It's a decision with difficult consequences either way.*

*I: When you arrive into a situation like this, a live television interview, and you've come through the gates and you have people chanting with their placards and so on and they're shouting "War criminal!" and they're shouting at you – are you a war criminal?*

*TB: Of course I don't believe that, but I mean-*

*I: Why are they calling you one?*

*TB: Ryan, you know why they are ad-*

*I: No, no, explain it.*

*TB: Look, I'm not going to explain it. I don't have to explain it. They can explain it. But in the end-*

*I: You can try to answer...*

*TB: You know, I...of course I can understand it, but you can't take decisions on the basis of people with placards. You've got to take decisions on the basis of what you think is right.*

*I: Does their opinion matter, do you think?*

*TB: Of course their opinion matters, but their opinion can't determine everything. Look, one of the first things that you learn in politics, I'm afraid, and this is a lesson in political leadership, is that those who shout most don't deserve necessarily to be listened to most. Everyone should be listened to equally, irrespective of the volume of noise. So, yes, I had to listen to people who were opposed to the decisions I took. There were also people in favour of the decisions I took, including, incidentally, many, many Iraqis.*

*I: I remember Gerry Adams sat in that seat last season of this programme and I asked him "Do you think you have blood on your hands?" after all the conflict and so on, and I'd put the same question to you with Iraq with a view to...as somebody who was involved in a military struggle, war, whatever you want to call it. Do you ever feel sometimes that perhaps you have blood on your hands?*

*TB: No, I feel that, em, I took a decision that was incredibly difficult. I know many people disagree with it, but I took it in good faith, and all I ask people to do is to understand the other point of view. I understand theirs.*

*I: Would you do it tomorrow, with the same information? I know it's a bit of a [?] question but...*

*TB: Well, it is, it is really, because it's a hypothetical question.*

*I: I know it is.*

*TB: But I...in answer to the question "Do I still believe, in the light of what we know now, that Saddam was a threat?" yes, for the reasons I've just given."*

Why did Iraq not settle down? Why did it lead to Daesh? Some say the West is seen as an enemy of the Muslim world, and an attack on Iraq is seen as an attack on Islam. If that is so, it seems to me a bit unfair because Blair and Clinton had intervened in Kosovo to protect Muslims, and after all, most of the victims of Saddam were themselves Muslims.

Were all these problems the consequence of Western intervention or a result of mistakes made by the West after military victory? Now, of course, with hindsight, everyone can point to mistakes made after the war and suggest alternatives. Perhaps a mistake was to de-Ba'ath the country too quickly, an analogy with de-Nazification after 1945. Perhaps it was a mistake to disband the Iraqi Army. But there is no convincing reason, I think, to believe the alternatives would be any better. I mean, hindsight is a wonderful thing.

But I think the problem lies deeper, in misconceptions about Iraq, held both by Blair and even more by Bush and those who advised him. People say there was insufficient planning for the post-war situation, and that was partly, no doubt, because the focus of planning was on the military campaign. The planners I think drew an analogy with what happened in Germany and Japan after 1945, though there had been much more planning for that, but the main difference was that Germany and Japan were old, established nation states, which were unified, with a strong sense of national identity. Iraq was an artificial state which had been part of the Ottoman Empire. It was formed after the First World War, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, putting together three districts of that Empire: the south, with the Shia, and they were a majority in Iraq - they were 55%; the centre, with the Sunni, who were 20%; and the north with the Kurds, 20%. These groups were not only religiously separate but territorially separate.

There are 30 million Kurds, scattered among a number of states in the region, and they are the world's most numerous people without a state of their own, though they have not attracted the same degree of support from the international community as another stateless people, the Palestinians. But the Kurds, unlike the Palestinians, are not Arabs and did not want to be part of an Arab State, and Saddam said there was no place for them in an Arab State and he, as rather Hitler had said no place for Jews in a German state, and he showed that by his policies.

Iraq had been put together when Churchill was Colonial Secretary at the end of the First World War, and Churchill, for a time, had favoured a separate Kurdish state, but he was overruled by Colonial Office officials because they said, firstly, it will destabilise Turkey, but more important, they said, the Kurds and the Sunnis will together offset the Shia majority and so help stability in Iraq. Churchill later regarded that as a mistake.

Bush, you may say, by making possible de facto Kurdish independence, undid Churchill's mistake. The Kurds are de facto independent. Bush, as we know, used to keep a bust of Churchill in his office, which, as we also know, Barack Obama has removed...

The Ba'ath leaders were Sunni, and they certainly were not prepared to share power with the Shia. Indeed, the whole notion of sharing power is fairly alien in that part of the world. So the only way of ruling Iraq by a minority was by force, to hold down the majority - not necessarily by such brutal means as Saddam used, but certainly by force.

Saddam, you may say, at least kept the Sunnis and Shias down, kept them apart from fighting each other because of his own brutality. There was a sense in which he united most of them against him.

Now, Bush and Blair meant well, and they said they wanted to secure democracy in Iraq. Bush said this in February 2003. He said: "A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region by bringing peace and progress into the lives of millions." He thought it would have a domino effect, lead to democracy in the rest of the Middle East, and therefore make the Middle East problems, particularly the Israel/Palestine problem, easier to settle. Bush held perhaps a not unreasonable view, derived from the very idealistic American President Woodrow Wilson, that everyone, everywhere, wanted democracy. He said all people wanted the chance to be able to choose their government, all women wanted to enjoy equal rights with men, all people wanted to enjoy basic human rights. Blair said he wanted the Iraqis to be able to choose a government for themselves. He told the American Congress, he said it was a myth that Afghan women were content under the lash of the Taliban that Saddam was somehow beloved by his people, and that Milosevic was Serbia's savour. And, as I say, they hoped there would be a domino effect in the Middle East.

But despite all the improvements, despite the fact that Iraq has, more or less, an elected, legitimate government; there is probably no real chance of securing democracy there in the immediate future. What does democracy mean in a society so deeply divided by tribes, ethnicity and religion? There is no real sense of majorities and minorities in the sense in which we understand it. They are just simply different religious groups. The majority, after the invasion, were Shia. They certainly were not inclined to share power with the Sunnis, particularly, after all, with the way that Saddam, who was a Sunni, had treated them when he had power. They were even less prepared to recognise the rights of the Kurds, who were not Arabs at all, and many of the Shias sought an alliance with Iran, who was part of Bush's "Axis of Evil", so, arguably, one outcome of the war was to strengthen Iran, which some may regard as more dangerous than Saddam's Iraq - it is a disputable argument.

Now, Charles Freeman, who had been Ambassador to Saudi Arabia under the older Bush, from 1988 to 1992, he said: "We invaded not Iraq but the Iraq of our dreams, a country that didn't exist, that we didn't understand, and it is therefore not surprising that we knocked the kaleidoscope into a new pattern that we find surprising. The ignorant are always surprised."

More recently, in Libya, where Britain and France removed Gaddafi, there have also been enormous problems. There is now, over four years after the intervention, a legitimate elected government, but it is plagued by ethnic and tribal warfare, and parts of the country are also occupied by Daesh.

The truth is that most of the Arab countries in the Middle East have been extraordinarily reluctant to the waves of democratisation that have affected every continent since the fall of communism and Apartheid in the 1980s and 1990s, leaving Israel, which is in a sense a Western importation, as the democracy in the region. But because they believed democracy could be secured, Britain and the US did not ask themselves how Iraq could be governed in the light of the profound ethnic, religious and tribal differences that are there. Is there in fact such a thing as a real Iraqi identity at all or should one arrange for an orderly partition and an independent Kurdish state, though that would be bitterly resented by Turkey since it would be a pole of attraction for Kurds in Turkey.

So, the costs of intervention are very clear, and you might say we should stay out of the Middle East entirely, that it is a snake-pit and we should keep well away, that all our interventions have done a lot of harm. But then you have to consider the costs of non-intervention, and this is what Blair was saying, if Saddam Hussein had remained in power and developed weapons of mass destruction, which he had every intention of doing.

Some of you might think Syria is an example of the costs of non-intervention. As you know, David Cameron sought to intervene but was defeated by a majority in the House of Commons. Now, we know that at least 10,000 Syrians have died in custody under the Assad regime, but Western calls for sanctions were resisted by Russia and China. During the civil war, a further quarter of a million people have died and there are nearly five million Syrian refugees. You have to ask yourself whether there was, in the early stages, when Cameron wanted intervention, a real civil rights opposition in Syria which would have come to power and established Syria as a moderately legitimate state, or would the outcome have been, as in Iraq and Libya, where the overthrow of a brutal dictator, who kept order by the most ruthless and inhumane means, is followed by something nearly as bad or even worse? In Syria now, were Assad to be overthrown and Daesh take over the state, the outcome clearly would be worse, and that is part of the reasons why the Russians have intervened militarily to save Assad.

Of course, with hindsight, all things might have been done differently, but as President Bush said, and on this I agree with him, "Hindsight is not a strategy. Everyone's hindsight is better than the most acute foresight." My conclusion is there are no easy answers, that Bush and Blair were faced with an almost impossible dilemma, and that all of us should be very grateful that we were not in their shoes and did not have to make their difficult decisions.