



The Government is refusing to release minutes of Cabinet meetings before the Iraq War because they would reveal there was no discussion on the issue.

Details surrounding two crucial meetings on the eve of the conflict were laid bare for the first time yesterday when former Cabinet Minister Clare Short, who was present at both, gave a full account of what happened.

She told *The Mail on Sunday* the main reason for the 'scandalous' decision not to publish the minutes was not to protect confidential discussions about the war, but to cover up the fact there was no such discussion.

At the last Cabinet meeting, no debate on the legality of the war was allowed and Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, said brusquely: 'That's it.'

The official records would also put an end to claims by Gordon Brown's supporters that, in private, he had grave doubts about the war, said Ms Short. In fact, he led the Cabinet campaign to accuse France of sabotaging British and American attempts to win United Nations support for the attack on Saddam Hussein.

'It is extraordinary when you hear people like Jack Straw say that the Cabinet minutes cannot be published because you have to preserve Cabinet confidentiality and robust decision-making,' said Ms Short, who resigned as International Development Secretary after the war.

'The bitter irony is that what they are doing is concealing the fact there was no robust decision-making. The minutes will reveal there was no real Cabinet discussion about the Iraq War. That is the real scandal.'

Ms Short spoke out after the Government blocked an order by the Information Commissioner to reveal minutes of Cabinet meetings on March 13 and March 17, 2003, two days before the war started on March 19.

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