

Q1010 Mr Pope: And on the other charge that you pressurised the intelligence agencies to exaggerate the evidence, that is also a lie?

Mr Campbell: Totally untrue and what is more, again, the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Head of SIS, the Intelligence and Security Co-ordinator have all authorised me to say with their full support that is not true.

Q1011 Mr Pope: Can I move on to a different area about the machinery of government? Clare Short came before the Committee recently and she said that crucial decisions in the run-up to the conflict with Iraq were made by an entourage in No 10, that this entourage sucked the decision-making process out of the Foreign Office into No 10, that the people who make up the entourage are not elected, that the members of the entourage are yourself, Sally Morgan, David Manning, Jonathan Powell? Is that the case?

Mr Campbell: No, it is not. What is true is that I would say, if you were to say who in relation to Iraq were the officials in Downing Street who spent the most time with the Prime Minister in terms of the many foreign trips that he was doing, in terms of briefing, in terms of general meetings, it probably was the four, but in relation to that whole period he had meetings every single day with the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary in particular, with the Deputy Prime Minister, with the group that comprised those three plus the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary, the Leader of the House - now the Home Secretary, with Margaret Beckett, and with Clare Short, and also with officials including some of the intelligence officials that we have been discussing.

Q1012 Mr Pope: What I am putting to you, though, is there is a lacuna here in that the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee of the Cabinet has not met since 28 June 2001; the War Cabinet, the ad hoc committee on Iraq; did not start meeting until mid-March, so we have this long period of time when there is no Cabinet Sub-committee meeting, the ad hoc committee, the sub-committee of the Cabinet on Iraq, had not started meeting and in that gap the decision-making process on a day-to-day basis about Iraq was essentially being made by an unelected coterie around the Prime Minister.

Mr Campbell: No. I really do not accept that because the decisions were being taken by the Prime Minister and by ministers and it has always been the case that Prime Ministers and ministers have advisers and I just do not accept the picture as it was portrayed by Clare Short when she came to the Committee. As I say, in the build-up to the conflict and during the conflict that group was meeting the whole time. Prior to that the Prime Minister was meeting with his ministerial colleagues all the time. As Robin Cook said to the Committee last week there was regular discussion in the whole Cabinet. I do not think a week went by where Iraq for some months was not the dominant

FAC | 2/0285