

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Chilcot Inquiry: Lessons for the Machinery of Government, HC 656

Wednesday 14 September 2016

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Members present: Mr Bernard Jenkin (Chair); Ronnie Cowan; Oliver Dowden; Mrs Cheryl Gillan; Kate Hoey; Mr Andrew Turner.

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Witness

Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service

Examination of witness

Sir Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service

Q1 **Chair:** May I welcome our witness to this special session on the Chilcot Inquiry and we hope, if we have time, on the EU referendum? I would be very grateful if you could identify yourself for the record.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service.

Chair: Thank you.

Q2 **Oliver Dowden:** Sir Jeremy, you indicated to our predecessor Committee in January 2015 that, once the Chilcot report was completed and published, you would seek to talk to those involved, particularly Sir John Chilcot, the secretariat and the rest of the panel, to see what lessons could be learned about the conduct of future inquiries. What discussions have you had and what was the nature of those discussions?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Yes, I have had a short discussion with John Chilcot and I know that there will be further opportunities for Parliament and this Committee, or other Committees maybe, to talk to him as well. We are currently in the middle of a Civil Service-wide, Whitehall-wide, lessons learned exercise ourselves, so I would say at this stage we only



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have relatively preliminary thoughts on this. My basic message to John was I thought that the inquiry was an outstanding piece of work. Obviously it took a lot longer than was originally expected and many people would have liked but, judged by the credibility of its conclusions, the rigour of its analysis, the comprehensiveness of its scope, I think he fully matched the requirements of a very, very difficult exercise. So my first message to him was, "Well done to you and the team for that excellent piece of work, which I think will stand the test of time".

I obviously asked him whether he had any preliminary thoughts as to whether it could have been done more rapidly, and any particular lessons he would like to draw to my attention from his perspective. Frankly, the discussion we had I think had a fairly straightforward conclusion. It was, in essence, given the scale of the terms of reference that he was asked to take forward, almost inevitable it was going to take a very long time. He could not suggest to me any ways in which the thing could have been done more expeditiously, could have been broken down into different chunks, for example, without losing its coherence and the compelling logic of the narrative. That was his view and I am very reluctant to second guess him on that.

From my perspective, you judge an inquiry by the reception it gets, the broad range of stakeholders, the commentary on it, and whether it stands the test of time. Obviously that last test will take some time for history to judge, but so far I think the reception has been pretty strong and positive and that is where I am myself.

Q3 **Oliver Dowden:** So you do not have any concern about the length of time it took? It took over an entire Parliament. It was set up in the Parliament before last and only published in this Parliament. Both you and he have no thoughts about whether that was an acceptable timescale or about how you could potentially curtail that timescale?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I am not going to speak for Sir John. He needs to speak for himself. Having talked to him myself, obviously, I start from the same place as everybody else, which is: it would have been desirable to deal with this much more expeditiously. When it was first launched the hope was it would be done by the end of 2010 or early in the 2010 Parliament, and that turned out to be a long way wide of the mark.

I think the first and perhaps the strongest lesson from all of this was there should be a much clearer setting of expectations than was done at the start of that particular inquiry, but, having probed away at the length of time it took and why it took so long, the complexity of it, the mammoth nature of the document flow, which he and his panel felt they needed to see in order to get to a completely fair assessment, the broad time period he was scrutinising, the complexity of the issues, the diplomatic, the military, the planning, the Civil Service and so on, it was a massive undertaking.

Q4 **Oliver Dowden:** Do you not feel that it has had a detrimental impact on



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the effectiveness of the report, the excessive delay? In particular, the Iraq conflict took place in 2003. There were discussions just today about the planning, post the Libyan conflict, which took place in 2011. Surely it would have been far better to have learnt those lessons prior to the Libyan conflict. Do you accept that there has been some damage from that delay?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I certainly think it would have been happier all round if it had been completed earlier, but I am struggling to think of something that would have allowed that to happen. Also, as you very well know, plenty of other lessons have been drawn along the way. It is not as if time stood still and just waited for the Chilcot Inquiry. We had the Butler Inquiry. We had the Hutton Inquiry. We had lots of progression in the way the machinery of government operates.

Many of the lessons that I think we will end up learning from this whole process were already learnt before Chilcot came along. Nevertheless, Chilcot added much more depth and comprehensiveness to them. It is a very important document that I think will stand the test of time in its own right, but I would not want anyone to think that nothing changed while we were waiting for Chilcot. We clearly learnt lots of lessons along the way.

Chair: Can I just bring in Ronnie Cowan for a moment?

Oliver Dowden: Yes.

Q5 **Ronnie Cowan:** I want to come back to look at the process for a minute, a process such as Chilcot. Civilian and armed forces' lives are at risk. Is there anything in the process where if something comes to light they can report it and prevent potential future loss of life or people being put into positions of danger, or does it have to wait until the end of the inquiry?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think things will have come out of the evidence sessions. As I said earlier, several previous inquiries took place looking at certain aspects of this, and definitely the 2010 SDSR and the way in which we approached—

Q6 **Ronnie Cowan:** I am not talking about previous inquiries. I am talking about this inquiry. If during this inquiry Chilcot uncovered something that he thought could potentially save lives, could he have then reported it or did it have to wait until the end of the report?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That was a matter for him. If he had felt that something was so pressing and imperative that it should be brought out, which had not previously been brought out, I am sure he could have brought that to our attention. It was an independent inquiry so they could have certainly done that if they had chosen to.

Q7 **Oliver Dowden:** Thank you. On the specific causes of the delay to the publication of the Iraq inquiry, as I am sure you know, we have suggested if the inquiry had been conducted according to two PASC reports governed by the inquiry report in 2004-05 and the Iraq Inquiry



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report in 2008-09, we would not have had such significant delays. Do you agree with that?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: No, I don't and nor does he I don't think, so you will obviously need to talk to him about that. I think he feels that, for example, if we had had a judge-led inquiry or if we had had a different form of inquiry it would, if anything, have added cost and delay and made the whole thing much more difficult to get to the truth. That is his view. I have no reason to second-guess him.

When we stand back and look at the enormity of what he was asked to look at, the length of time, the voluminous quantity of documents, many of which were previously classified, that he and his team felt they needed to read properly to understand, cross-question and then the time that had to be allocated for this so-called Maxwellisation process, you end up with an inquiry of that sort of magnitude. It is unfortunate in the circumstances that it took a lot longer than people expected, but I think in the end we should judge it by whether it landed in a credible way and a way in which people think, "Right, that really is a fair and last word on this subject".

Q8 **Oliver Dowden:** As you know, there was a delay in the commencement of the inquiry. I am sure you accept that that caused a delay in turn in the publication. Do you feel that with hindsight that was a mistake?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: As a mathematical fact, if he had started it earlier it would have taken the same length of time. It would have finished earlier.

Q9 **Oliver Dowden:** You do feel that he should have started earlier and, therefore, we may have been able to learn some lessons sooner?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: We are back in the mists of time now. I think the then Prime Minister thought it was appropriate to start the inquiry only after the UK troops had left Iraq. That was obviously a political debate at the time, as you will remember.

Q10 **Oliver Dowden:** Are there any specific recommendations that you would make to in any way speed up future inquiries of this nature?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: As of this moment, no, but I am waiting for the National Security Adviser to complete a lessons learned investigation across Whitehall, to put those ideas to our Ministers, and we will probably debate them internally. I will probably want a more detailed conversation with John Chilcot but, at the moment, I do not have a hypothesis as to what we would do very much differently, for example, more resources or a different composition of panel. I don't think any of those would have speeded it up. I think with those terms of reference, and that is the crux in a sense, if you wanted a thorough piece of work that was going to stand the test of time and be incontrovertible in its comprehensivity, and the issues that it looked at, I think it was going to take something like that length of time.



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Q11 **Oliver Dowden:** To be clear, Sir John Chilcot shares that analysis. He does not have a hypothesis as to how—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I believe so but I don't want to be the person to speak for John—

Oliver Dowden: No, of course. No.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: —John needs to speak for himself.

Q12 **Oliver Dowden:** On the point about why the inquiry was not established as a statutory inquiry, in light of the length that we have been discussing, and the difficulties encountered, what assessment has been made about this point: about the value of establishing a statutory inquiry under the 2005 Inquiries Act as opposed to a Privy Counsellor inquiry?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: As I say, we had a conversation about that and discussed it with internal experts and we don't believe it would have speeded things up. We don't think it would have saved costs. We don't think it would have led to a better, more comprehensive, more credible outcome, so that is our position.

Oliver Dowden: Thank you.

Q13 **Chair:** Our predecessor Committee did recommend that the inquiry should be split into stages. That would have, for example, got the decision to go to war out much more quickly, which would have been useful. We suggested it should not operate in private but in public, because that would have ventilated the issues much more effectively. We think it was wrong for the Government to adopt what that Committee then called a top-down process, effectively presenting Parliament with a fait accompli instead of, for example, having an open debate about the terms of reference, which could be amendable. The lack of any members at all with political experience probably narrowed the focus of the inquiry and perhaps allowed the inquiry to focus on less important matters and waste time on those than on the really salient points. What reaction do you have to that comment?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I do not agree with that. It was pretty open when it needed to be. I think there was open questioning of witnesses. Obviously the publication itself in the end was about the most open document we have ever seen, lots of documents that are usually classified information, Cabinet minutes, private memos from Prime Ministers to Presidents, all laid out for people to judge and so on.

Q14 **Chair:** That is a different question. A lot of people think that the breadth of the terms of reference, and the fact that there was no budget and no suggested end date, made it as open ended as possible, so that the grass should be as long as possible that all these issues were going to be kicked into, and this has not been an exercise that has improved accountability. All the people that were involved have left politics, apart from perhaps you. You were sitting at the table when some of these decisions were being made, at least as a witness. It really has not been



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satisfactory in terms of giving serious and timely lessons as my colleague, Ronnie Cowan, points out. It has been a travesty in many respects.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think that is a very unfair judgment on a very, very comprehensive and authoritative piece of work.

Kate Hoey: Sorry, could you speak up a little. It is a very difficult room to hear in.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Sorry, yes. I think that is a travesty. It is a very authoritative and very comprehensive piece of work that is highly credible and has been found to be by most observers, so I think your characterisation of the way in which the terms of reference were set out in order to kick it into the long grass is completely wrong. I do not think that is true in the slightest. The expectation was that it would not be more than a year or so before it concluded. That was the intention in setting it up, and, while I agree with your conclusion that it would have been desirable to have had earlier conclusions, I don't think you can attribute that to anyone's bad faith. I think that the inquiry team worked incredibly hard and produced an outstanding report.

Q15 **Chair:** Indeed. Could we quantify what caused the delay and to what extent the very long Maxwellisation process caused delay, and to what extent agreeing the release of sensitive documents caused delay? Do we have any analysis on that?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Some parts of that process were confidential, the Maxwellisation process, so I do not have all the facts and figures as to timeframe but—

Q16 **Chair:** But wouldn't it be instructive?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: My understanding from John Chilcot is that none of those processes themselves caused the delay, in the sense that work did not stop on the writing of the report and the finalisation of the report pending the outcome of the Maxwellisation, still less the declassification requests, so they were perfectly capable of carrying on the work they were doing while final decisions were achieved on those various other points. That is their view. But I am finding myself ventriloquising Sir John Chilcot here, which is an uncomfortable position to be in. If you want detail of how the inquiry operated, the timeframes and the sub timeframes, you are better to ask him, frankly, than me because it is an independent inquiry. It would be quite wrong of me to be putting pressure on him to interrogate those different phases.

Q17 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** As you know, Sir Jeremy, we are concerned with the role and effectiveness of public inquiries, in the way in which we are looking at this. How satisfied are you that Parliament was fully involved in the setting up of this inquiry?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think that is more a matter for you to conclude than me. Obviously there was discussion in Parliament at the time that



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helped shape the way in which the inquiry was conducted, if my memory serves me right. Parliament was definitely involved at the time and that—

- Q18 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** It is rather sad that the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, announced it on 15 June and then it was an Opposition Day Debate on 24 June that talked about it and welcomed it as an inquiry, but then Sir John outlined the terms of reference on 30 July 2009 and there was no parliamentary debate on the terms of reference. In relevance to the fact that PASC had made a recommendation that this inquiry would be more effective and efficient if divided into two parts, and when the terms of reference came out it was not divided into two parts, it seemed to me that there was a significant ignoring of Parliament's views. You said it was a matter for us. Our predecessor Committee gave a very good steer but the powers that be just conveniently ignored that.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Yes. To be honest, I am going back into the mists of time here. My impression at the time, my memory of that—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan: I am sure you have some notes, Sir Jeremy.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: —time was that Parliament did play a role in reshaping the nature of the inquiry beyond what had originally been proposed by the then Government, but I quite understand your point of view.

- Q19 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** What would you recommend in future to make this sort of inquiry more manageable?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: My preliminary conclusion from talking to John Chilcot and having thought about it myself with my experts and advisers, not having discussed it with the new Prime Minister, is that it is difficult to think of something other than having a narrower set of terms of reference, which would have led to a shorter inquiry. I am obviously very happy to take away again the suggestion that it should have been broken into two chunks. I don't believe that John Chilcot thinks that would have been tenable, but you need to maybe talk to him about that, but I think definitely, if the body politic believes that it is too long to have an inquiry on an important subject like that, lasting as long as it did, then the first place I would look is the narrowness of the terms of reference.

- Q20 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** I was particularly interested as to how Sir John arrived at those terms of reference without taking on board the full recommendations that came from our predecessor Committee. Were they discussed with you? Did you point out that if the terms of reference went ahead on the basis that they were that they were not following the wishes of a Select Committee of this House?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I do not recall having any conversation with John Chilcot at that time. I don't think it would have been my role to do so. I think it would have been the then Cabinet Secretary in 2009, but I am sure he was aware of the views of the then Select Committee and the views that Parliament expressed in the Opposition Day debate.



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Q21 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Do you think you would have had a role if you had been consulted on this? You are saying it was the Cabinet Secretary as opposed to you but—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: If such a situation arose now I would be centrally involved. I would expect in such an important public inquiry, consulting the Prime Minister and advising the Prime Minister, so yes I would be but I wasn't Cabinet Secretary in 2009 obviously.

Q22 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Bearing in mind that the Libya report has been published in the last 24 hours, have you had a discussion with the Prime Minister on the subject of inquiries and—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: No. We briefly discussed the Libya thing this morning but I have not discussed the general issue of inquiries yet with her.

Q23 **Oliver Dowden:** Picking up on something you said earlier, you rightly acknowledge that there was an expectation that the inquiry would take a year or two when in fact it took eight years. That of course was a considerable frustration to many people involved, not least the families.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Yes, of course.

Oliver Dowden: You knew what the terms of reference were. Why was there such a gross underestimating of the amount of time it would actually take?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think it was the inquiry that made a suggestion that it would be finished by 2010. It is a very good question. I cannot put myself back in those shoes. I think there was a general misunderstanding about how long it would take, just how complicated it would be.

Q24 **Oliver Dowden:** Did the Civil Service not take a view about how long it would take? They were not involved at all then?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I honestly cannot remember. I have not seen any paperwork that suggests the Civil Service thought this was going to take a lot longer than 2010 or, indeed, made any sort of prediction but definitely a perception got into the public domain this was going to be 2010-ish, I think. I cannot remember who put that in first.

Q25 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Don't you think you should go that extra mile and delve back into the paperwork or ask the questions, because otherwise how are we going to learn those lessons? There is no point in saying, "It is too long ago. We have forgotten it". That is not—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I am happy to do so. I am very happy to do so, but I think we are all acknowledging that, whoever it was, it was a mistake.

Q26 **Chair:** Everybody agrees—except you apparently—that this all took far too long and Parliament was very, very frustrated by it. It was meant to take a year or two and it took far, far longer. So what is the lesson that



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we need to learn about setting up of inquiries in future to avoid the pain and heartache caused by the length of this inquiry? If you have only done preliminary work, when are you going to do the work?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Let me be very clear. I am acknowledging that it would have been desirable to do this more quickly if it had been possible. All I am reflecting is the conversation I have had with the person who had the job of doing it. He does not believe—and I at the moment have no reason to second guess him—that with that set of terms of reference, if you wanted to be as comprehensive and open and to get through all the documentation, it could have been done more rapidly. I will continue to ask him questions about that obviously, but I do not want anyone to think that I do not share the general frustration about how long this took.

Q27 **Chair:** Just to ask the question: what is the lesson that you think we should learn from the length of this inquiry and how are you going to learn those lessons? You have talked about preliminary conversations with John Chilcot. When are you going to have the substantive conversation that is going to lead to a document that sets out what the Government has learned from this inquiry, the mechanism of this inquiry?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That is a matter for the Government, not for me. My conclusion is that, if you definitely want a shorter period, you would have to have more narrow terms of reference.

Q28 **Kate Hoey:** Do you think we should be having John Chilcot in front of us?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It is not for me to suggest that.

Q29 **Kate Hoey:** Do you think he might be able to fill us in on some of these more detailed questions that you obviously clearly cannot or are not able to or have not looked at—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: He ran an independent inquiry. It is not for me to answer your questions about how he ran his inquiry.

Q30 **Kate Hoey:** No. It is just I am not very sure how helpful you are actually being to us. Perhaps it is not your fault but it is not. Anyway, sorry, Chairman.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I have been very helpful. I am giving you exactly what my views are.

Q31 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Sir Jeremy, I think we have common ground here. We all know it took far too long. The trouble is I am not convinced that there were enough people chasing it up and saying, "This must finish. You must get on with this". I think it was allowed to drift but, of course, the proof of the pudding is always in the bottom line and to find out that this cost £10,375,000 is slightly stunning. Do you think that that represents good value for money?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I don't think that is out of line with other inquiries of similar length. In fact it is considerably cheaper than some



others. It is such an important inquiry that everybody was waiting for and wanted a thorough, comprehensive, objective, dispassionate outcome, fully transparent. I do not think we should put a money constraint on that. I think £10 million, if that what it cost that is what it cost.

Q32 Mrs Cheryl Gillan: It did throw a huge spanner in your budgeting process I presume because, if you thought it was going to take two or three years, I presume it was completely out of line with your expectations as to what the cost of the inquiry would be.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Logically, you must be right, yes.

Q33 Mrs Cheryl Gillan: How are we going to make sure that there is realistic costing done on future inquiries? I appreciate the tension between a full examination of it, which is going to satisfy all the audiences that an inquiry needs to satisfy, but, at the same time, you cannot have a government process that so badly blows a budget or maybe you can.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It would have been wrong to say at the end of 2010, "Sorry, you have had your money, now just finish up. Finish your work and we will just get on" because it was a much more important initiative than that. It was a hugely significant event in British post-war history. It was absolutely right to have a fully independent inquiry. But it is not true to say that we did not constantly—as Parliament itself did and the Government also did—ask the Secretary, "Is there any more resource we can give you? Any more help we can give you to speed this up?" It is not true to say that we were unconcerned about that or we let it drift, far from it.

It has come up on many occasions I have been before this Committee and the former Prime Minister was very concerned about it too, as Parliament was. So at every stage we have been trying to give whatever support was possible. But it had to be an independent inquiry. We could not lean on it. We had to let them do the work in the way that they wanted to do the work, in the sequence they wanted to do the work. We did not want to give them an arbitrary timeframe, and I think that was the right thing to do because, if we had curtailed it in some way or constrained the budget in some way or constrained the way we were doing it or leant on them to finish particular aspects more rapidly than they wanted to, it would rightly have been seen as an interference in an independent process.

I think it should be judged by the outcome and the outcome was a thoroughly authoritative, comprehensive report, which I think the House of Commons, the House of Lords have accepted as being an extremely valuable piece of work.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan: I am not querying that. We are talking about the process here.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Sure.



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Q34 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** My last question is: at any stage did you incentivise the inquiry to reach a more rapid conclusion?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: No, we did not interfere with the timetable in any way, other than to say, "We will give you—"

Q35 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Basically, you were saying, "Let it run for as long as you want to. It does not matter what Parliament says or anybody says. You just keep going. We are not going to do anything to stop you until you find a natural conclusion"?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: No. We did not express indifference. We kept on saying as—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan: Sorry, I was not trying to give the impression of indifference. I was just saying that you kept reassuring them that they could keep going as long as they wanted to because the money was there, the support was there from Government?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: You will have seen the letters the Prime Minister wrote. I have said to you before in this Committee: we had frequently said to the committee, "Parliament is concerned. The public is concerned and the families are concerned about the length of time this is taking. Is there any help we can give you consistent with your independence?"

There was no way that Sir John Chilcot would have had the impression that we were entirely relaxed about the time this was taking. That would be a very unfair characterisation. He is well aware of that himself and I think takes the view that, given those terms of reference, the complexity of the issues and the fact that they had to get through tens of thousands of documents, many of which were highly complicated and so on, over a very long timeframe, interview lots of people and give people the chance to then look at their preliminary thoughts, inevitably it was going to take a lot longer than was first advertised.

It is that first advertising that set the completely wrong timeframe in people's heads for this inquiry. Lots of inquiries have taken this amount of time. Inquiries do take a lot of time. Having said all of that, I do not want to be misinterpreted as being completely relaxed about how much time this took.

Q36 **Ronnie Cowan:** How much time was consumed by the Maxwellisation process?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That is an issue that Sir John Chilcot would have to answer not me. I have no visibility of the Maxwellisation process. It is a confidential process.

Q37 **Ronnie Cowan:** What lessons have been learned for other inquiries from this inquiry to speed them up, to make them—



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Sir Jeremy Heywood: As we have just been saying, the main lesson is we need to have much more care perhaps given to the terms of reference before you—

Q38 **Ronnie Cowan:** That was recommended upfront. The recommendation from the previous Committee was to do just that and it wasn't taken on board.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That is a fair criticism. If your overwhelming desire was to get an inquiry that would publish within a short period of time, you needed to have narrower terms of reference than the ones that were agreed.

Q39 **Ronnie Cowan:** So next time round you would back that recommendation? I hope there is not going to be a next time round, but you know what I mean?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Yes. If there is a similar inquiry in future I think we will be extremely mindful of the lessons from how long it has taken in this case.

Q40 **Chair:** Thank you, Mr Cowan. Moving on to the decision-making processes of the Government, at the time you were the Prime Minister's private secretary. It should be said that there is nothing in the Chilcot report that criticises you personally in any way, but can I ask you about what you have been publicly criticised for, which is not minuting quite important meetings. Chilcot actually says, "Most decisions on Iraq pre-conflict were taken either bilaterally between Mr Blair and the relevant Secretary of State or in meetings between Mr Blair, Mr Straw, and Mr Hoon, with No. 10 officials and, as appropriate, Mr John Scarlett and Sir Richard Dearlove and Admiral Boyce". These minutes were not formally minuted. That is not a quote from the report incidentally but it is a fact. What lesson do we take from that and how do you feel about that?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I do not know how many of those meetings were not minuted. They should have been. Undoubtedly, all significant meetings involving the Prime Minister and other Secretaries of State should definitely be minuted. That was always my practice as principal private secretary.

Q41 **Chair:** Were you in any of those meetings?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think I was in very, very few, if any, of those meetings and if I had been I would—

Q42 **Chair:** Were you ever instructed not to minute a meeting?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Not that I can ever recall, no, certainly not.

Q43 **Chair:** What would be your reaction if you were or if it was implied that you should not be taking a minute?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I would have to judge it by the moment. There are some meetings that I can accept should not be minuted, but formal



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meetings involving other Secretaries of State on issues of this gravity that take decisions, and decision-taking meetings would certainly have to be minuted or the conclusions minuted. Frankly, the part of No. 10 I was working in was the economic and domestic side, including all the Prime Minister's meetings with the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. Part of my job was to make sure that those discussions were properly recorded and everybody who needed to know knew what had been decided. That was not my role. I did not have that role in relation to the foreign and defence side of No. 10. It was not one of my responsibilities.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan: Chair, Kate and I are having trouble hearing, Sir Jeremy. I think we must be in an acoustic black spot over here because neither of us are going deaf we did not think, anyway.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It is a long way away. I will try to speak up.

Chair: If the sound engineers could address this.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan: I am so sorry.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I am sure it is my fault.

Q44 **Chair:** Thank you. Crucial in the discussion about decision making is the role of the Cabinet Secretary, and the inquiry report illustrates how the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees were bypassed by Mr Blair with a detrimental effect on decision making. We now have the National Security Council but that is in effect just another Committee that can be bypassed. What mechanisms are now in place to prevent Cabinet Government from being circumvented in the future?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: The National Security Council is just another Cabinet Committee in one sense, but the idea that it will be bypassed I think is just not how the Government works these days. The National Security Council meets on a very regular basis. If it needs to, subcommittees are set up on my advice to deal with issues that require a more intensive focus and those Cabinet Committees are not bypassed. The mechanism is it is my job as Cabinet Secretary to make sure that issues are dealt with in a proper way. I take that responsibility very seriously.

Q45 **Chair:** The Chilcot report does emphasise the importance of having Ministers present in discussions who are not immediately responsible for the policies being discussed, and to provide external challenge and alleviate the risk of group-think. In the Libya report published today, which incidentally there is a sad comment that we finish up with another conflict where, "Policy was not informed 'by accurate intelligence'", "threat to civilians was overstated", "rebels included a significant Islamist element", which was not taken into account, "limited intervention 'to protect civilians drifted into opportunist policy of regime change" and "the policy was 'not underpinned by a strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya'".



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It does read horribly like a repeat—albeit, on a much smaller scale—of all the mistakes that were made in Iraq, and one of the points they make in their recommendations is, “The Government must commission an independent review of the operation of the NSC. This review should consider the merits of introducing a formal mechanism to allow non-ministerial NSC members to request prime ministerial direction to undertake actions agreed in the NSC”.

Obviously it is for the Government to respond to this but, on behalf of the Civil Service and the non-ministerial officials, and in fact in respect of your guardianship role upon which Chilcot lays great emphasis, what are your thoughts as head of the Civil Service on this matter?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I have not read that Libya report yet. I think it only came out this morning. What I can say in relation to Libya is that the National Security Council and a subcommittee of the council—the Libya subcommittee—met on many, many occasions. Whatever might have gone wrong with Libya in the aftermath of a successful military engagement, it was not down to the want of Cabinet Committees meeting with proper agendas, with proper preparation, my officials, challenging my Ministers on those Committees who did not have direct responsibility; all of those things took place in relation to Libya. So whatever happened was despite good process, because there was very good process.

Q46 **Chair:** How satisfied were you that all the appropriate Cabinet Ministers were fully engaged through the formal structures of the Cabinet?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Absolutely satisfied. I would have to go back and check. I cannot say that every one of the 60-odd meetings that took place had every single Minister present because sometimes it is just not possible.

Q47 **Chair:** How do you ensure that appropriate Ministers are involved?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I form a judgment with No. 10, and above all the Prime Minister, as to who should be on each Committee, making sure that we have all the right people, by which I mean the people with departmental responsibility and often other people. For example, Oliver Letwin played a big role in relation to the National Security Council as a non-departmental Minister who could exercise or challenge functions and so on. So you look in the round as to whether you have—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Your predecessor, Andrew Turnbull, comes in for a deal of criticism for not insisting that that happened during his period during the run up to this decision. We all know the dilemma that public officials are faced with. You have to carry out the instructions of Ministers. If you are being instructed to deny the engagement of the appropriate Cabinet Ministers, what would you do?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It is a hypothetical question, I mean—

Chair: It is not hypothetical. It happened.



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Sir Jeremy Heywood: As far as I am concerned, the two Prime Ministers I have worked with as Cabinet Secretary have always been prepared to take my advice on—

- Q48 **Chair:** I am not into blaming anybody for this. I simply want to see if we have learned or what we need to learn in order to prevent this happening again. Chilcot says, “The responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that members of the Cabinet are fully engaged in ways that allow them to accept collective responsibility and to meet their departmental obligations remains”. He does not make any recommendations as to what you are meant to do if you are confronted with the same dilemma that Andrew Turnbull was obviously confronted with and, without some change, how are you going to carry out this fundamental constitutional obligation?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: As I say, I don’t think it does require a change in the current arrangements because that is what happens now. I feel that responsibility. The Prime Minister—

- Q49 **Chair:** So you blame Andrew Turnbull for not ensuring this?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I am not going to get into blaming people. I am just saying my interpretation of my role as Cabinet Secretary certainly extends to ensuring that the Prime Minister has the right people in the room when decisions are being taken—

- Q50 **Chair:** If he refuses to do so what would a Cabinet Secretary do?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That is a hypothetical situation that has never arisen on my watch.

- Q51 **Chair:** When you say “a hypothetical situation”, are you suggesting that Andrew Turnbull did not mind this happening and he was complicit in it or do you think he was giving advice to the Government to get the right people involved and his advice was ignored?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I honestly have not discussed that with Andrew, but I think the report says that he was asked by the Prime Minister to focus on other things, public service reform and so on. What I am saying is—myself, this is my view now not discussed with Andrew Turnbull—my view is the Cabinet Secretary has responsibility for making sure that Cabinet Government is working properly, that Cabinet Committees meet with the right people in them to take the key decisions, and certainly, in the time that I have been Cabinet Secretary, that is what has happened.

- Q52 **Chair:** The memorandum we have had from the Better Government Initiative, which is published on their website, written by the former Permanent Secretary, Richard Mottram, suggests that there should be the same kind of direct accountability to Parliament for Permanent Secretaries and the Cabinet Secretary as exists for the handling of public money. That if a Permanent Secretary or Cabinet Secretary thinks a Minister is wilfully ignoring the right procedures or planning to spend money that is against the advice of the Civil Service you ask for a letter



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of direction, and that is reflected in the Libya report from the FAC as well. What problems could you see arising from this proposal, or what difficulties would there be if this proposal was implemented?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: My starting point is that it would not be necessary under the current circumstances, in the way in which the Prime Ministers I work for and the way I act—

Chair: Let us take that as read but looking at the lessons—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It starts off being unnecessary. It then introduces a degree of antagonism between the Cabinet Secretary and the Prime Minister, because it is really only about the Prime Minister I think this proposal is directed because it is the Prime Minister who decides how the conduct of Government is taken forward. That would put a significant point of tension potentially between the Cabinet Secretary and the Prime Minister, in my view, completely unnecessarily at the moment. The other point I would make and—

Q53 **Chair:** At the moment?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Absolutely at the moment and—

Q54 **Chair:** Yes, fine, at the moment but who is to say that the same circumstances will not arise again?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: The other point I would make, Mr Chairman—I am not totally close minded. The first time I saw this was yesterday so I will obviously reflect further on it. But the other important thing about this is that the machinery of government is not a mechanical thing: if you have this Committee, tick, no need for an accounting office direction. If you do not have this Committee, the Cabinet Secretary makes a public warning about how the Prime Minister is conducting the Government, which I think would destroy their relationship, frankly.

Much more problematic is how the meetings are used. The key point I would make, and one of the most important lessons of all from Chilcot and possibly even from Libya—I don't know, I have not read the report—is not so much what meetings you fix up or do not fix up, it is what culture and spirit of challenge you have within those meetings. You can have as many meetings as you like. The Cabinet did meet many times on Iraq and Iraq was often on the agenda. But those Cabinet meetings did not translate themselves into any serious challenge to the prevailing wisdom. So a lot of this is not so much a binary question: do you have the right meetings and the right people in the meetings? It is: how are those meetings operating in practice, which is a much more subjective and difficult to analyse issue.

In my view, by far and away the most important thing about the whole Chilcot Inquiry is: do you have a culture in which senior officials and Ministers meeting around, and external experts as well, feel that it is possible to offer an alternative view to the prevailing wisdom, so as



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avoiding group think? A lot of what went wrong in Iraq was a genuinely held view about what the intelligence meant or what weapons of mass destruction were there, and it turned out to be wrong. Whether they were minuted or not, many, many meetings took place to discuss—

- Q55 **Chair:** Yes, but when the Prime Minister sent another letter to the President of the United States, using those now very famous words “I will be with you whatever”, he was advised by officials that this position should be shared with other Cabinet colleagues before he sent the letter and he refused to do so. What should the Cabinet Secretary do under those circumstances?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I don’t like getting involved in hypothetical discussions

Chair: It is not hypothetical. It happened.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: You are asking me: what would I do now?

- Q56 **Chair:** What should the Cabinet Secretary do under such circumstances?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think the Cabinet Secretary in that situation should seek a one-on-one meeting with the Prime Minister, to speak to them directly and say to them they really must share this collectively if it is going to become Government policy. That is the way the rules of Cabinet work.

- Q57 **Chair:** Officials did that and it did not happen. He carried on.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I don’t know whether they did or they did not.

Chair: He was behaving like a president, not a Prime Minister.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I certainly agree with you that private memos from the Prime Minister to the President of the United States setting out what the Government’s position is, should have been subject to collective approval and would be today.

Chair: Perhaps we had better go and vote quickly and come back. I am sorry for this delay but thank you very much. We will resume at 1535.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

- Q58 **Chair:** To continue, Cabinet Secretary, the ministerial code at the time is very clear, “The Cabinet is the main mechanism by which most senior Members of the Government take collective responsibility for its most important decisions. Cabinet is supported by a system of ministerial committees whose role is to identify, test and develop policy options, analyse and mitigate risks and debate on home policy proposals until they are endorsed across Government”. Do you agree that there was a breakdown of collective responsibility at the time of the decision to go to war in Iraq?



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Sir Jeremy Heywood: I think certain meetings should have been minuted and certain documents should have been agreed collectively that weren't, but it is also fair to say that there were a significant number of Cabinet discussions on Iraq and some of those did have substantive discussions. I don't want to make an overall judgment on—

Chair: I asked you a yes/no question.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I am giving you a more complicated answer.

Chair: Yes. It is quite a simple question: was collective responsibility observed in the run up to the—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Not at all times, no.

Q59 **Chair:** What recourse should the Cabinet Secretary have if he feels that there is no possibility that collective responsibility is going to be achieved because certain people are being excluded from the discussions?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Under our current constitution the Cabinet Secretary can continue to provide advice but Ministers decide, and if the Cabinet Secretary, therefore, feels that his or her job is becoming completely impossible then they would have to resign. There are no other levers than those, but that is not the position that obtains at the moment.

Q60 **Chair:** I appreciate that. I absolutely understand the constitutional position that a Cabinet Secretary faces in this situation, as it stands. The problem was in this case, effectively, a very big, substantive policy decision was made, "I will be with you whatever", without the involvement of the Cabinet and that, according to the code, is unconstitutional. That was an unconstitutional decision. What should a Cabinet Secretary do? Under the present circumstances you are saying, "If that is what the Prime Minister tells me to do I have to do it". That is your position, isn't it?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I just go back to what I have just said, which is that the Cabinet Secretary has the power of course to insist on an audience with the Prime Minister and make quite clear his or her advice, but if the Prime Minister chooses to ignore that advice there is not much the Cabinet Secretary can do other than resign.

Q61 **Chair:** You and I both believe in an impartial and permanent Civil Service—it is one of the bulwarks of our constitutional stability—and it failed in this case, not I think through any personal failure. It just failed and indeed you could argue that it failed at Suez and it failed at the beginning of the 20th century. There was another incident at the beginning of the 20th century, so it is not unique. There is a case, is there not, for having a new mechanism to ensure that there is some fallback in order to strengthen the constitutional structures that everyone intends to operate under these circumstances.



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Sir Jeremy Heywood: If that situation obtained today or in the recent past, then I would be looking for possible new mechanisms. Although I think that particular mechanism—I mean I will obviously very happily read the paper in detail and discuss it with Richard Mottram—would be a very draconian one, but at the moment there is no such problem. Cabinet Government is working well. I have all the access to the Prime Minister I need.

Q62 **Chair:** You do not need to say this. We appreciate we are addressing a problem that is not at the moment occurring. That does not mean we do not need to address the possibility of what occurred in 2003 happening again. You accept that?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I do, but one of the many things that have already moved on a long way since Iraq is strong improvements in the way the machinery of government operates.

Chair: Let us move on to the role of the defence and intelligence staff.

Q63 **Mr Andrew Turner:** Sir Jeremy, Chilcot states that the Joint Intelligence Committee should have made it clear to Mr Blair that “the assessed intelligence had not established beyond doubt either that Saddam Hussein had continued to produce chemical and biological weapons or that efforts to develop nuclear weapons continued”. Why do you think the JIC failed to make this clear to Mr Blair?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I do not know the answer to that question. All I can say is what happens now and what lessons we have learned from the Butler inquiry and also the Chilcot inquiry and the passage of time. We now put much greater weight on having a fully independent JIC Chairman who has full authority and meets as part of the National Security Council and, therefore, is absolutely used to giving tough messages and dispassionate analysis to Ministers.

As part of what I was saying earlier, I think in the Civil Service we are very, very focused on encouraging a culture of challenge and red teaming and avoidance of group think, so a number of mechanisms, both formal and cultural, have been put in place over the period. Everybody accepts that something went badly wrong with the intelligence assessment at the time of Iraq. All I can say is that I think we have learnt a lot from that and things have moved on significantly.

Q64 **Chair:** Can I press you on this? How can you have learned anything from it if you do not understand why it happened?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Because we have learned from the Butler inquiry and we have—

Q65 **Chair:** Then you must have a view as to why you think the JIC failed to make this clear to Mr Blair.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: In a general sense, the JIC had become too close to the policy-making process, and so it is very important to establish a



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clearer demarcation between policy advice to Ministers and dispassionate, objective analysis, and make it quite clear that those are in two separate buckets. It is also very clear that the JIC Chair needs to have sufficient access to the Prime Minister on a regular basis, and that he or she is not at all intimidated by the experience of being in the same room as the Prime Minister and senior Ministers but is absolutely totally prepared to speak to whoever is in power. I am not saying that was not the case under the previous JIC Chair at the time, John Scarlett. He obviously did have access to the Prime Minister. Having a powerful, independent minded, separate from the policy process person, is the most important way forward.

But not just that, the individual who is the Chairman of the JIC also has to engender a culture of challenge and avoidance of group think, so the JIC itself does not get captured, quite independent of the policy process, and these are things that we are trying our very best at the top of the Civil Service to encourage. I know that the current incumbent, Sir Charles Farr, totally shares my view. That we have to build in better red teaming and more culture and make it absolutely clear that it is safe to challenge the prevailing view. These are the things that will make sure we avoid that sort of mistake of the past.

Q66 **Mr Andrew Turner:** Could you speak a little bit louder please. This arrangement between Mr Blair and Mr Scarlett was exactly not that Mr Scarlett was frightened of Mr Blair; it was more that they agreed they were going to do what the Prime Minister wanted to do.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I acknowledge that John Scarlett did have access to the Prime Minister, so that particular critique is less applicable to him than to some others, but I don't think there was quite the same absolutely clear—John Scarlett would probably disagree, but, post the Butler review, we now have an absolutely clear demarcation between the JIC and the Joint Intelligence organisation and the National Security Adviser and the Foreign Policy Advisers to the Prime Minister. That is even clearer now than it was then.

Q67 **Mr Andrew Turner:** How will you work with the National Security Adviser to ensure that assessments of the JIC are always clearly and properly communicated to policy-makers?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That is part of the line management job that we have. The Chairman of the JIC now presents at the start of every National Security Council meeting and gets feedback, in real time, as to whether they have been clear enough and objective enough and so on. It is very much my job as Cabinet Secretary and Mark Lyall Grant's job, as National Security Adviser, to make sure that the team we have in place, everyone is playing their role professionally. It is part of quality assuring my team.

Q68 **Mr Andrew Turner:** What safeguards are necessary to ensure that Chiefs of Staff always act appropriately on intelligence and in accordance with UK Government policy?



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Sir Jeremy Heywood: Are you talking about the Military Chiefs of Staff?

Mr Andrew Turner: Yes.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I would have to take further advice on that question. I don't know the answer to that question.

Q69 **Chair:** The Foreign Affairs Select Committee asked Lord Richards whether he was convinced that military intervention in Libya was in the national interest, in March 2011. Lord Richards, the then Chief of the Defence Staff, replied that, "the Prime Minister felt it was in our national interest", which suggests that his advice perhaps was not being taken as straightforwardly as he wanted. So we still have a problem on your watch of perhaps disengagement of Defence Chiefs from very major decisions. What is your reaction to that?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I do not agree with that at all. Everyone is playing their role correctly. The Prime Minister in a democracy—providing he or she can take their Cabinet with them—has to be the judge of the national interest. The Chief of the Defence Staff is not the person who decides what is in the UK's national interest.

Q70 **Chair:** So it does not matter that Lord Richards told the FAC—I am quoting from the report—"that he was unconvinced by the development of UK strategy in spring and summer 2011"?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: What I can say is that David Richards, who is a very self-confident individual, had every opportunity to express his views, speak to his under power in the National Security Council, the National Security Council's subcommittee on Libya, and had every opportunity to make those points, any points he wanted to make, and I have not—

Q71 **Chair:** The point is once again we find the Prime Minister's will overriding advice that turns out to be rather prescient in—

Sir Jeremy Heywood: The National Security Council and the National Security Council's subcommittee on Libya discussed on many, many occasions, collectively, on the basis of advice from the Chairman of the JIC, advice from the Chief of the Defence Staff and a number of other officials, who were absolutely empowered to speak truth under power, but of course in a democracy the politicians have to decide what is in the national interest. It is not a matter for the Chief of the Defence Staff. I am sure you were not implying that.

Q72 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Another subject that arises from the report, which is on the mechanics, is on cross-departmental calibration. I don't know about you, but I was pretty shocked to read in the report that there was a lack of co-ordination between the Departments, right from the planning stages, right the way through to the conflict resolution and reconstruction stage. It is illustrated particularly by saying that there was more time devoted to which Department was going to be responsible for civilian casualties than actually in determining the number of civilian casualties,



which is really very sobering. I wonder what changes you have made to ensure that Departments operate cohesively when delivering this sort of cross-cutting priority in the future.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: We have made two sorts of changes. First of all, the formation of the National Security Council and the underpinning officials committee that meets on a weekly basis. The National Security Council officials subcommittee themselves drive a much greater appreciation of cross-departmental challenges and cross-departmental partnership and working. So frankly, as you very well know, if Ministers are meeting together collectively once a week or once a fortnight and officials are meeting together once a week to discuss issues of common concern, that builds a sense of team work and shared ownership of challenge, so it is a very good habit to get into and it improves policy-making, per se. That is strand one.

Strand two, which has been a more recent development, I have taken a view over the last few years that we have too many departmental silos, too much duplication between Departments and, therefore, particularly at a time when we are cutting resources overall, we need to be particularly efficient. One of the ways of becoming more efficient is to create joint units, so we bring together the experts in the MoD and the experts in the Foreign Office working on a similar issue and we put them together into a joint unit or between other Departments as well.

Over the last year or two we have set up a whole series of these joint units, some of them have cross-cutting budgets as well, and that is a further way in which we have tried to break down the silos. Because I do think that this has been a general problem, not just in the Defence, Foreign Office, DFID and so on but across Whitehall. I am a big enthusiast for trying to experiment with different forms of achieving of government at official level, and I think that has the strong support of Ministers as well.

Q73 Mrs Cheryl Gillan: Sir John Chilcot recommended that when you have something that is of the size of the engagement of Iraq, which is huge and has tremendous implications to it, that you should relieve the Prime Minister of that burden and put a senior Minister in charge on a day to day basis. What do you make of that recommendation?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It is a very interesting recommendation. I think myself I am slightly sceptical that a Prime Minister would want to delegate something as big as a war in Iraq to another Minister. I understand the spirit in which it is put forward and so on. It is definitely something we will want to consider as part of Mark Lyall Grant's current lessons learnt exercise and then have a proper debate with the Prime Minister and the National Security Council, but designating another Minister as a person who is going to oversee all of that I think is very much an ad hominem or ad feminem thing. If you happen to have a very senior Minister who had the bandwidth to take that on, and had the Prime Minister's complete and utter trust, it is possible, but it will not always be



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the case. Most of the Prime Ministers I have ever worked with would want to retain a very close oversight over all aspects of something as important for the nation as a military exercise on that scale. I can see the case for it but I think there are some practical considerations.

- Q74 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** Is that really possible? A Prime Minister has such a wide range of responsibilities on a day to day basis and at least having a Minister “for war”, the Prime Minister would have somebody there that was dealing with the co-ordination, for example, of interdepartmental working. Because it is quite clear that officials and civil servants have not been capable of running smooth, cross-departmental operations when you get the criticisms that you get in the Chilcot report.

Maybe it is not somebody that takes over responsibility from the Prime Minister. That is certainly not what I understood in the recommendation. But having somebody that had that oversight and day to day running gives you the political will because, if the Civil Service is not going to provide it, then you do need that political overlap.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It would have to be provided at a political level as you say, and it is definitely worth further consideration.

- Q75 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** The Stabilisation Unit has been a key thing. How adequate is it in ensuring that we get that co-ordination?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It is operating well and we are happy with its performance, but again it is one of those issues that we will want to look at afresh in the light of the Chilcot recommendations.

- Q76 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** What sort of things will you be examining?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Exactly the implications of Chilcot for that. Mark Lyall Grant is currently reviewing all aspects of the way we look at post-conflict stabilisation, conflict prevention and so on, whether or not there are new things we can learn in the light of both Libya and the Chilcot report.

- Q77 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** When do you think you will be able to make some pronouncement on your post-Chilcot inquiry and your post-Libya investigations, so that we have something to look at in terms of proposals?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: The work is currently underway.

- Q78 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** When will it be finished?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I don’t know, to be honest, but hopefully months rather than any longer than that.

- Q79 **Mrs Cheryl Gillan:** It will not be several years like the Chilcot report?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I certainly hope not, and of course a lot of these lessons we think we have already incrementally taken on board and we have discussed some of them today, so we don’t start from a blank sheet



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of paper or from a completely unreformed system. As soon as we see something that immediately makes sense, of course, we implement it, like these joint units I was talking about a few minutes ago. We are getting on with this and individual Departments will have their own learnings as well.

As I said earlier, for me, in some ways the most important thing of all is the cultural and challenge aspects, which go to Civil Service culture, ministerial culture and how we work together.

Q80 Mrs Cheryl Gillan: Can I ask you a very practical question? You are carrying out all this work. You are not quite sure where it is going to finish. How is that work going to be made accessible to parliamentarians and to this House?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: That is not an issue I have discussed with the Prime Minister yet, so I would want to reserve judgment on that.

Q81 Mrs Cheryl Gillan: Could you let us know when you have had that discussion because it would be nice to know whether you are going to present a report to the House, or whether you are going to perhaps come before this Committee and talk through what your findings are? It would be good to know how it will emerge from the Civil Service internal investigation, so that we can have a look at it.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It will emerge from the Civil Service to our Ministers, obviously. They will then take a view as to whether they want to make any announcements, Department by Department, or occasion by occasion, or in one fell swoop. I just have not had that conversation yet with the new Prime Minister.

Q82 Mrs Cheryl Gillan: Yes. But bear in mind we are very interested on this Committee in it, and so we would like to know what the mechanism is.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: Sure.

Q83 Chair: Thank you. On this question of cross-departmental co-ordination, having myself watched it at close quarters, first as Shadow Secretary of State for Defence and then as a member of the Defence Committee, it is quite obvious that people on the ground in theatre work very capably together, but departmentally in Whitehall people were on different planets from different Departments. We took evidence from the Defence Committee with three Ministers from three Departments, and they were giving completely different answers to the same questions. It was quite obvious that there wasn't joined up thinking at Whitehall level. How confident are you that the Stabilisation Unit, which is merely a unit in the Cabinet Office, has resolved that?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I would not put all my weight on the Stabilisation Unit. I think that would be ridiculous, but all the things I mentioned earlier: the habit of working together that has come from the National Security Council, the NSCO and subcommittees, plus at least 10 joint



units that we have established, are beginning to make a difference, but as you say, Chairman, we are operating against the grain here sometimes.

Q84 Chair: It is ironic, isn't it, when we had the result of the referendum and the Government was confronted with a big long-term challenge that was going to require a lot of cross-departmental involvement Whitehall was immediately confronted with a choice: either appoint a Minister in the Cabinet Office, who was going to co-ordinate on behalf of the Prime Minister, or set up a new Department or appoint a lead Department, and Ted Heath in 1970 decided to have a Minister in the Cabinet Office co-ordinating. In this case the Prime Minister set up a new Department. Given that Iraq and Afghanistan were every bit as massive a challenge as leaving the European Union—in fact I would regard leaving the EU as frankly a lot easier—why has Whitehall set up these structures for this task, when we all know that both Mr Blair and then Mr Brown wanted to do anything but talk about the conflict in Iraq as it became more and more unpopular, and it did get sidelined? We had a peace mentality Government that was conducting a war at arm's length pretending everything was going much better than it actually was. Isn't the answer: if we had had a Minister at Cabinet level, either co-ordinating or running a Department or being a lead Department, that would have strengthened the co-ordination across Government?

Sir Jeremy Heywood: It is a perfectly plausible hypothesis and it is one we want to think further about. I think, certainly for the post-conflict phase, as opposed to the conflict phase, when the Prime Minister is bound to be very, very—

Chair: The Prime Minister was right in there, I agree with that.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: There is always a slight danger that as it moves into that post-conflict phase, as I say, the political interest wanes slightly, but there is still a huge co-ordination job to do, as you say, bringing Departments together, so I think that is a perfectly good proposal that we need to think about.

Chair: I am grateful for your answers and it is likely that we will produce a short report following up this evidence session, our reaction to Chilcot on these matters. If you want to add anything else in writing to us please do.

Sir Jeremy Heywood: I will reflect on that.