Britain and the 1991 Gulf War Witness Seminar

16 March 2011

Cormorant Hall, JSCSC, Shrivenham, Wiltshire

Session 1:
11:30-12:45: Origins of the Conflict up to Desert Shield

Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock (Commandant, JSCSC): Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock. I am the Commandant of the Joint Services Command and Staff College, which is where you are this morning, and it is my great pleasure to welcome witnesses and delegates to this witness seminar.

It is not my intention to eat into anyone's time, but just a couple of minutes by way of introduction if I may: on 27 February 1991, I spent four hours that morning sitting in my Tornado, in cloud, headed up towards an airfield called Al Taqaddum, just to the west of Baghdad, to destroy a hangar. For one minute of that sortie, miraculously, the clouds parted, and we were able, with the help of a Buccaneer, to destroy said hangar. For much of my generation, that was our first proper foray into war, and it has very much set the tone for the decades that followed.

In fact, it is remarkable to note that, 10 years after the ceasefire, Prince Philip[1] opened the Staff College here. The Joint College has, of course, very much been one of the children of the First Gulf War; the other one, of course, being the Permanent Joint Headquarters. I have just come – 10 minutes ago – from a briefing by its staff on what we are doing now in terms of Libya, Bahrain and Yemen, and all the other places. So the pull through for me from the First Gulf War is very clear, and it is something that we speak about every day here in the College, as we educate our young men and women for the future. That is why I am absolutely delighted that we can capture the strategic and military strategic background to the Gulf War, because I believe that is essential to our current and, indeed, future operations. This is an appropriate place to do that, and I welcome back many people whose names I saw in the newspapers at the time but, frankly, whom I knew little of, as I departed the Sheraton in Bahrain every day to fly combat missions over Iraq. That is another story, not perhaps for today, I dare say.

On the witness seminars, we are very lucky to have Dr Rob Johnston to lead us through today from the Faculty of History at Oxford. Rob is a Deputy Director of the Changing Character of

Warfare Programme [at the University of Oxford]. Thank you very much indeed. The witness seminar today is very much about our expert witnesses, providing their perspective.

Of course, one should reflect that a number of my colleagues – our comrades – lost their lives in 1991. We remember their sacrifice, but we are here today to hear from the strategic end of what went on in the 1991 Gulf War. King's College London are running the seminar today. The Staff College enjoys a close partnership with King's College London, so without any further ado, let me hand over to Rob.

Dr Robert Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much indeed. I hope that you can all hear me very well. I will first run through a few administrative issues to help you and the witnesses frame the discussions. It is very important to note that this seminar will be recorded, transcribed and archived. Therefore, everything that is said will be attributed and on the record. This is not a Chatham House scheme.

The first part of the day, Session 1, will be very much a discussion of the origins of the war, up to – using the American expression – DESERT SHIELD. It is very important to note that we will try to acknowledge the fact that, long before the land component and the air-land battle got under way, there was already a significant air and naval campaign going on.

I will ask each of the people who make witness statements, first, to announce themselves at the start of the day, to give us an idea of the role that they were fulfilling at the time of the conflict or just before.

I want to thank the Commandant for his comments and his warm welcome, the College for providing this facility and, indeed, the British Academy for generously funding this event, as well as those members of King's College and, indeed, this College who have so generously helped us out for getting this thing under way.

After a few opening remarks, I hope simply to field each of the speakers. Let us go back to 02.00 on 2 August 1990 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which many people have posited was something of a surprise – itself a controversial point. Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah[2] made his escape. Unfortunately, his brother was not so lucky. There was certainly a great deal of uncertainty about the next moves that Iraq and particularly Saddam Hussein might take, and a great deal of uncertainty about the course of action that should be followed: sanctions, force, by what authority, which allies and what of Arab opinion.

There was, of course, then the decision to establish DESERT SHIELD and the deployment of considerable and overwhelming force against an Iraqi army that at the time numbered 540,000, which was very battled-hardened and experienced, and no one quite knew what sort of entity we were dealing with. We were then faced with the issue of an Iraqi Scud missile offensive and whether the Israeli-Palestine question would blow up in our faces as the war seemed to start

to unfold. There were gradual but intensive diplomatic moves towards the liberation of Kuwait – although, again, that was not given at the beginning of the crisis – which ended with the UN deadline of 15 January 1991, under UN Security Council Resolution 678.[3] Saddam hoped for a protracted struggle and the reunification of Arab opinion against Israel and the West, and that was something that had to be borne in mind as the air operations began to intensify.

The Air campaign has been seen as largely successful. But of course, one of the great things about doing a historical study in a reflective move like this is that we have the opportunity to go back to the decisions, the contingencies and the questions that were in the minds of the commanders and decision makers of the day. It is all very well studying the historical record as things actually happened—'*Wie es eigentlich gewesen*',[4] as Leopold von Ranke[5] would have said – but what we are interested in today is some of the considerations, concerns and anxieties of those decision makers.

The war followed, with overwhelming fire power demonstrated by the Western forces, with new precision weapons, with new media coverage and with the consideration, of course, of the security of energy supply and the domination of the waters of the Gulf. There were questions of how or when to stop the war, how to avoid civilian casualties, particularly against human shields, and how much or how little to manage the media. The DESERT SABRE operations – the 100-hour war, as it is known – was immensely successful, crushing, and an indictment perhaps of the veracity and importance of manoeuvrist warfare, but the Basra Road destruction led to an eagerness to end the war by particular political masters.

Did we achieve our war aims? Did we achieve them by 1991; or were they achieved later? Was this the last of the industrial wars; or was this the first of the post-modern wars and a glimpse into the warfare of the later twenty-first century? We had decisive military operations, but a very uncertain peace followed. I think that this will be an opportunity for us all to reflect, amplify and discuss the contingencies and concerns of the day and to get at the story underneath the narratives that are already in the literature and the scholarship. It is important, of course, to note finally that, while the conflict of 2003 is in our minds, which is probably a debate for another day, I am sure that the present will bleed into the past and our reflections on it, but I think that we need to move fairly swiftly and discuss, as our primary consideration today, the conflict of 1990 to 1991.

If we are going right back to the origins of the crisis, we perhaps need to go back even a little further than that. So I will call upon speakers to address particular questions; but of course, there will be interjections, and I will keep my eyes open here on the panel for those who wish to make other additional remarks.

I think that the first question that we should consider is the extent to which British policy towards Iraq in the 1970s and 1980s encouraged Saddam Hussein to believe that particularly Britain would regard his territorial ambitions towards Kuwait with any leniency or licence.

To get us started on this, perhaps I can call upon Sir Harold Walker and Professor Gordon Barrass to make some reflective remarks about that 1970s and 1980s period.

Sir Harold Walker: My name is Hooky Walker. I was briefly Ambassador in Iraq from February 1990 to January 1991. I do not think that British policy would have encouraged Saddam to think that he could walk into Kuwait without reaction, because, after all, we had defended Kuwait as long ago as 1961 and we had a long history of protecting the Gulf States. However, I have to say that, in the immediate lead-up to the war, what seemed to be on the mind of British decision makers more than anything else was trade.

My memory is not good, but my memory of my briefings pre-February 1990 on going to Iraq supports one of the statements in the pieces of paper that we were supplied with before this seminar – namely, 'Britain wanted to restore positive dialogue in the months preceding the invasion'. My briefing before I was appointed amounted to my being told the following: 'Anglo-Iraqi relations are always rocky. Your job is to keep them sufficiently calm for us to conduct profitable trade'. That was the sum of my briefing.

The Foreign Office had in mind a graduated series of ministerial visits to build up the prospect of trade. I do not think that we had any plan laid out in detail; but in general, the idea was that, after a while, a junior Minister should visit Baghdad. Then there would be a visit by Ted Heath[6], who was already keen to go. If all went well, that would lead up to a ministerial visit of Cabinet rank. So, from my perspective, we were thinking more of trade than security and politics at the time when I was briefed to go to Baghdad.

Dr Robert Johnson: Thank you. Just before we proceed, is it possible to turn up the volume just a little for some of the speakers – years are going on for some of us? Thank you.

Professor Gordon Barrass: Could I just give you a perspective from how it looked from the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), as we approached the invasion of Kuwait? As you will see from your notes, on 25 July, Saddam had summoned the American Ambassador[7] to a meeting to hold comprehensive political discussions. The Middle East Current Intelligence Group met that day and prepared a paper saying that Saddam was stepping up the pressure on Kuwait. Before that paper was drafted, I consulted the FCO Head of Middle Eastern Department who looked after the region, and I said that there was growing concern in the defence intelligence sector that there was a build-up of Iraqi forces and we should really take this very seriously.

The Under-Secretary's response was that the word had come back from King Fahd,[8] from King Hussein of Jordan[9] and from Mubarak[10] that basically what Saddam was doing was playing games and that this was to build up the pressure but there would be a settlement: after all, these people had known Saddam for 20 or 30 years. So the paper basically said that was the background: he wanted to step up pressure, but there was in the longer term the risk of an attack on Kuwait.

The next day, the Joint Intelligence Committee met, and as was its custom, it reviewed the current intelligence papers that had been produced between the two sessions. Its view was rather more pessimistic, because already further evidence had been passed on by defence intelligence that the forces were building up near Kuwait. On the Friday, Sir Percy Cradock,[11] the Chairman of the JIC, as was customary, wrote a note to the Prime Minister about the JIC's deliberations. He was of the view that we really did face the prospect of a war over Kuwait, and he wanted the Prime Minister to urge European leaders and the Americans to take a collective, firm stance. At the time, the Prime Minister was just embarking on her travels – perhaps Charles Powell can say something about that in a moment – but the piece of paper did not catch up with her until she was close to seeing President Bush[12] in Colorado on 2 August, which just happened to be immediately after the invasion had taken place.

In the period towards the invasion, the Ministry of Defence was becoming increasingly concerned that there would be an invasion. On the day of 1 August, it issued a warning that it thought that was likely. This warning, for reasons that remain unclear, but it was not on the MOD side, did not really get through into the JIC system, and by the time that the word was hoisted in, it was too late.

The next day, I had a meeting with Percy Cradock and one of my other colleagues in the JIC, and he was asking us what sort of action could be taken. At that stage, the first concrete idea that we came up with was a naval blockade, and that was something that began to work its way through the system.

Dr Robert Johnson: Thank you very much. Before we move essentially to Lord Powell and his comments on what the Government were going to do about this, may I ask the ambassadorial figures here, particularly Sir Alan Munro, to give us some indication of how well we understood the motivations that lay behind this man, Saddam, since this was a system that very much depended on him as a decision maker? What was the view essentially of the prospect of a crisis, which appeared to be blowing over by the late summer anyway, taken by the ambassadorial figures?

Sir Alan Munro: I can look at this from two successive appointments, because I was the Deputy Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office responsible for the Middle East from 1986 until 1989, during much of the prelude period, which included the Halabja gas outrage on the Kurds.[13] I have to say that we were not soft politically on Saddam at any point during this time. In fact, we did, whatever others might try to tell us subsequently, impose a rigorous weaponry – military equipment of all kinds by then, not just offensive weaponry – embargo, unlike certain others, notably the French and the Soviets, at this time. That certainly riled the Iraqis, who were very anxious to have access to some British equipment.

Dropping back a moment, I remember 10 years earlier, when I was at the Ministry of Defence and looking after our military equipment, collaboration and sales to the whole Arab world,

Saddam Hussein, in about 1981, sent an armoured corps general over to see us who over supper staggered me by saying, 'What we want you to do, please, is to reopen the production line for the Churchill tank flamethrower'.[14] Well, we got through dinner somehow, my having pointed out that sort of weaponry did not really figure on anyone's sheets anymore and certainly should not, but when I asked the Royal Ordnance Factory, just out of interest, it said, 'Oh, yes, delighted; we've still got the jigs'. But there we are – those were good industrial days.

That said, we were not soft, but we were spurred on, as Hooky says, to maximise our trade. Someone who had a lot to do with this and various affairs during that time was called Alan Clark.[15] He was certainly a great proponent of maximising our very valuable trade with the Iraqis, but it did not include the defence sector.

The other point to bring in here is that, in the late 1980s, our attention was focused on what we saw as the major threat, shared indeed with our American partners: Iran. Our eyes were on the menace of Iran in one form or other, which tended, if you do not have the resources maybe to scrutinise two enemies at the same time, to take our eyes off Iraq. Once I got out to Saudi Arabia in 1989 and early 1990, and we had all the build-up and the tension, personally I was indeed very worried that, as this built up in those early spring months, it went beyond sabre rattling, but I was constantly assured by senior Saudis, ministerial and official, 'Look, this has got to be sabre rattling; we know our man; he'll be bought off eventually. The Kuwaitis aren't being awfully clever' – indeed they were not and had been provocative – 'but it will be bought off. Above all else, look at the Arab League charter: Arabs do not attack each other. They never have. Israel is our target, and we do not attack each other, even if we threaten each other'. So that was how we saw it, right up until the last moment.

Sir Harold Walker: Before we move on to any next stage, I think that we need to add a rider to this view that Arab states do not attack each other, or the way that we accepted that view. It is set out very well in one of the papers that we were supplied with by Alex Danchev and Dan Keohane.[16] A factor in our judgment at the time was that the judgment of Arab leaders was that a military attack was unlikely. Now, the supposition on our part that primarily the Egyptian Government and also other Arab governments would be better able than ourselves to judge Iraqi intentions was due, I say now with of course hindsight, to an insufficiently rigorous assessment on our part of the then nature of the Arab world.

Arabists, like myself, ought to have made an assessment that, although there were and, indeed, still are commonalities across the Arab world, the Arab countries since the Second World War had developed individually to the point at which it was no longer correct to assume that one Arab country would not attack another and, similarly, that it was no longer wise to assume that one Arab government – the Egyptians or whoever – would necessarily make better judgments about the behaviour of another Arab government than we could.

I may say that later on I pointed out that, in my judgment, there was an element of brutality in the Iraqi system that did not exist or was rare in the rest of the Arab world. I was taken to task for that judgment by the late and great Fred Halliday,[17] but I think that I was correct – of course, much too late. So I think that there was, in my case and in the general international disposition, a tendency to be out of date in judging the Arab scene. We thought that the Arabs behaved in a certain way, which indeed they had done in the past, but if our thinking had been really more rigorous, we would have said that that was no longer true and that, when you see an army on the border of somewhere with the equipment to invade – well, if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. I know that this is partly hindsight; none the less, I feel in my case that more rigorous thinking would have produced an early warning for HMG that Saddam might indeed invade.

Sir Michael Weston: I was Ambassador in Kuwait at the time. I had been in Kuwait for only four or five months. It had been a period when there was a lot of tension over the border issue, and the Kuwaitis were engaged, as you all know, in discussions of that. What they were saying to me was, 'We need not worry. We know the Iraqis better than anyone. Moreover, the Iraqis are dependent on support from their fellow Arabs, and they all tell us that this is only sabre rattling and that we really need not worry'.

Of course, when it came to 2 August, the Kuwaitis were totally unprepared. They did not believe that there would be a military attack, but that if there were an attack, contrary to their belief, it would stop at the Mutla Ridge, north of Kuwait City, so that Saddam would be able to capture the oilfields, which he claimed and which straddled the border and which Saddam claimed the Kuwaitis were draining at the expense of Iraq.

My only contribution, I think, following Hooky's line rather, is that somehow we attributed too much logic to Saddam and his position, because had he indeed stopped north of Kuwait City, my own view is that it would have been very difficult indeed to get him out again. It would have been virtually impossible to get the international consensus, which was obtained, together to get him back just a short distance. That certainly was the Kuwaiti view. The worst case, so far as they were concerned, was that they might lose a bit of the northern oilfield; that was all.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom: Archie Hamilton, Minister for the Armed Forces at the time of the Gulf War. Before we leave the subject of Alan Clark, I think that we ought to examine his role rather more closely. He was Minister for Trade and moved subsequently to become Minister for Defence Procurement in the Ministry of Defence at the time of the Gulf War. When he was Minister for Trade, he was extremely enthusiastic to sell everything to the Iraqis that they could possibly ask for.

I remember at one stage the telephone rang. Alan Clark was on the other end and said, 'Archie' – in his drawling voice – 'your people are being very difficult about the sale of 5,000 rubber boats to the Iraqis'. I had not been aware of the fact that the Ministry of Defence had been

trying to block it, but it seemed to me to be eminently sensible so I said to him, 'Well, Alan, is it not likely that Saddam Hussein will use them against the Marsh Arabs in the south-east of his country?', to which he said, 'Well, we don't know that, do we'? So I said, 'We've got a pretty good idea, I think'.

Alan did play an absolutely pivotal role in trying to supply the Iraqis with almost anything that they wanted. Of course, basically, he played a pivotal role in the whole arms to Iraq scandal by nodding and winking to people who wanted to sell arms to Iraq, because his view was that the more damage Iraq could do to Iran the better and we should not be too squeamish about dictators. He was one of those extraordinarily unique Ministers who seemed to think that he did not need to be too tightly held by what was clear Government policy at the time. Of course, during his time at the Ministry of Defence, he found it necessary to write his own defence review, which he managed to get to the Prime Minister, although those enthusiasts who read his brilliantly written diaries would have noticed that he did not actually spell out what was in his defence review. But Alan, I think, was incredibly damaging at that stage and did play quite a big role in presumably giving quite a bit of reassurance to Saddam Hussein, which he did not deserve to have.

Dr Robert Johnson: Perhaps that is an important reminder of the nexus between domestic politics and the international environment. In terms of understanding the considerations regarding the Arab world, I wonder whether we might get the opinion of the UN.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: David Hannay; I got to the UN at the beginning of September, one month after the invasion of Kuwait, and by that time the initial decisions had been taken and that included both very strong legal action proclaiming Saddam's seizure of Kuwait as illegal, null and void, and far the biggest economic sanctions package that the UN had ever contemplated, let alone implemented. By the end of August, the crucial decision had also been taken that force could be used to prevent Iraq from getting around the sanctions. The wording was a little obscure, but the practice was not obscure, and at that point, pretty well all Iraqi legitimate external trade ceased, which was, of course, mainly external trade in oil, because there was not much else.

The policy until the end of October remained broadly one of tightening the screws of sanctions, so that in September there followed a resolution that cut Iraq off from all air transport and air cargo. Then there was a final turn of the sanctions screw in October, when some other bits and pieces were swept up. By that time, it was clearly understood at the UN that there was nothing much left in the sanctions rung of the ladder. It is always important to remember that sanctions are not an end in themselves; they are a step on a ladder between diplomatic persuasion and, above them the use of force. So it was realised by the end of October that it had run its course and had not produced any correction in Iraqi policy at all, which is why the whole Western response, particularly that of the US, the UK and, subsequently, France, shifted gear at about the end of October, because there was nothing left in the barrel to take out.

One other point to make about that period was that it was the time when the greatest fragility was shown in the coalition because of the Israeli killing of about 15 to 20 Palestinians on the Temple Mount, or the Haram al-Sharif, Jerusalem, when there had been some fairly normal, by subsequent standards, rioting. The Israelis opened fire with live ammunition and killed quite a lot of Arabs. That caused an enormous shockwave, as you might expect, and it did put at risk the Arab members of the coalition if we had not found a unanimous Security Council response which we did. It required the Americans through gritted teeth to condemn the action taken by Israel and to support the dispatch of a UN fact-finding mission, which was never admitted to Israel, in fact, and a really tough resolution of a sort that either before or since would not have passed. It only passed because the Americans understood that it was a necessary condition for keeping the coalition together.

A final point: at this period, of course, thought had been given about what the next stage should be if all the sanctions that we threw at Saddam were not going to bring about a change of policy. That consideration began broadly about the end of September and continued through October, but did not surface at that stage because the US was in the middle of the mid-term elections, which the president's party did pretty badly in, and did not wish any distraction by talk about the use of force to expel Saddam from Kuwait.

The diplomatic preparatory work, however, started at that stage, and there was distinct tension between ourselves and the Americans, because the Prime Minister took the view that we did not need any further UN authority to help the Kuwaitis to expel Saddam from their country. There was no doubt at all that was a correct reading of Article 51 of the Charter, which speaks about your right to act in self-defence, together with your allies if you so wish. But the Americans were more interested not in the legality but in the legitimacy of the use of force, and on that point, they had already begun to come to the conclusion that, to get a pretty unwilling Congress to vote in favour of the use of force, they needed a UN resolution. They had also come to the conclusion, correctly, and based very much on something that the Soviet Foreign Minister[18] said at the General Assembly in September, that the Russians would not have undue problems; and they were fairly sure that in those circumstances the Chinese would just look out the window and would not use a veto.

So the American preference for going back to the United Nations for a resolution authorising the use of force against Saddam carried the day and the main theme of activity in November up to the passage of Resolution 678 at the end of November,[19] was already known to us in September and October, but there were tensions between the Prime Minister's view in Downing Street and the emerging view of Bush, Baker[20] and Scowcroft.[21]

Dr Robert Johnson: Thank you very much. We will come back to the questions about the passage of those resolutions in a moment, but let us go back to the Cabinet view, with Lord Powell.

Lord Powell of Bayswater: I was the Prime Minister's Private Secretary at No 10 Downing Street throughout this period. Indeed, since 1983 I had been responsible particularly for foreign affairs and defence. I will try to look at matters from Margaret Thatcher's point of view – not my own, which is of limited interest. We can start with the question of perspective. What you have assembled today is a great deal of Foreign Office expertise on the Middle East and people who were working on it and had been for years and also those who commanded our forces and who have great military expertise focused on defending Britain and fighting wars. From the centre of the Government, it all looked rather different. We were weighing up much broader factors and dealing with a much wider range of issues.

Just to remind you, at the time of July/August and Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, we were still in the throes of trying to sort out German unification.[22] We were still running up to the end of the Cold War, the great conference in Paris in November that year, which really marked the end of the Cold War. In domestic politics, there was a huge row going on about the poll tax. I want to call it the community charge, of course, but I shall settle for the 'poll tax'.[23] There was a major dispute within the Government about joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism. Those were the matters that were preoccupying Margaret Thatcher. The Middle East was, of course, important, but it was not particularly high on the radar screen in June/July of that year.

It so happened that, at the end of July/beginning of August, I had actually – the only time during my years at Downing Street – persuaded Margaret Thatcher to take a holiday. It was to be in Aspen, Colorado. It was a characteristic Thatcher holiday. She would have a meeting with President Bush, would give a major speech, visit the headquarters of Strategic Air Command, speak at the Aspen Physicists Conference and visit a major environmental laboratory in Denver, all in the space of three days – the sort of holiday that most of us enjoy. Of course, it did turn out to be fortuitous, a point that I shall come on to.

Had we had a strong intelligence warning that a conflict was imminent, I wonder whether we would have gone. I think that we might have still gone, because it would have been the right thing to do, but the JIC assessment was, as always, extremely balanced. It listed all the factors, and it gave great weight to the assurances from President Mubarak and other Arab leaders that Saddam was all a bluff. He was going to be negotiating; it would all be settled and not to worry. Someone has just made the valid point that if a country's tanks are all close to a border and facing the direction of advance, you probably should take that rather seriously.

Nonetheless, we thought that the situation was all right and that it was sufficiently stable for Margaret Thatcher to go America. We were reinforced in that view by the Americans who were equally unclear as to what would happen. I should point out that I had a telephone on my desk, which was a direct link to General Scowcroft, the President's National Security Adviser – a link that was often used several times a day. So it was easy to know what was in the Americans' minds.

We had set off to America on 1 August, gone through Washington and had just landed at Aspen and were driving from the airport to the ranch where Margaret Thatcher would stay when General Scowcroft rang to tell me the news that Saddam Hussein's tanks had just crossed the Kuwait border. My first question to him was, 'Will the President still come out to Aspen tomorrow as planned to meet Margaret Thatcher and give his speech'? He said, 'I honestly don't know. We will think about it and come back to you'. I said that I really thought he should because nothing will be more important than the two of them to be together in response to the situation. President Bush did indeed reach the right decision. He came out the next day and had a meeting with Margaret Thatcher at which the whole line of the subsequent Gulf conflict was set.

It is sometimes said that was the stage when Margaret Thatcher said, 'George, this is no time to go wobbly'.[24] That is completely untrue. She did say that to him some weeks later in connection with stopping ships in the Indian Ocean, but at the time of their meeting that day, they were equally robust, both of them. Margaret Thatcher's approach was quite easy to understand. It was strongly conditioned by the Falklands conflict. She believed in standing up to dictators and that we should never back down in the face of them. She had no inhibitions about believing that we should be part of a military action to stop Saddam Hussein.

Secondly, Margaret Thatcher had huge respect and admiration for our military and believed that they were capable of conquering the world. Perhaps they were, but luckily we didn't have to find out. She knew that she had available to her Armed Forces that could make a major contribution to stopping Saddam. Thirdly, she had a very clear understanding of the strategic importance of the Gulf. Her biggest concern at the time was not really with Kuwait, but whether Iraqi Forces would go straight through Kuwait and advance on to and into Saudi Arabia.

In her mind also was another factor: she wanted to demonstrate to President Bush that Britain really counted still. There is a bit of a background to that. She had been particularly close to President Reagan.[25] He had talked to her about almost everything, her view frequently prevailed with him. When President Bush came into office, his advisers believed that the US had tilted a bit too far towards Britain, that it was time to rebalance the relationship a bit, and pay more attention to France and Germany, and give others a chance as it were. Margaret Thatcher was aware of that. Indeed, I remember talking to her about it, and shortly after President Bush was elected she said, 'Charles, don't worry about it. The Americans will soon find out who their real friends are'. Indeed, she saw the Gulf situation as a prime opportunity to demonstrate to the Americans who their true friends were. She and George Bush really approached the matter on the same basis of immediate resistance to Saddam Hussein. If you read Margaret Thatcher's memoirs, she has the phrase, 'I never found any weakness in George Bush from the start'. They really were of one mind. They gave their joint press conference that morning, where they said, 'This invasion shall not stand', and that really set the tone for the whole of the subsequent six months and more.

If there were any intelligence failures, I suspect that they belonged to Saddam Hussein. It was perfectly common knowledge that Bush and Thatcher would meet on 2 August, and it was not exactly a very intelligent time to choose to invade Kuwait. Probably his intelligence failure outweighed any failure on our part. I must be careful how I say this, but the fact that the US President and the British Prime Minister were together, Margaret Thatcher with her longer experience of being a head of Government than George Bush, probably accelerated the moment when the President took the decision that the invasion must not stand. Would he have reached that conclusion quite as rapidly if they had not been there together? I am not sure. In that sense, the meeting was extremely important and influential.

I will just add two or three more points. It is important to note that, at no stage from the very beginning onwards, was bringing down Saddam Hussein an objective. Margaret Thatcher and George Bush never said to each other at the first meeting or indeed at any subsequent meeting, 'We've really got to get rid of this guy. He's a menace. He must go'. It was only cast in terms of getting him out of Kuwait, defeating him and stopping him getting to Saudi Arabia. Anything said subsequently about that, including things said subsequently by Margaret Thatcher, have no historical basis. It was never an aim to get rid of Saddam Hussein.

We have to remember the end of the Cold War context. It was really the first test of Western resolve since the end of the Cold War. It was important that the West should not be found wanting. The enemy was, of course, different from the one that we had planned for. Nonetheless the test of wills was important and that, too, was very clear to both Margaret Thatcher and George Bush at the time. On the historical side, they met that day in Aspen. George Bush flew back to Washington. Margaret Thatcher joined him there three or four days later. They met in the Oval Office and confirmed everything that they had said at their first meeting in Aspen. They heard the first results of Secretary Cheney's[26] visit to Saudi Arabia, the agreement of the King that American Forces could start to be deployed there. But they also had their first disagreement, to which David Hannay has referred.

As for my perspective on that disagreement, obviously it was important at the very beginning to get the UN to act, to demand Saddam Hussein's withdrawal and to start to impose sanctions. From the first, Margaret Thatcher took the view that any action to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait should be under Article 51 of the UN Charter: the Right to Self-Defence. She argued that point with George Bush and Jim Baker that first day in Washington and many times subsequently. She never thought that sanctions would work. They were useful. They were important, but she never thought that they were going to work. On that, she was in contrast to Douglas Hurd,[27] who was convinced at the time – and had said in his memoirs – that they would work.

Margaret Thatcher thought it a mistake not to use Article 51, the Right to Self-Defence, on a number of grounds. First, if you did not use it, it would suggest that sovereign states did not have the authority to act on their own behalf, but had to go to the UN for permission to act.

Secondly, she thought that, if you could achieve an objective without UN authority, why seek it at the risk you would not get the resolutions you wanted? Thirdly and linked to that, she feared that a UN resolution would tie our hands unnecessarily. At the beginning, George Bush was perhaps less focused on getting UN authority than James Baker: for him and certainly Brent Scowcroft, it was primarily a matter of congressional support.

There was never any real problem with the British Parliament about going to war to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. There were debates in early September, again in January the following year. On each occasion, the majorities in favour of action were massive. At the US Congress, it was an entirely different picture. George Bush did not know whether he would get a majority in Congress. He did not even try to test it until very, very late in the day, and when he did – you will all remember – it was a very slim majority in the US Senate, three or four votes from memory. That gave Margaret Thatcher great leeway, which President Bush and Secretary Baker did not have. Frankly, she did not worry much about the parliamentary aspects. Insofar as the British politics of it all concerned her, she was very fed up with Ted Heath's activities, which she saw as consorting with the enemy. She did not mind who knew that was her view. She was very fed up with one or two others, such as Denis Healey[28] who was preaching gloom and disaster and saying that it would be a frightful conflict with tens of thousands of British casualties. However, essentially, she had a pretty free hand in our politics.

Dr Robert Johnson: On the issue of balancing UK interests with those of our allies, we have mentioned Europe, the United States and the Arab world. Does Lord Hannay wish to respond to what the situation looked like on the other side of the Atlantic in trying to balance the national interests and how problematic it might have made his work in terms of getting resolutions and some understanding in the Security Council of what UK interests really were?

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: The task of getting resolutions at the Security Council on the issue was less than it would ever have been at any other time in the United Nations' history before or since, because we were in a state of grace as a result of the end of the Cold War and the weakening of the normal Soviet policy of simply mucking about if the West wanted to do something. The Chinese were still a power that was regional; they would get very excited about a resolution on Cambodia, but not very excited about a resolution on Kuwait or Bosnia. They were not at that stage in any sense a global power, although they had a veto on the Security Council.

As for the rest of UN opinion, there were any number of small states, countries such as Singapore, that were absolutely determined that tough action needed to be taken against Saddam. They realised that their own security in the post-Cold War world could very well crucially depend on whether the UN was able to reverse an open act of aggression such as had been committed. So we had a reasonably easy ride. That is not saying all that much because at the UN people always argue the toss about anything. But the majorities were always there, even though there was push back from groups of countries such as the Maghreb countries,

which did not share the views of some of the other Arabs who lived closer to Saddam. After all, the Maghreb countries would never be invaded by Saddam. There were thus some weak brethren, but they were always in a minority whether in the General Assembly or in the Security Council. When the Americans decided that they *were* going down the Security Council route to get the authorisation for the use of force, which, as Charles said, was not the view of the Prime Minister, although she conceded the point when it was put firmly to her at the beginning of November when Jim Baker came to London and said that it was the President's view, they then put on a diplomatic *tour de force* such as I certainly have never seen in which Baker travelled round the world and met pretty well every head of Government and Foreign Minister on the Security Council.

Tom Pickering,[29] the US representative and I, the British representative, had told Douglas Hurd and Jim Baker in early October that we thought that it was attainable now that it was clear that the Russians would not veto, as had been made pretty clear when Shevardnadze spoke at the General Assembly in September. We said that it could not be done in New York, but that it had to be done in capitals; it was too big an issue to be handled just by ambassadors in New York, particularly since some of the Security Council ambassadors had an extraordinary capacity to make up their own instructions as they went along. Baker took that seriously. He did his world tour. He got the votes necessary. One place that he did not visit, strangely enough, was Havana. At that time, the Cubans were on the Council but their vote did not matter! He did a brilliant operation, helped by us. But we were definitely playing second fiddle in the diplomatic negotiations that led up to the end of November, under US Presidency, to the voting of the authorisation for the use of force.

It was, of course, an astonishing resolution. It did not set up a UN military force to expel Saddam from Kuwait. No one in their wildest moments believed that could be done under the UN flag, even in the way that it had been done in Korea. It had to be done by a coalition of the willing, authorised by the Security Council. So that opened the door to a new chapter of UN history, in which there was another option between UN enforcement activity, which subsequently in Bosnia proved to be unrealistic, and doing nothing at all. That was the coalition of the willing, authorised by the UN at the end of November.

Dr Robert Johnson: Sir Alan Munro, would you talk about the coalition maintaining, particularly the Arab world coalition?

Sir Alan Munro: I can speak partly on behalf of Lord Wright,[30] who is unable to come. He was very much involved with the leading role played by the Foreign Office in such matters. The coalition was a very leaky bucket, as with other alliances under the United Nations. At its high point, remarkably there were 27 signed up members. A number of them had some form of military engagement and others had come up with financial support or one thing and another. There were also interesting ones who stood back. Nevertheless, holding all that together through the months of phoney war, while the process of 'Shall we turn the defence of

Saudi Arabia and the Lower Gulf into a liberation exercise?' was being debated, was a challenge. Much hesitation was shown by a number of our European partners, for example.

At one disgraceful point, the Belgians declined to supply ammunition to the British Forces. That was not a glorious moment in Belgium's inglorious history. We also had the French dissimulation. There was a great moment when I had a meeting with the EU ambassadors some time in November. My very boastful and tedious French colleague said to all of those gathered there, 'I wish you all to know – and Alan, in particular – that, as of today, there are more French troops than British in Saudi Arabia'. Bless him, the Italian looked at him and said, 'But Jacques, we don't know which way they're facing'. It was lovely, lovely.

The Saudis played a real role here, one that has not really been brought out in some of our material. King Fahd and Prince Saud[31] indefatigably and with enormous resolve played an ingenious part. It was a mixture of arm twisting and financial inducement. The Soviets were only brought on side in the end by a massive loan through a Saudi bank to the declining Soviet Union. The Syrians were also paid to come, and the Egyptians had all their debts written off – by nearly all of us, frankly. The Egyptians came out of the war best financially, without any doubt. The Saudis managed to hold a very rag-tag coalition together. Some of the Western participants were perhaps the least willing at times. Oddly enough, the newly liberated Eastern Europeans were some of the most enthusiastic, but then they wanted to score and register themselves as part of the new world order. The Saudi part in all of this, which is somewhat discounted in the literature, was very important indeed. They will not write it up. It is not in their way, but it should be put on the record.

Dr Robert Johnson: As for how one influences, cash and other forms of diplomacy seem to go quite a long way. There are about 40 more questions that I could pose, but it is important to turn to the issue of force structures. I know that there are a lot of military and naval aviation people in the audience who want to know how it was done. I shall call on Lord Hamilton, Field Marshal Sir John Chapple and Admiral Sir Julian Oswald, in particular, to comment on the force structures that were being envisaged and say how they interpreted the intent of the Government, particularly Lord Hamilton from within the Government sphere, and explain the structures that were said and in what order that was done. Can I start with Lord Hamilton?

Lord Hamilton of Epsom: I wish that you did not start with me because, to be honest, when it comes to the important business of fighting wars, the military takes over – and that is the way that it should be. I had very little to do with gathering together the force structures and there are people here who did, so I much prefer to hear from them.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine: Can I set the scene before my single service colleagues comment from their perspective? I am Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine. I was the Joint Commander of all British Forces in Gulf War One. The military chain of command ran from CDS at the Ministry of Defence through myself, as Joint Commander in the Joint Headquarters at

High Wycombe and out to the Joint Force Commander in theatre in Riyadh. That was much the same C2 structure that we had used during the Falklands campaign in 1982.

The initial British force deployment was a Tornado F3 squadron at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia; a Jaguar Squadron at Thumrait in Oman supported by a couple of tankers; an extra frigate for the Armilla Patrol, and three Maritime Patrol Nimrods deployed to Seeb in Oman. The top priority very early on was to get sufficient military capability into theatre as quickly as possible to deter ideally, but if not deter, to repel an invasion by Saddam into the oil-rich, north-east part of Saudi Arabia. I first met General Norman Schwarzkopf,[32] who was the overall Coalition Commander in theatre, towards the end of August 1990. I got to talking with him about what would be needed initially to repel any invasion of Saudi Arabia and, ultimately – it was always borne in mind – to drive Saddam and his Forces out of Kuwait.

Schwarzkopf's top priorities for further deployment by the UK were, first, armoured forces, because he wanted to put them with the US Marine Corps, who were lighter in armour in the north-east of Saudi Arabia. Secondly, he wanted the RAF to deploy Tornado GR1s equipped with the JP233 airfield denial weapon. Those were his top two priorities. It is worth saying at this stage that, when we discussed an operation to drive Saddam out of Kuwait, he said, 'If the President wants me to do that, I need sufficient resources here in theatre to do so with minimum risk in terms of allied casualties, particularly American casualties. I will never get all the ground forces that I think I really need for the job, so I will have to rely very heavily indeed on air forces – both land-based air forces and of course carrier-based air forces'.

There was at that time a stand-alone air campaign plan, should the Iraqis have invaded Saudi Arabia. It would have been initiated to get military action on the road and before sufficient ground forces were in theatre. Those were the initial requests from the American Commander in theatre. I relayed them back to the MOD about the end of August 1990. My Ministry of Defence colleagues might like to take up the story from their individual perspectives.

Dr Robert Johnson: It is only right that I ask the Senior Service next, so perhaps Admiral Sir Julian Oswald will comment on that interpretation of force structures.

Admiral Sir Julian Oswald: I have just a couple of points to make, as much has come out already. We must remind ourselves that the Navy was there already in the sense that it had been operating in the Persian Gulf since the year dot. The very large gentleman on my left, whom I treat with great respect because he is a lot bigger than me, and I were both there in 1961 in a previous incarnation when there was trouble in that area. So it came as no surprise to the Navy to be expected to do more in the Gulf.

The importance of the lessons learnt in 1982 in the Falklands is not lost on people. A lot of good command and control points came out of that campaign and, on the whole, they were well and sensibly picked up when it came to what we would send and what we would try to

do with it in the Gulf. The only real criticism I have of the state in which we ended up was that we had too much, to be fair, political interference in the actual construction of the military force – certainly from the naval point of view. He is not here, so I will not mention his name, but one particular Minister became known as 'the long screwdriver'. We all know what that means. It is interfering from London in what is going on in Kuwait, Bahrain or somewhere else like that. That became quite a significant worry.

However, all was well because other Ministers and authorities took a very sensible view, but it remained rather worrying that right through the campaign when the Navy thought that something additional was required by way of forces and perhaps an aircraft carrier was the supreme example, it found the greatest difficulty in persuading not only Ministers, but civil servants that this was a reasonable road down which to go. The net result was that the Naval contribution, although appreciated and sensible, was not as great as it might have been.

Field Marshal Sir John Chapple: I want to step back a moment to the question that was asked about where the Army was at the time of the Kuwait invasion. We certainly were not focused on Kuwait or Iraq because we were engaged with the other two Services at the Ministry of Defence on 'Options for Change', which was a thinly disguised defence review – the largest one since the end of the Second World War. The Cold War had only ended a few months beforehand. The staff at all levels in the commands were much engaged from February that year onwards with coming to grips with changing from what had been a threat-dictated Army to one that was capability-based, without knowing necessarily what the threats would be. There were lots of political arguments with our bosses, all conducted in a gentlemanly manner but, by the end of the parliamentary session in July, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force had more or less decided on the shape and size of their reductions. We still had a lot of work to do – only about four decisions had been taken.

The first decision was to reduce the size of BAOR[33] by half, down to 25,000. Why 25,000, we did not know. The second decision was to reduce from four operational divisions to two; thirdly, to have only one brigade committed for the United Nations; and, fourthly, one brigade – a light brigade – for out-of-area operations. We must remember that we had withdrawn all our bases east of Suez, except Hong Kong, in the 1967 withdrawal. Only those four decisions had been taken by July. They were included in a parliamentary announcement in the last week before Parliament broke up for two-and-a-half months' holiday. During that week, there had been a bit of trouble in Trinidad and a bit of trouble in Liberia. We sent small numbers of soldiers to both places, so it came as a bit of a surprise when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

We did not have any initial plans, of course, as has been brought out in the previous discussions, to deploy land forces. It is worth remembering that it was a late July invasion, but it was not until 14 September that the first political decision to deploy any land forces took place. I shall stop there, because such matters will come up in our other discussions.

Dr Robert Johnson: I am conscious that we have about 45 seconds left to run. I have several things to ask about tasking and the considerations of each of the Commanders. Given that we shall be looking at the naval blockade, the air embargo and operations immediately after lunch, perhaps Lord Powell can make a quick response about tasking, structures and consideration of opposition casualties or whatever was on his mind at the time.

Lord Powell of Bayswater: I shall deal first with Sir John's point on 'Options for Change', which was indeed a big issue at the time. It is important to remember that 'Options for Change' was designed to build a strong platform below which our forces would not be reduced. The feeling was that, at the end of the Cold War, everyone said, 'Okay, let's have the peace dividend. Why do we need defence? Cut the Ground Forces'. Clearly, something had to be done, but the approach was to build a sustainable platform so we could not be rushed into making unacceptable reductions.

Margaret Thatcher's involvement in the military aspect of the campaign lasted only until the end of November when she was dethroned or defenestrated – or whatever you like to call it. She did not initially envisage the use of British Ground Forces. The initial focus was very much on the use of air power, sending aircraft out to the Gulf, and the Armilla Patrol. Indeed, at the first meeting, my recollection is that George Bush never raised with her the subject of a British commitment of Ground Forces. That came later. Her concerns were in no particular order: first, how big a threat was the Republic Guard? One heard many different views about that. I think that I am right in saying that the JIC took a pretty dramatic view of its strength. A lot of the countries in the region said, 'No, no, it will crumble pretty quickly'; secondly, would Saddam use CBW[34] or not? Again, there were mixed views on that. Very unmistakeable warnings were given to him about what would happen to Iraq if those sorts of weapons were used; and, thirdly, whether the nature of the targets that ought to be attacked in Iraq could extend to bridges, power stations and so on, and was that the right thing to do? A particular point that Sir John and I were discussing in the car on the way from the station was whether our Challengers would break down because they always seemed to be breaking down in Germany. Margaret Thatcher summoned the Defence Secretary[35] and the head of Vickers[36] and made them sign in blood a statement that the tanks sent out to the Gulf would work all the time. Sorry, that is not quite true. They had to be reliable 80 per cent of the time.

Margaret Thatcher was concerned about the choice of the British Military Commander on the spot. He will be speaking for himself, later of course. She was very keen indeed to have Peter de la Billière there and made that clear. Overall, her main concern during the final months she was in power and involved in the situation was to secure an early start to the military campaign – earlier than many people might have thought wise. She did not believe in the business of 'give sanctions a chance to work', because she was convinced from early on that sanctions would not work. She thought that they were useful, but would not do the job. She also feared that, given too much time, Saddam Hussein might withdraw without being

thrashed in the process. My military colleagues will remember that she was constantly nagging at the Americans for the earliest possible start to the military campaign.

Dr Robert Johnson: Clearly, there is much that we have had to leave out, such as the crisis talks and the Baker/Aziz[37] meeting at the eleventh hour. However, we have been taken from crisis to conflict. After lunch, we shall be dealing with the conflict and its wider political ramifications. I accept that several people on the panel have not yet spoken. They will get their chance, but I thank them for their forbearance so far.

Notes

[1] HRH Duke of Edinburgh, consort to HM Queen Elizabeth II.
[2] Jaber III Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (1926–2006), Emir of Kuwait, 1977-2006.
[3] Adopted 29 Nov 1990.
[4] Translation: 'How it essentially was'. From Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514*.
[5] Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886).
[6] Leader of the Conservative Party 1965-75; Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1970-1974.
[7] April Glaspie, US Ambassador to Iraq, 1988-90.
[8] King Fahd (1921–2005), King of Saudi Arabia.
[9] King Hussein (1935–99), King of Jordan, 1952-99.
[10] Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt, 1981-2011.
[11] Sir Percy Cradock (1923–2010), Chairman, Joint Intelligence Committee, 1985-92.
[12] George Bush, US President, 1989-93.
[13] 16–17 Mar 1988.
[14] Churchill Crocodile Flamethrower Tank.
[15] Alan Clark (1928–99), Minister of Trade, Department of Trade and Industry, 1986–9; Minister for Defence Procurement, Ministry of Defence, 1989-92.
[16] Dan Keohane. 'The United Kingdom', in Alex Danchev and John Macmillan (eds), *The Iraq War and Democratic Politics* (London: 2005).
[17] Professor Fred Halliday (1946-2010), Professor of International Relations, 1985–2008, London School of Economics and Political Science.
[18] Eduard Shevardnadze, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1985-90, 1991.
[19] 29 Nov 1990.
[20] James Baker, US Secretary of State, 1989-92.
[21] Brent Scowcroft, US National Security Advisor, 1989-93.
[22] See M Kandiah and G Staerck (eds), *Anglo-German Relations and German Unification: Witness Seminar* (London: 2002).
[23] The Community Charge, or Poll Tax, was a system of local taxation designed to replace domestic rates, which was introduced in Scotland in 1989 and then in England and Wales in 1990. The Council Tax replaced it in 1993.
[24] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, pp.823-24.
[25] Ronald Regan (1911–2004), US President, 1980-8.

[26] Dick Cheney, US Secretary of Defense, 1989-93.
[27] Douglas Hurd (Lord Hurd of Westwell), Foreign Secretary, 1989-95.
[28] Denis Healey (Lord Healey, 1917-2015), Defence Secretary, 1964-70; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1974-9.
[29] Thomas Pickering, US Ambassador to the United Nations, 1989-92.
[30] Lord Wright of Richmond (Sir Patrick Wright), Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1986-91.
[31] Prince Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1975–.
[32] Norman Schwarzkopf (1924-2012), commander of the Coalition Forces in the Persian Gulf War of 1991.
[33] British Army of the Rhine.
[34] Chemical and biological weapons.
[35] Tom King (Lord King of Bridgwater), Defence Secretary, 1989-92.
[36] According to Jonathan Aiken, Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality (London, 2013): 'Her grilling of the directors of Vickers about the reliability of the Challenger tank became a legend in the company forklore' (p.601).
[37] Tariq Aziz, Iraqi Foreign Minister, 1983-91.