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Monday, 1 February 2010

(11.00 am)

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning.

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, welcome everyone, and to our witness,

Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup. We are taking evidence from him in his capacity as Chief of the Defence Staff. Before that, he was Chief of Defence Staff since April 2006. Before that, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Equipment Capability) from April 2002 until May 2003, and then Chief of the Air Staff from July 2003 to April 2006.

Now, I regret the fact that these dates are incorrect on these sheets on your seats, but the ones I have read out are correct, I hope. Thank you.

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Correct.

THE CHAIRMAN: We had expected this afternoon to see Sir Bill Jeffrey, the Permanent Undersecretary in the Ministry of Defence, at 2.00 pm, but he is unwell, he has got a throat. So we shall be seeing Lord Walker, former Chief of Defence Staff at 2.00 pm, rather than later in the afternoon.

Now, two other routine preliminaries: I remind every witness that they will later be asked to sign

1 a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the
2 evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

3 We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence
4 based in part on their recollection of events, and we,
5 of course, cross-check what we hear against the
6 documents to which we have access.

7 With those preliminaries out of the way, I will, if
8 I may, turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman to open the
9 questions.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are going to focus today on your
11 time as Chief of Defence Staff, but I would just like to
12 take you back to your period as Deputy Chief of Defence
13 Staff (Equipment Capability), which we have just heard
14 you held from April 2002 to May 2003.

15 It's just quite a short period of time. Perhaps
16 just say the difficulties of coming into a job and then
17 out of it so quickly, in terms of being able to
18 influence the equipment process.

19 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It does present difficulties, given
20 that the equipment plan looks so far ahead. However,
21 I had only been out of the Ministry of Defence for about
22 16 months or so. I had been Assistant Chief of the Air
23 Staff before that. So I had been heavily involved in
24 part of the equipment programming, and, of course, I had
25 also been involved in the move from the organisation

1 that we had prior to our acquisition reforms to the new
2 equipment capability organisation. So I was familiar
3 with the organisation and I was familiar with many of
4 the issues. So I feel I was able to hit the ground
5 running.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were your main responsibilities
7 in that post?

8 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The principal responsibility was to
9 construct annually the equipment plan for all three
10 services' equipment and to do the financial programming
11 over the ten-year period for that plan. Also, of
12 course, responsible -- and this became a very
13 significant part of my job -- for the construction of
14 urgent operational requirements in an operational
15 context.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, the strategic defence review of
17 1998 said that the armed forces should be prepared for
18 expeditionary warfare. By 2002, how prepared did you
19 think we were?

20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We had moved some way, but we still
21 had a fair distance to go. For example, our
22 expeditionary campaign infrastructure, tented
23 accommodation, showers and messing facilities for people
24 who were deployed were still being built up. Our
25 strategic and tactical mobility was still somewhat

1 constrained. So I would characterise it as having made
2 good progress on a journey, but with some distance still
3 to go.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sir Kevin Tebbit told us that the
5 defence budget wasn't big enough to fund the planning
6 proposed by the strategic defence review. Was that your
7 impression and -- just to get a sense of how that
8 affected the actual preparations for Iraq.

9 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I know that when the strategic
10 defence review was finalised, I think I was in the
11 Ministry of Defence shortly after that, and we were all
12 clear that the funding was a little way short of that
13 which would have been required for totality of what was
14 implied by the review. So a number of adjustments had
15 already been made in the programme.

16 But, of course, since 1998, the cost of the defence
17 programme had increased, as it always does. As I'm sure
18 the Committee will be aware, Defence Sector inflation
19 in equipment, and, indeed, in personnel, outstrips
20 normal inflation, so even a flat real defence budget
21 doesn't keep pace with events, nor even do small-scale
22 increases, and also, of course, new requirements are
23 emerging all the time.

24 So there was constant pressure growing within the
25 defence budget within the equipment plan as part of that

1 budget. When we got to the equipment plan for 2002, we
2 had had to make some quite difficult decisions, because,
3 for about three years, we had been engaged in
4 a conscious attempt to shift resource out of parts of
5 the programme into what we referred to as information
6 superiority; intelligence, surveillance, targeting,
7 acquisition, reconnaissance, and so on, and we had some
8 success. I think we had increased the amount of funding
9 in that particular area by about 15 per cent. That, of
10 course, only served to increase the challenge in other
11 areas of the programme. So balancing it was always
12 a big challenge.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So what would you say were the major
14 things that were getting insufficient funding at this
15 time?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The things that were getting
17 insufficient funding, I think, were strategic mobility;
18 the whole area of information superiority, although we
19 had increased it, was still not getting enough of its
20 share of the pie, if I can put that way; and I think the
21 other area, which certainly, in hindsight, was
22 under-resourced and didn't fall in those days within my
23 area of responsibility, was the whole logistic support
24 area. There had certainly been some logistic hollowing
25 out in a number of areas of defence.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: With strategic mobility, what were
2 the major items there that you thought were in trouble?

3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We were short on strategic airlift
4 and, certainly, when we did the first lessons learned
5 exercise after Operation Telic, that was one of the
6 clear lessons to emerge from it, in part because of the
7 continuing delay in the A400M programme, although the
8 A400M would not have been in service on the original
9 plan by the time of Operation Telic, but, nevertheless,
10 it was slipping to the right and we didn't have anything
11 really to fill the gap.

12 We were having problems with the introduction of the
13 C130J. Those had been mostly overcome by the start of
14 Operation Telic, but still existed. Roll-on, roll-off
15 ferries were in operation, and they were an excellent
16 addition, but basically we needed more capacity,
17 particularly to be able to support two different
18 theatres.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What was the position with regard to
20 helicopters at the time, particularly the air transport
21 helicopters?

22 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: In 2002, we had a lot of money
23 invested in the plan in helicopters. We had
24 some £3 billion, I think, over the ten-year equipment
25 plan out of a total of 57.5 billion, although the

1 principal elements of that were in what was referred to
2 as the surface combatant maritime rotor craft, which was
3 essentially the helicopter that is an indigenous part of
4 a ship's fighting capability, and in a future amphibious
5 support helicopter for the Royal Marines, in total, that
6 was over £1.5 billion.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Could you make it a bit slower? Thank you
8 very much.

9 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It was subsequent to 2002 that an
10 element of the helicopter funding was removed from the
11 equipment plan. I think 2004.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come to that. I just wanted
13 to clarify what were the plans for support helicopters,
14 particularly the Chinooks?

15 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Chinooks were essentially a mature
16 fleet. So the funding for Chinook was essentially
17 about sustaining its capability. The outstanding issue
18 for the Chinook fleet was the eight Chinook Mark IIIs
19 which had been procured originally for special forces
20 use, but which, because of changes to the software, were
21 not able to to be flown.

22 So finding a way to take eight Chinooks which were
23 sitting in a hangar unusable and getting them into the
24 air was the principal concern so far as support
25 helicopters were concerned.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, this issue, as I understand it
2 had something to do with the United States, that we
3 needed the software from the United States, and given
4 that we were working so closely with the Americans at
5 this time, was it surprising that we were finding these
6 difficulties with the software?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, it was surprising. The Chinook
8 Mark III acquisition pre-dated my time --

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I understand that.

10 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: -- so I am unable to comment on that
11 programme. What I was faced with was the issue of what
12 to do about it. It was clear that we were not going to
13 be able to fly them in the configuration we then had, so
14 something would have to change, and, of course, that was
15 going to cost money.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So, as things stood -- and was this
17 the case when you left the job -- we had expensive
18 helicopters that we just couldn't use?

19 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Absolutely, and we were still
20 struggling to find a way forward.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were representations made to the
22 Americans to try to help us out of this problem?

23 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, but, as I say, the difficulty
24 is, or the difficulty was, that we couldn't fly the
25 helicopters as they were then configured. So we had

1 to make a decision how to change. Should we go for
2 something completely new? Should we revert to the
3 status quo ante -- which, of course, is eventually what
4 we did -- to get the helicopters in the air? Whichever
5 path we chose was going to cost a lot of money.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you have longer-term plans for
7 support helicopters. You mentioned what was cut out of
8 the budget in 2003/2004, but what were your plans as
9 they stood when you left the job?

10 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: As far as medium support helicopters
11 were concerned, it was essentially Chinook and Merlin.
12 As far as battlefield utility helicopters were
13 concerned, the replacement for the Lynx, there was
14 a battlefield light utility helicopter lying in the plan
15 amounting to some three quarters of a billion pounds.
16 That eventually transpired into Future Lynx. The other
17 two major programmes, as I say, were actually maritime
18 and amphibious programmes.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If we just move to the relationship
20 between what is provided for in the defence budget
21 and the UOR process, the urgent operational
22 requirements. Obviously you are going to be dependent
23 to some extent on UORs for any campaign. Were you
24 comfortable with the balance that the forces faced as
25 they moved towards Telic?

1 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think the -- where we got the
2 balance wrong, probably, was in the proportion of
3 equipments that are fitted for a capability but not with
4 a capability.

5 In other words, you can procure platforms with all
6 the hooks and eyes to be able to put things in them at
7 very short notice, but you only buy a limited number of
8 the equipments that go in them, and then, should the
9 requirement expand, should you be faced with an
10 operation, then, of course, you can buy many more and
11 fit them at very short notice. Nevertheless, it takes
12 time to manufacture those things.

13 Our experience on Telic certainly was that we
14 couldn't get enough of them into service as quickly as
15 we should. So it was a key lesson from 2003 that we
16 needed to look again at the balance between fitted with
17 and fitted for.

18 More widely, I think, if one looks at the list of
19 urgent operational requirements that we generated for
20 Operation Telic -- and I think there were something
21 like, if I remember correctly, 197 -- the majority of
22 them were not big, new items. They were modifications,
23 they were applique armour, for example. They were
24 improvements to defensive aids. They were bits of
25 equipment that enabled us to operate, or interoperate,

1 more effectively with the United States, and, of course,
2 there were some items of equipment that were specific
3 for the environment; dust filters for Challenger 2 tanks
4 and AS90 guns, for example.

5 Bear in mind that the original plan had been for UK
6 forces to operate from the north, where they would have
7 faced a different environment. So it is not possible to
8 equip your forces with everything they need to face
9 every environment. That has to be done at relatively
10 short notice.

11 So I think that, on balance, with the exception of
12 fitted for and fitted with, we didn't do too badly. The
13 problem, of course, was that we simply did not have
14 enough time, as it turned out, to do everything that we
15 needed to before the operation started.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are aware that the planning
17 assumption from the strategic defence review would be
18 six months, and in the end, you had, what, three to four
19 months?

20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Four months.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: With that extra two months, what
22 difference do you think it would have made to our forces
23 in the field?

24 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think it would have made
25 a significant difference. That's 50 per cent additional

1 time and we were finding that, in a number of cases we
2 were getting 100 per cent delivery about a month or two
3 after the operation started. So I think that the
4 six-month assumption wasn't a bad one. One can't
5 guarantee that it would work in every case, but our
6 experience on Telic suggested that it was not
7 unreasonable.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It must have been quite frustrating,
9 given that you would have had a reasonable idea of when
10 the operation was to take place, not to be able to get
11 these UORs in motion. What sort of pressures were you
12 putting on ministers to do this?

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We made absolutely clear to ministers
14 that if we were not allowed to engage with industry --
15 and that was the critical element -- we could take these
16 no further, and that there was a serious risk that they
17 would not all be delivered by the assumed start of the
18 operations.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You mentioned some things arriving
20 too late. What would you say were the major items where
21 with that extra month or so might have made
22 a difference?

23 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think in terms of clothing, it
24 would certainly have made a difference --

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry to interrupt, this is greens and

1 desert?

2 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Desert clothing.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the boots and so on?

4 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Desert clothing and the boots. We

5 were constantly trying to pressure manufacturers to

6 advance their production and delivery dates of this, but

7 it proved impossible, and although we delivered just

8 about sufficient sets, of course, that never quite does

9 it in an operational environment, because there are

10 sizing issues, you assume that you have got the range of

11 sizes accurately spread, and you never do. You assume

12 it all gets to the right places on time, and that was

13 a critical issue for many items of equipment. You never

14 do. So you need more than the actual total number of

15 the force that you deploy.

16 I think the area where we could have done better is

17 in terms of enhanced combat body armour. We didn't have

18 enough of that in theatre at the time, and I think, in

19 part, for both clothing and body armour, the issue was

20 it was all being done so rapidly at the last minute

21 no one was quite sure who had what.

22 For example, just before the start of operation, the

23 clear message that we were receiving in the

24 Ministry of Defence was that all unit demands for

25 enhanced combat body armour had been met, but quite

1 clearly not everybody who needed it in theatre got it
2 when they needed it, and had it been -- had that been
3 two months earlier, then those sorts of issues I think
4 could have been untangled.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on that last point, which is
6 very interesting, within MoD, and it was MoD who was
7 being asked to say to ministers that the readiness is
8 there, and so on, you thought it was fine, but out there
9 it actually wasn't. You are nodding.

10 So that the problem this indicates -- and to look at
11 maybe -- is how to be sure that, when the force says
12 that it is ready, it really is.

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I was clear in my own mind that the
14 urgent operational requirement process was only complete
15 when the particular item of equipment was in the hands
16 of those in theatre who needed it and they were
17 satisfied with it.

18 I actually tried to get some of my senior staff
19 deployed into theatre to check those specific issues,
20 but it was decided that we shouldn't do that and that we
21 should rely on the chain of command. That, I think,
22 turned out to be the wrong decision and now we routinely
23 have people deployed for those purposes.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is a complex process. When you
25 are explaining this to ministers, I suppose this

1 presumably would be largely to ministers in the
2 Ministry of Defence. Did you give any briefings to the
3 Prime Minister at all on this issue at the time?

4 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I gave no briefings to the Prime
5 Minister, but we had regular stakeholder meetings with
6 Lord Bach, who was then Minister for Defence
7 procurement, when we went through the whole UOR
8 programme, the progress that we were making, the pace of
9 deliveries through the Defence Procurement Agency and
10 identified issues which were becoming critical or which
11 were slipping and the action that was required to
12 rectify those, including, where necessary, ministerial
13 engagement across the Atlantic.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to follow up from what you were
15 saying before, when you were having those meetings with
16 Lord Bach, would you have been able to to say, "As far
17 as we can tell from the chain of command, it is fine",
18 when, in practice, it wasn't?

19 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Just before we move on to the
21 later periods, were there any other lessons that you
22 would draw from the way that this process was handled at
23 the time?

24 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, I think it was clear that lack
25 of visibility on what was actually happening in theatre

1 was hampering us, but, of course, even if you have that
2 visibility, you have got to identify what are the real
3 substantive problems, and the real substantive problems
4 were very much to do with asset tracking with knowing
5 where things were, so you could get them to the right
6 place at the right time. In a number of instances, the
7 necessary equipment was in theatre, it just wasn't in
8 the right place, and in some instances, people didn't
9 know where it was in theatre.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Asset tracking had been a problem in
11 1991, as I recall?

12 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So why hadn't more been done, do you
14 think, to remedy the deficiencies that had been apparent
15 then? I mean, Tesco's and so on had made great strides
16 there in the previous -- in the intervening period.

17 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I can't answer the question as to why
18 more hadn't been done in the interim. What I can say is
19 that substantially more has been done since in that
20 regard.

21 I think also, though, we have to remember that we
22 are deploying this force in less than the readiness
23 timescales that were assumed in our defence planning.
24 Therefore, it turned into a bit of a rush.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed. Just -- sorry, one other

1 point. On Afghanistan, which we had been in
2 since October 2001, had anything come up from there that
3 was indicating things that we needed to deal with that
4 was fed into the planning for Telic?

5 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Not from Afghanistan. We did, of
6 course, look at the lessons identified in Op Telic --
7 sorry, in Op Granby, and looked at the extent to which
8 those had been learned and applied, but I don't recall
9 any specific incidences to do with urgent operational
10 requirements that flowed from Afghanistan.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If we can just now move on to the
12 period when you were Chief of the Air Staff, how closely
13 were you engaged in monitoring this development of the
14 security situation in Iraq?

15 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, we had, of course, weekly
16 operational Chiefs of Staff meetings, in which I was
17 being updated on the situation and giving my advice to
18 the Chief of the Defence Staff, and I was watching
19 extremely closely the requirements, performance and needs
20 of the air force contribution to the joint force.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Again, what was your view of the
22 development of the helicopter situation over this
23 period?

24 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: My perception in Iraq was that,
25 although any commander on the ground at any time is

1 always going to be able to use more helicopters, that it
2 was not a significant issue in our discussions with the
3 Chiefs of Staff meetings, between 2003 and 2006.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Your people weren't pushing you
5 to -- on the helicopter issue? Coming up through the
6 RAF?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: There was a requirement to get
8 modifications in place for the helicopters, evolving
9 modifications, as we learned lessons in Iraq. There was
10 the issue of sustainability of the crews and the crew
11 effort in Afghanistan.

12 So all of those normal issues that you would expect,
13 but there was no sense that, in Iraq, that we needed --
14 urgently needed twice as many helicopters than we had,
15 although it was quite clear that we could always have
16 used more.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The Chinook issue, when did you move
18 away from your hopes that you could get the necessary
19 software from the States?

20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I don't think that my hope was that
21 we could get the necessary software from the
22 United States. My aspiration was to get those
23 helicopters flying as quickly as we possibly could, one
24 way or another.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When did you make progress on that?

1 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We made progress when I was Chief of
2 the Air Staff, but, as it turned out, it wasn't progress
3 that we saw through to conclusion, because the initial
4 plan was to bring the aircraft to a state in which they
5 could fly with an advanced cockpit, because we still had
6 aspirations to use these helicopters for the special
7 forces.

8 You asked about helicopters in Iraq and I replied
9 really in terms of the conventional forces. There was
10 always a requirement for more for special forces. That
11 was the gap that the Chinook Mark III had been intended
12 to fill. So that gap did, of course, continue.

13 So we did develop with Boeing a programme for the
14 recovery of these aircraft, but the technical risks
15 eventually were judged to be too great, the costs were
16 too great, and a safer and quicker route was to take the
17 helicopters back to their original state, and that's the
18 route that we eventually settled on. As a consequence,
19 we now have the helicopters beginning to fly.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It has taken a long time.

21 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just moving on to -- now to your
23 position as CDS, what was your assessment of the
24 security situation in Iraq when you took up your
25 position?

1 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, perhaps I can do best by
2 quoting something that I actually reported to the
3 Defence Secretary after my initial visit there
4 in May 2006. I said:
5 "Basra is the key. The obstacles there are, one,
6 militias and, two, governance. Neither is substantially
7 in our hands and we need firm action by the government
8 in Baghdad, but, as consent continues to reduce, as we
9 have always foreseen it would, so, too, does our ability
10 to effect further significant improvement. The law of
11 diminishing returns is now firmly in play and there is
12 an increasing risk that we become part of the problem
13 rather than of the solution."
14 So my sense was that we needed to shift the dynamics
15 within Basra, that it was essentially about politics and
16 that we had only a very limited time in which to do it.
17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's pretty grim. You have given
18 all the hopes and aspirations that have gone on.
19 When you were examining this situation, how much did
20 you see this as a function of the natural resistance, as
21 you seem to be suggesting, to the British forces staying
22 around so long and how much to the interference by
23 external powers; for example, Iran?
24 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The interference by Iranians was
25 clearly a significant exacerbating factor, but the

1 essential challenge was a political one internally
2 within the Shia community of Basra. It was a struggle
3 for power: political, economic, social, to some extent
4 military, within the different communities of the Shia
5 in Basra.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So even if the Iranians had not been
7 involved, which clearly they were to some extent, we
8 would have still been facing pretty serious difficulties
9 there?

10 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, we would, the Iranians made it
11 worse.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed. What advice did you get
13 about how we could deal with this situation?

14 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, since I identified the first
15 problem as the militias, we needed a plan essentially to
16 deal with the militias, and that plan was drawn up by
17 General Shirreff, who took over as General Officer
18 Commanding of Multi-National Division (South East) and
19 he named it Operation Salamanca.

20 His intent was to go in, and go in hard militarily
21 and deal with the militias, particularly the
22 Jaysh Al Mahdi militias of the Sadrists. That was our
23 first approach to it.

24 The problem was that any military approach could
25 only succeed in a political context and we didn't have

1 the political context. As the planning for Salamanca
2 proceeded, it became clear to me, and to many others,
3 that it was not going to be able to have the effect that
4 we had hoped. I think I reported, following a visit
5 in September, that:

6 "Even though political agreement to launch Salamanca
7 has been secured, we do not have agreement to tackle the
8 hard issues, such as militias. Success in Basra will
9 depend on strong political leadership, of which no sign
10 is emerging."

11 So I was not wholly optimistic that Salamanca would
12 put us on the road to provincial Iraqi control in Basra.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, could I just go back a little bit?

14 Your first visit to Basra, you produced the assessment
15 that you have just quoted to us, which is very helpful.
16 There would have been a standing and evolving assessment
17 for the Chiefs of Staff. Did yours represent in some
18 degree a step change or a change of emphasis?

19 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think it did, and I think the --
20 one way to illustrate this is, at that time, the
21 assessment was that the Iraqis could probably take over
22 security responsibility for Basra in early 2007, and
23 that, at that stage, Multi-National Division (South
24 East) could reduce to about 3,000 to 4,000 people.

25 By July, the advice I was giving to the

1 Defence Secretary was that we would need to sustain our
2 force levels of just over 7,000 unchanged through the
3 first part of 2007.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. To that degree, it was
5 a reassessment as the situation as evolving?

6 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you have got this pretty grim
9 assessment of the security situation. You need
10 a political input that you are not quite sure where it
11 is coming from. There is a plan developing from
12 General Shirreff, but you are not quite sure it can do
13 the trick in this context in which you find yourself.

14 What do you see as the options, then, for British
15 forces in the situation in which they found themselves?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Going back to my report after my
17 visit in September, I said that we needed to plan our
18 response should Salamanca not succeed. A return to the
19 status quo ante would not be sensible, and I advised
20 that we should look at removing our permanent presence
21 from inside the city in order to force the Iraqis' hand
22 politically.

23 This, bear in mind, was September 2006, and
24 I reported that all of my interlocutors in Iraq had
25 agreed that this would be a sensible proposition.

1 General Chiarelli, in particular, who was then the
2 Commanding General of the Multi National Corps, agreed
3 very strongly. He was hugely frustrated by the
4 political dilution of his Baghdad security plan
5 especially in regard to Sadr City, and he agreed
6 strongly that we should reposture in Baghdad if
7 Salamanca did not deliver.

8 I think it is useful to bear in mind the comparison
9 over time between Basra, which is a distinct area,
10 almost entirely Shia, of about 2 million people, and
11 Sadr City, which is a distinct area in Baghdad, almost
12 entirely Shia, of about 2 million people, and the
13 challenges that the Americans faced in Sadr City were
14 almost identical to the ones that we faced in Basra; and
15 Sadr City was not resolved until after Charge of the
16 Knights in Basra, and General Chiarelli was experiencing
17 exactly the same frustrations in Sadr City that we were
18 in Basra.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was because the links between
20 the Sadrists and the government to some extent?

21 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Again, I think it is useful to
22 remember the political context over time. In May 2006,
23 Sadrism support for Maliki was crucial to him becoming
24 Prime Minister. But then, over time, the relationship
25 between Moqtadr al Sadr and Prime Minister Maliki

1 deteriorated until, by the time we get to the end of
2 2007, it is very poor, and so there was a distinctly
3 changing political context in Baghdad.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to that in a moment.
5 I want to pass over to my colleagues, but I think it is
6 quite important to understand the context in this way.

7 Essentially, until the politics between Maliki and
8 Moqtadr Al-Sadr could be resolved, it was going to be
9 very difficult for us to get out of the position in
10 which we found ourselves?

11 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It was going to be almost impossible.
12 In September 2006, Prime Minister Maliki, with the
13 support of Safa Al Safi, blocked Operation Salamanca.
14 He insisted that security in Basra was improving and he
15 demanded the release of Jaysh Al Mahdi detainees.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That sums up --

17 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: That was the end of Salamanca. We
18 went ahead with a reduced plan which was renamed
19 Operation Sinbad, but that did not enable us to take on
20 the militias as we wished to, and, at the beginning
21 of October, General Lamb, who was then the Deputy
22 Commanding General of Multi-National Forces in Iraq,
23 reported, first of all, that the Baghdad security plan
24 would not deliver security, and that Sinbad would fall
25 short of our expectations.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Again, important points which we'll
2 come back to in a moment.

3 Can I just finally ask you again on this position of
4 2006? You will have been giving regular briefings to
5 senior Cabinet ministers at this time. Were you
6 reporting the risk of strategic failure in Iraq?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, and we were making clear that we
8 had limited time, and that if we did not reach some kind
9 of political solution, we would not succeed.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That the answer lay to some extent
11 in political events outside our own control?

12 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Absolutely.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If this control -- if these events
14 did not come about, that our forces would have to be
15 withdrawn, nonetheless, in some way?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, I think, we didn't get to that
17 stage, because my proposition was that if we could not
18 deal with this militarily through Operation Salamanca --
19 and by October 2006, it was clear that we couldn't --
20 then we had to find an alternative. How were we going
21 to change the political dynamic in Basra?

22 As I said, my advice was that the best way of doing
23 this would be to withdraw UK forces from the inside of
24 the city of Basra and force the Iraqis to deal with the
25 issue themselves, or accept the fact that they could not

1 control their second largest city. It was a risky path
2 to take, but there were no risk-free paths and it was
3 the only one that seemed to me to offer any prospect of
4 breaking the political logjam.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: One bit of the political jigsaw -- we have
7 heard a lot of evidence from the diplomats and others,
8 but you spoke of the relationship between the Iraqi
9 Government, Prime Minister Maliki's government, and
10 Moqtadr Al Sadr.

11 There is also, is there -- I don't know that we have
12 had direct evidence on this -- the fact that
13 Prime Minister Maliki's own position vis a vis other
14 political factions was growing stronger, slowly but
15 steadily, to the point where he was less reliant on the
16 Sadrists politically? But that's in mid-2007?

17 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: In August 2007 (the Sadrist support
18 had already evaporated in April of that year. Sadr
19 withdrew his ministers from the government, criticised
20 Maliki openly), and, in August 2007, Maliki agreed a new
21 alliance with ISCI and with the two Kurdish parties, and
22 that significantly strengthened his position and removed
23 his reliance on the Sadrists.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Thereby paving the way eventually for what
25 became the Charge of the Knights?

1 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Exactly.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Roderic?

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have described the problems that

4 existed because of the connection between

5 Prime Minister Maliki and the Sadrists, and you have

6 also made clear that the fundamental problem in Basra

7 was the struggle for power between internal groups of

8 Shia, enhanced by Iranian interference but not caused by

9 it.

10 To what extent, if at all, was the activity of

11 external elements of Al-Qaeda coming into Iraq a problem

12 in the south-east, where we were responsible?

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It was not noticeable in

14 MND (South East) as an issue. That was one of the key

15 distinctions between the security situation in and

16 around Baghdad and the security situation in the

17 south-east.

18 In and around Baghdad, Al-Qaeda in Iraq were

19 attacking Shia and coalition and Iraqi security force

20 targets. The Shia were reacting to that, and, as

21 a consequence, you had Sunni/Shia conflict going on in

22 the centre of Iraq. In Basra, you had an intra-Shia

23 conflict going on.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. I would like to turn now for

25 a few minutes to the interaction between our commitments

1 in Afghanistan and those in Iraq. This essentially
2 started in July 2004, when the Prime Minister announced
3 the decision to deploy the ARRC headquarters to
4 Afghanistan and we will obviously be discussing that
5 later with Lord Walker.

6 Now, at that time, you were Chief of the Air Staff.
7 Were you involved in giving advice on the decision over
8 the ARRC going to Afghanistan?

9 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, we discussed it on a number of
10 occasions. I think it is fair to say that some of us
11 were very nervous, because the assumption was that we
12 would be drawing down in Iraq at the same time as we
13 were ramping up in Afghanistan, and, therefore, the
14 overall commitment for our forces would remain about the
15 same, would remain in balance.

16 I certainly took the view and a number of my
17 colleagues did, that things never work out as you expect
18 or as you plan, and that usually these things tend to be
19 delayed, and so there was a risk, if we were not
20 careful, of placing a burden on our forces beyond that
21 which they could sustain over the long-term.

22 We discussed that on many occasions, and it was
23 clearly a risk, but there was also a sense of strategic
24 momentum within NATO, bearing in mind that we were
25 talking about the ISAF, which is a NATO force and it was

1 a NATO plan to extend the influence of ISAF from Kabul
2 in the north through the west and south and then around
3 to the east, and eventually to have unified command over
4 the whole of the country rather than having a split
5 between ISAF and American Operation Enduring Freedom.

6 These things, once you set them underway and you
7 start discussing them, particularly in an international
8 context, they develop a life and a momentum of their own
9 and we certainly found ourselves, I recollect, in 2005,
10 in a position where we were seen within NATO as dragging
11 our heels.

12 At one stage, I recall we actually put a stop to
13 planning for UK force deployment, because we were not
14 sure what the Dutch were going to do, and it seemed to
15 us unwise to be deploying our forces into an environment
16 where we didn't know what the surrounding forces were
17 going to be and who they would be working with.

18 The Dutch -- so there was a pause at that stage, but
19 during that pause we were coming under considerable
20 pressure more widely within NATO, because there was an
21 urgency within the alliance to get this done.

22 So when the Dutch resolved their particular concerns
23 and decided what they were going to do, our planning
24 continued, but there was always this concern about the
25 overlap between Iraq and Afghanistan and the doubt

1 whether we would actually be able to reduce in Iraq
2 quite as quickly as we were planning at that time.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Geoff Hoon told us the other day that he,
4 too, was opposed to the idea of going into Afghanistan
5 until we had finished in Iraq. So essentially, his view
6 and that of the Chiefs of Staff on this was the same?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I don't know that we were opposed to
8 going into Afghanistan until we had finished in Iraq.
9 We would have preferred to see some substantive downward
10 movement in our deployment in Iraq before going into
11 Afghanistan. The trouble, of course, is that there is
12 a lag between planning these things and employment. So
13 you are trying to anticipate your drawdown in Iraq so
14 that you can match the two.

15 If you wait and leave your planning until you
16 actually draw down, then it is probably going to be
17 18 months later before you can get your force into
18 another theatre.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were concerned about the stretch
20 on personnel, on equipment, on enablers and so on?

21 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was this concern fed right through to the
23 top, to the Prime Minister and the people around him?

24 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I was not seeing the Prime Minister
25 at that stage, but certainly that concern was evident in

1 the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. Was it apparent at this stage
3 that deploying into Helmand, as we subsequently did, was
4 going to lead to the UK military being involved in two
5 substantial military operations simultaneously? When
6 did that become apparent?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: There was uncertainty over what would
8 be required in Helmand, not in terms of the initial
9 deployment; the initial deployment was structured
10 sensibly in line with what we understood at the time,
11 but, of course, we didn't understand very much about
12 Helmand. The only forces in Helmand before us were
13 a maximum of about 100 Americans. So knowledge of the
14 situation on the ground was thin.

15 One thing we were very clear of was that the south,
16 Helmand, was nothing like the north, which is where UK
17 forces had been deployed up to that point, and I think
18 a number of us said on numerous occasions in the
19 Chief of Staff Committee, "We have to understand that
20 this is real bandit country we are going into".

21 So there was no sense that we were complacent about
22 the nature of the threat or the risks, but the scale of
23 it and the detailed character of it would only be known
24 once we actually got forces on the ground and were able
25 to develop local sources of intelligence.

1 So it is not that we could foresee at that time that
2 we would need to have over 10,000 UK forces deployed in
3 Afghanistan, but we clearly understood that there was
4 a considerable amount of uncertainty.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Nevertheless, the decision was taken, the
6 Secretary of State for Defence at the time, John Reid --
7 well, he and the Cabinet took a decision in January 2006
8 to increase our military commitments further in
9 Afghanistan, go into Helmand province.

10 What was the view of the Chiefs of Staff -- this
11 is just before you become Chief of the Defence Staff --
12 what was their view on that decision?

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think the view on that decision was
14 that this was a NATO operation that was going to happen,
15 that there was an urgent need in Afghanistan to do
16 something about the west and the south if the whole
17 Afghanistan enterprise were not to fail, that
18 restricting NATO and ISAF only to Kabul and to the north
19 would not deal with the issues which by then were
20 starting to emerge much more clearly in terms of
21 a resurgent Taliban, in terms of lawlessness, in terms
22 of a lack of governance.

23 So there was a requirement to do something and that
24 we had to participate in that. We had to contribute to
25 it as an alliance member, as a substantial alliance

1 member, but at the same time we were concerned because
2 we were still in Iraq.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's go a bit further on that. There is
4 a requirement, as you say, to do something in
5 Afghanistan. What warnings were you giving about the
6 impact which meeting that requirement would have in
7 Afghanistan, the impact it would have on our
8 capabilities and performance in Iraq?

9 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We were clear that, as I said
10 earlier, the -- that the pace of drawdown in Iraq could
11 well not be as we were then anticipating, that we might
12 find it all happening a lot slower than we were
13 currently planning, that that was a risk, and that, if
14 that happened, we would be able to deal with it but it
15 would be at cost of some stretch on our forces.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In fact, in a much later television
17 interview in 2008, you talked to Andrew Marr about that
18 strategy. You said at this point:

19 "We are doing more than we are structured and
20 resourced to do in the long-term. We can do it for
21 a short period, but we can't continue doing it
22 ad infinitum."

23 Were you reflecting in 2008 the view that you had
24 been giving in 2005 and 2006?

25 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, we didn't know the extent to

1 which we would be stretched, but I come back to my
2 point, we had been very clear about the risk.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So this then essentially became
4 a priority decision for ministers. They had the clear
5 advice from the Chiefs of Staff and they had to make
6 a decision as to whether the priority was Iraq or
7 Afghanistan? Would that be right?

8 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think it is not quite such a binary
9 choice. The issue wasn't: do we do Iraq or do we do
10 Afghanistan? The issue was the amount of relative
11 effort we put into each.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On that relative effort, what
13 instructions and guidance were you receiving from the
14 Prime Minister and the Secretary of State?

15 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The decision was made that we would
16 go into Afghanistan at the level that the -- that had
17 been advised in terms of the initial deployment. The
18 advice was also, though, that we needed to continue to
19 force the pace in Iraq and to reach a solution there as
20 quickly as we could so that we could keep the overall
21 effort in balance.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But down the chain of command, you
23 actually had to make decisions over both personnel and
24 equipment, and there were some of those decisions -- you
25 couldn't have both operating in both places at once.

1 A number of previous witnesses have talked to us about
2 this. General Houghton, for example, said that:

3 "The imperative coming out of the military strategic
4 demands of my superior headquarters", by which he was
5 meaning the MoD, "was to rebalance in order to gain
6 strategic coherence in Afghanistan."

7 Was he right in telling us that -- well, in
8 conveying the impression that at this point he was
9 having to rebalance towards Afghanistan, that there was
10 a priority -- if he had to make a choice, that was -- he
11 was being guided in that direction?

12 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, from April 2006, when
13 substantially we were deployed in Afghanistan, one of
14 the key strategic challenges for us was to balance the
15 requirements of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the stretch on
16 our forces and our force structure.

17 Our priority was to deliver success on operations in
18 both theatres, but at the same time we had to manage the
19 pressure on our people and our force structure so that
20 we didn't do lasting damage and we could sustain our
21 contribution in theatre over time.

22 So juggling those three issues was one of the
23 fundamental strategic challenges of 2006 and 2007, but
24 I don't think it is true to say that it was an
25 automatic, "It is Afghanistan, and Iraq just gets what

1 it gets". Frankly, that was the decision, in my view,
2 that the United States took in reverse. They said, "It
3 is Iraq, and Afghanistan just gets what it gets".

4 I saw it as a more complex problem than that and I
5 didn't think you could make that kind of binary choice,
6 and I think the fact that we changed our assumption for
7 2007, as I mentioned earlier, from 3,000 to 4,000 troops
8 in Iraq to leaving the numbers there at just over 7,000
9 and, indeed, for Operation Salamanca, which became
10 Sinbad, deploying an additional 360, which included the
11 headquarters and two companies of the theatre reserve
12 battalion, is a clear indication of the fact that we
13 didn't just give Afghanistan whatever we felt it needed
14 and Iraq took the hindmost. We tried to balance between
15 the two theatres. We didn't believe it was possible
16 just to leave one of them hanging.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But we have nevertheless had evidence
18 from people who were commanding on the ground in Iraq at
19 this time, that, at a tactical level, this was to some
20 extent constraining their abilities.

21 If we take Sinbad as an example, General Shirreff
22 told us that Sinbad hadn't achieved the security which
23 was the original genesis of the plan, and you, yourself,
24 have talked about this, but he said that he felt that
25 the resources that might have ensured it would have been

1 a success were not available to him.

2 He, later on, talking about the problem of
3 countering indirect fire in Basra, told us that:

4 "In order to get this under control he would have
5 needed more assets: specifically, artillery, attack
6 helicopters, surveillance, special forces", that weren't
7 available.

8 Now, presumably, this implies that, at a tactical
9 level, there were some constraints as a result of the
10 deployment into Afghanistan?

11 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Most certainly, and, of course, any
12 commander on the ground will always be able to use more
13 forces, if you can deploy them. But I don't actually
14 accept the premise that more forces would have enabled
15 Operation Sinbad to be a success.

16 The thing that was required for Operation Sinbad to
17 be a success was actually for it to be
18 Operation Salmanca, which took on the militias, and, as
19 I have already described, Maliki vetoed that. So there
20 was no way -- and we knew this from the outset -- that
21 Sinbad was going to do what we required it to do.

22 More resources would have enabled, on
23 Operation Sinbad, some of the phases to be done
24 concurrently rather than consecutively, and that would
25 certainly have had tactical advantages, but Sinbad was

1 just not going to deal with the fundamental issue in
2 Basra, once Maliki had vetoed the operation taking on
3 the militias.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Then if we look at the other side of the
5 equation, the speed of drawdown, you have already
6 described to us how you recommended that it had
7 effectively to be slowed down, we had to keep the troop
8 levels at a higher level than had previously been
9 anticipated or hoped for.

10 Nevertheless, did you feel that, because of the
11 stretch between Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a lot of
12 pressure on the chiefs and the commanders to achieve the
13 drawdown as soon as they possibly could from Iraq,
14 possibly sooner than their own military judgment would
15 ideally have led them to conclude?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: As soon as they possibly could,
17 consistent with achieving success. There was no
18 pressure to just get the troops out, never mind what the
19 situation is on the ground. The issue was actually how
20 to bring Basra to a successful conclusion as quickly as
21 possible so that we could rebalance towards Afghanistan
22 and reduce the pressure on our force structure.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is it is not fair to say that we had to
24 abandon a winning strategy for an exit strategy?

25 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think it is fair to say that we

1 actually constructed what turned out to be a winning
2 strategy.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Perhaps a winning exit strategy.

4 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: If I could just say that any
5 successful strategy ends with an exit.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just ask one final slightly broader
7 question before we leave this point?

8 You have been a Chief of Staff now through seven
9 years in which the United States and the UK forces and
10 some other allies have been engaged in intensive combat
11 simultaneously in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this has
12 clearly stretched western capabilities as we have just
13 established. We are now in a situation in which Iran
14 and different elements of international terrorism, which
15 are, I know, distinct issues, remain high on the agenda,
16 as we have heard from other witnesses.

17 What advice, looking back over those seven years,
18 would you offer about the west's capability to deal with
19 these complex threats by military pre-emption?

20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The first thing I would say is that
21 the key bit we got wrong in the strategic defence review
22 was the assumption that, because we did the high end
23 things well, we could go in and do those for six months,
24 and, at the end of the war-fighting phase, if you like,
25 withdraw and let somebody else come in and pick up the

1 pieces. That doesn't work. So intervention is quite
2 likely to end up in an enduring campaign, and if you end
3 up in an enduring campaign, then the forces that you
4 have for contingency are used up and you don't have
5 contingency for anything else. So you need to think
6 about that very carefully before you engage in the first
7 place.

8 When you go in, you are going to be committed, you
9 are quite likely to be committed for a long time and you
10 are going to be stuck. It is not the sort of
11 environment where you can just pick up your ball halfway
12 through the game and go home. You have got to see it
13 through and you have got to see it through to
14 a successful conclusion. So understanding the potential
15 commitment you might be making by intervening is
16 absolutely crucial.

17 With regard to the efficacy of the military
18 instrument, I think that our experience in Iraq and in
19 Afghanistan has shown for me that the military
20 instrument is extremely important, but that it is not
21 the instrument that delivers strategic success, that it
22 is essentially about politics, that virtually all
23 conflicts end politically somehow.

24 This is pure Clausewitz, and we shouldn't be
25 surprised by it, but we are less than well equipped to

1 deal with those political issues and those political
2 problems, and I suppose it is a post-Cold War era, and
3 adapting to this sort of expeditionary environment and
4 expeditionary politics, if you like, we have sort of
5 been inventing it as we go along, not just us, but
6 everybody else who has been involved.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the military instrument is one that
8 has to be used selectively, as an instrument of last resort
9 and with a careful regard to the limits of our
10 capabilities?

11 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: I think Sir Lawrence Freedman finds those
14 remarks irresistible.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I won't rise to the mention of
16 Clausewitz, but I did want to just come back to this
17 balancing between Iraq and Afghanistan. You mentioned
18 the Americans -- I presume you are talking about the
19 sort of 2003/2006 period -- had balanced in the other
20 direction, that they had made Iraq such a priority that
21 they perhaps lost sight of Afghanistan. This is
22 a critique that has been made and you're reinforcing
23 that critique.

24 You also mentioned that when we went into
25 Afghanistan, or prepared for it, that there were

1 warnings that the intelligence was thin, that there was
2 a lot of unpredictability and that we were going in
3 assuming we needed one level of forces, not perhaps
4 realising that we would need 10,000.

5 It all sounds a little familiar -- and your last
6 answer to Sir Roderic, reinforces that -- that not long
7 after we had gone into Iraq with limited intelligence
8 about what we would find on the ground when we got there
9 and were responsible for the country, when we would need
10 more forces to stay than we had anticipated, that the
11 same thing then happened with Afghanistan. Is that
12 fair?

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, although I think there are two
14 issues. The first is the lack of understanding. One of
15 the lessons, of course, is that, you should
16 have better intelligence, but actually the other side of
17 that coin is that intelligence is always limited,
18 particularly when you are not there. So understanding
19 that you are going into a situation of considerable
20 uncertainty is important.

21 But when you are dealing with the kinds of issues
22 that we were in Iraq and we are in Afghanistan, then
23 local politics, tribal dynamics, personalities, play
24 a hugely important part, and you don't -- well, we
25 always have a limited understanding of those anyway

1 because we are not part of that society, and so we have
2 to rely upon indigenous populations to help us develop
3 the understanding of the local political dynamics.

4 That's the first thing. The second thing, though,
5 is that, of course, since 2006, the situation has
6 changed with regard to the opposition in Afghanistan.
7 The Taliban, the Pashtun Taliban, have made Kandahar and
8 Helmand their main effort and they have poured all their
9 effort and all their resources into it, and so, quite
10 naturally, ISAF has responded by pouring its efforts and
11 its forces into it. It is the meeting point, if you
12 like. It is the fulcrum of the confrontation between
13 the Afghan Government supported by ISAF and the Taliban.

14 So, yes, we have had to increase force levels as our
15 understanding has deepened, but we have also had to
16 increase them because the opposition has focused on that
17 particular point in space.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But when we entered Afghanistan, we
19 had -- from what you are saying, because of the
20 continuing commitment in Iraq, we lacked the reserve at
21 the time that would have enabled us to ramp up the
22 forces earlier than we in fact did.

23 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We were certainly constrained by the
24 fact that we were trying to balance two theatres - absolutely.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: I think we might take a break now for about
2 ten minutes. So let's do that and come back at just
3 after ten past. Thank you.

4 (12.01 pm)

5 (Short break)

6 (12.10 pm)

7 THE CHAIRMAN: We have quite a fair amount of ground we
8 would still like to cover by one o'clock, so let's get
9 straight on. Sir Lawrence, over to you.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. I just want to spend
11 a little bit of time, not too much, on getting out of
12 Basra City.

13 To what extent were the continuing attacks on
14 British forces in Basra -- we have heard that they were
15 attracting a lot of fire. To what extent was that the
16 main reason why we wanted to move out?

17 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It wasn't the main reason. As
18 I think -- as I said earlier, the main reason was we
19 needed to break the political logjam. We needed to
20 change the dynamic. Clearly, though, the fact that we
21 had people sitting at locations in Basra City being
22 rocketed and mortared, the fact that we were having to
23 run resupply convoys to those locations that were being
24 attacked and on which we were suffering casualties, and,
25 politically, our forces were not being allowed to do the

1 job for which we were in the city, that's not
2 a sustainable position.

3 It is a sad fact that on military operations one
4 sustains casualties. That's the nature of the business.
5 But those casualties must be producing something of
6 strategic benefit if they are to be justifiable, and
7 they certainly weren't in the case of Basra City. But
8 the principal rationale -- and as I have said, I mean,
9 I was discussing this in October 2006 -- was actually to
10 find a way forward politically in Basra.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That required -- I mean, it is the
12 political risk that is being taken here -- moving out
13 before PIC, provincial Iraqi control, has been achieved.
14 That was potentially quite a significant risk?

15 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It was a risk, but, as I said, there
16 were no risk-free options in Basra, but it is
17 interesting to reflect that, in July 2007, Maliki
18 appointed General Mohan as the Basra security
19 coordinator. He took over from General Hamide and
20 I saw Mohan personally at the beginning of July when I
21 was visiting and he told me directly that he wanted UK
22 forces out of Basra City. He said that, if the UK
23 forces left Basra City, he could deal with security,
24 but, if they didn't, nobody could.

25 I stressed to him at the time that, if we were to

1 leave, once we left -- and we could perhaps do so as
2 early as August -- then security in the city would be
3 his responsibility and we would be looking to him to
4 deliver on that.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Didn't we still have legal
6 responsibility at that time?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We still had responsibility, in that
8 we had not handed over provincial control to the Iraqis,
9 but we were not in a position militarily to be able to
10 deliver that security, for the reasons that I have just
11 described. So from our perspective, the best way to
12 advance the security within Basra was to do precisely
13 what Mohan was asking us to do.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you concerned that there was
15 a risk to the British military reputation in the way that
16 we were having to leave?

17 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, and we were always very
18 concerned about the perception that we would be seen to
19 be bombed out of Basra. That was something that was
20 always on our minds and with which we had to deal, but
21 a far greater risk to our reputation would have been
22 strategic failure in Basra.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In the end, you accepted that it
24 looked -- because we were leaving before provincial
25 Iraqi control had been achieved, that that was a risk

1 that was worth accepting?

2 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, it was a risk that we were at

3 pains to try and mitigate, but it was a risk that we

4 could not entirely avoid.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How confident were you that if there

6 had been a real challenge -- for example, if the

7 ceasefire with the Sadrists had broken down before it

8 did -- that we would have been able to do anything about

9 a deteriorating situation within Basra?

10 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We retained the ability to

11 reintervene in Basra, and, indeed, General Mohan was

12 very clear that, although he wanted us out of the city

13 centre, he did not want us out of the south-east. He

14 saw it as very important that he had this sort of big

15 stick in his club, as it were, with which he could

16 threaten people inside Basra. So we did retain that

17 capability.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that was again part of the

19 balancing of risks at this stage?

20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think I'll stop there.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Lawrence. Sir Martin?

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have heard from several witnesses

24 about the British contribution in supporting the Charge

25 of the Knights. Can you tell us what conversations you

1 had with your American contacts about what role we
2 should, in fact --

3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, I mean, first of all, we must
4 remember that between the period of withdrawing from the
5 centre of Basra City, which included, of course, the
6 handover of provincial Iraqi control in December, we had
7 been pressing Mohan to develop his -- Basra security
8 plan.

9 As I had said to him when I met him in July 2007, it
10 would be his responsibility. Clearly, we would support
11 him, but we needed him to develop his Basra security
12 plan. He was fairly slow in doing that and we were
13 continuing to press him, and eventually we did get, with
14 the support of our people, a plan drawn up which he then
15 briefed in Baghdad, I think at the beginning of March,
16 to General Petraeus and to Prime Minister Maliki.

17 His plan was for, essentially, a six-week
18 disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme,
19 which would run up to the beginning of June 2008, and
20 then he would disarm those who continued to bear weapons
21 at that stage. I was in Baghdad shortly after him at
22 the beginning of March and I stressed to
23 General Petraeus and to General Austin, who was the
24 Corps Commander at the time, two things: first of all,
25 that the Mohan security plan was crucial, but it had to

1 be delivered so we had to keep Mohan's feet to the fire;
2 and, secondly, that it had to succeed, and, therefore,
3 we would need to allocate sufficient Corps assets to
4 support it.

5 General Austin was fairly reluctant, I have to say,
6 because his priority was Mosul, and really he would have
7 preferred just -- you know, a quiet life and the status
8 quo down in Basra while he got on with Mosul, but
9 General Petraeus was clear that this was the culmination
10 of what we had been working up to in the south-east for
11 the better part of a year and a half, and, therefore, we
12 had to go through with it.

13 So he undertook to ensure that the right corps
14 assets were allocated. In the event, as we know,
15 Maliki, towards the end of March, decided that he was
16 going to launch and lead Charge of the Knights. I had
17 a number of conversations on the telephone with
18 General Petraeus about this. They were taken by
19 surprise as much as we were. They were, as nervous as
20 we were, but General Petraeus described this to me as an
21 express train that just couldn't be stopped.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was our own assessment at that
23 time of Iraqi capability to do it on their own?

24 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Our concern was the lack of planning.
25 It wasn't the Iraqi capability. It was just going down

1 there with no plan; and just doing it is a recipe for
2 confusion at best and disaster at worst. As it turned
3 out, we got the best, which was confusion, but then
4 eventually some order out of the chaos.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you able to discuss the planning
6 aspect with General Mohan?

7 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: There was no planning aspect and
8 General Mohan at this particular stage was operating,
9 how shall I say, more politically than militarily.
10 General Mohan had been coming under a lot of pressure
11 and I think one of the reasons -- there were a lot of
12 reasons that Prime Minister Maliki launched Charge of
13 the Knights. In part, it was his frustration with what
14 he saw as slow progress, in part, as I have said, it was
15 a complete shift in the political dynamics with regard
16 to Moqtadr al Sadr, and, therefore, the Jaysh Al Mahdi, and
17 in part General Mohan's position was being undermined by
18 some of Prime Minister Maliki's advisers in Baghdad,
19 and, also, throughout all of this period, we had to
20 remember the dynamic between Prime Minister Maliki and
21 Governor Wa'ili down in Basra. Prime Minister Maliki
22 loathed the governor and made several attempts --

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have had heard evidence on that as
24 well.

25 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: -- to remove him, all of which were

1 ruled unconstitutional. So you can see this great sort
2 of partly political, but partly also personality and an
3 emotional mix driving forward here. So General Mohan,
4 I have to say, spent quite a bit of time at the
5 beginning of Charge of the Knights trying to protect his
6 own position. So there was no real planning that went
7 on for Charge of the Knights.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Then how did the Americans approach us
9 or what was it the Americans then asked us to
10 contribute?

11 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The Americans, of course, came down
12 with 1st Division of the Iraqi army because they were
13 mentoring that division, and so mentors came down with
14 them, and also, of course, they moved down, as promised
15 for the Mohan security plan, the corps assets, the joint
16 fires and the various enablers. They reinforced the
17 headquarters and then we sat down together in Basra and
18 planned how to retrieve the situation on the ground,
19 which was becoming quite serious.

20 One of the brigades of 14 Division that was pushed
21 straight into the fight with no real plan and no real
22 leadership, had just come out essentially of basic
23 training, and, not surprisingly, it pretty such
24 disintegrated. So there was a lot of retrieval to be
25 done.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How did you assess our contribution in
2 terms of its effectiveness?

3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think our contribution was good,
4 but it certainly wasn't appreciated by the Iraqis and by
5 Prime Minister Maliki in particular, and I think there
6 were a couple of reasons for that.

7 The first was we were, to a degree, caught up in all
8 of this irritation and frustration with regard to Basra
9 and Maliki and Mohan, and, secondly, the commanders on
10 the ground declined to attack a number of fairly
11 indiscriminate targets, that the Iraqis asked us to
12 attack, because of concerns over collateral damage, and
13 at that stage, I think the Iraqis decided that we
14 weren't really helping them.

15 This was a false impression, the commanders did
16 absolutely the right thing, but it didn't help with the
17 political atmosphere with Maliki.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: After the Charge of the Knights, what
19 was it agreed that the American contribution should be
20 in MND (South East)?

21 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: There was only a limited American
22 contribution in MND (South East) after Charge of the
23 Knights. When the 1st Division moved out, its mentors
24 moved out with it. Clearly, the corps assets to a large
25 extent moved out. The one I think that they did

1 leave down there, which was a great asset, was rather
2 more ISTAR (intelligence, surveillance, targeting and
3 reconnaissance) assets, unmanned aerial vehicles, for
4 example. So we got rather better coverage. But,
5 essentially, we reinforced our own people in Basra after
6 the Charge of the Knights to try and recover
7 14 Division. Clearly, it had to be built up again. The
8 brigade which had dissolved had to be reconstituted and
9 its confidence restored. So there was a very large
10 mentoring task to be taken on in Basra after Charge of
11 the Knights.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: By us?

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: By us.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: And with a revised view of how to do the
15 mentoring?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes. We had mentored 10 Division of
17 the Iraqi army, and we had had embedded mentors and they
18 had gone up to Baghdad with the various elements of the
19 division as they were rotated through the Baghdad
20 security plan, but when 10 Division was moved out of
21 Basra and 14 Division formed, then the principal effort
22 was on training. There was a limited amount of
23 mentoring. We -- with hindsight, we should have done
24 more mentoring earlier of 14 Division. I think there
25 were a number of reasons why we didn't.

1 One was the effort there was being put into the
2 training, but, secondly, there was also the issue of
3 having withdrawn from the centre of the city and having
4 seen the benefits amongst the Basrawi opinion. For
5 example, we were having reported by the Consul General
6 that ordinary Basrawis were saying, "Why are the
7 Jaysh Al Mahdi still armed now the British are no longer
8 here?" So you could see those sorts of dynamics
9 working.

10 We were cautious about reintroducing an overt UK
11 presence on the streets, and the other very significant
12 factor was that the Iraqis were very reluctant to have
13 us with them because they felt we attracted fire. So we
14 were slower than we should have been, I think, in
15 hindsight, in getting that mentoring going, although it
16 was always, as I think General White-Spunner would have
17 told you, the intent to move towards that as the Mohan
18 security planning evolved.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My last question on Charge of the
20 Knights -- you wrote in your article on 18 December 2008
21 that the Charge of the Knights was the crowning success
22 of our strategy to basically train up the Iraqi security
23 forces. It was, of course, a complex route to success
24 but how would you sum up your meaning really? How do
25 you sum up what you consider were the successes, the

1 crowning successes of Charge of the Knights?

2 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I don't think I was implying that it

3 was an example of our success in training the Iraqi

4 security forces, although, actually, I think that from

5 an overall coalition perspective, the fact that the

6 Iraqis could move an entire division down to Basra so

7 quickly was a telling example of how far they had come.

8 But for me, it was the culmination of our efforts to get

9 a political solution in Basra. As I have explained,

10 from about September/October 2006 onwards, you know, my

11 concern was to find a way to force the Iraqis' hand

12 politically in Basra, for them to provide a political

13 lead and a political context for security force

14 operations and that's what was done in Charge of the

15 Knights.

16 Now, it would have been better if it had been done

17 in a rather more considered and better planned way.

18 Then the start of the operation would have not been so

19 chaotic, but, nevertheless, it was the political

20 commitment, a demonstration of political will by the

21 Iraqi leadership that we had been seeking, that we had

22 been pushing for, and that we had been working for, for

23 18 months. So in that sense, it was a culmination of

24 our efforts.

25 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So despite the fact that we had to make

1 a sort of series of rescue efforts, it was there --
2 resolving their issues themselves --
3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It was a political turning point in
4 Basra.
5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.
6 THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Can we turn back to Sir Roderic?
7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would just like to turn the clock back
8 briefly to look at the way the British objectives and
9 American objectives fitted together within the coalition
10 in 2006/2007, the period that led up to the surge.
11 In 2006, the Americans had a bridging strategy which
12 emphasised moving towards provincial Iraqi control and
13 moving coalition forces out of population centres, and
14 that, presumably, fitted very well with what we were
15 planning in MND (South East) in what eventually became
16 Operation Zenith. So we were on all fours at that
17 point.
18 But then the Americans suddenly switched into surge
19 mode in their area. Were we unsighted when they did so?
20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We weren't unsighted. I think we
21 were watching events very closely. We were watching the
22 Baker-Hamilton Report and how that was being analysed.
23 We were watching the political debate within Washington.
24 We clearly recognised that there were voices saying,
25 "This is the wrong way. We should actually be sending

1 far more people out there", and when President Bush
2 eventually decided that was the course of action he was
3 going to take, I think we were perhaps slightly
4 surprised that it was at such variance with
5 Baker-Hamilton, but we weren't shocked, because we knew
6 it was very much on the agenda.

7 But it was a different problem for them in detail.
8 In macro it was the same problem. The problem was that,
9 to get politics to work, you had to have a suppression
10 of violence, you had to get violence down to a level
11 which allowed political accommodations to be reached.
12 The big difference was the source of the violence.

13 In Baghdad and the surrounding area, Shia and Sunni
14 were fighting one another and it was separating them
15 that was crucial, and that's what the surge forces
16 allowed General Petraeus to do.

17 In Basra, it was the Shia fighting us. They were
18 fighting us because we were there. We were increasingly
19 being seen as a force of occupation. We were an excuse.
20 All the while we were there, they didn't have to face up
21 to their own problems, so we were, in a sense, by our
22 presence, blocking progress.

23 But there isn't actually the complete difference
24 between the south and Baghdad if you go back to the
25 example I drew earlier with Sadr City. Sadr City was in

1 exactly the same position. The US forces, even through
2 the surge, were not in Sadr City, and they didn't go
3 into Sadr City and deal with Sadr City until after
4 Charge of the Knights, when Maliki led almost a repeat
5 operation, albeit, of course, better planned with the
6 lessons learned from Basra.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I suppose in Basra we were the external
8 interference at this stage that was causing the problem,
9 but if I come back to the surge announcement by
10 President Bush, did you feel that you had had adequate
11 forewarning of this significant change in the American
12 strategy through your contacts with your counterparts in
13 Washington?

14 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, we, I think, received almost as
15 much forewarning as they did. Whether that was
16 enough --

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was a very diplomatic answer. That
18 implies very little. Right.

19 Just turning to the consequences of that on the
20 ground in Basra, where, as we have described, we were
21 trying to move ourselves away from being the target, in
22 order to execute our strategy there, we obviously needed
23 support at corps level, but at corps level the Americans
24 were focusing on the surge.

25 Did this mean that we were a bit short of some of

1 the corps assets we would ideally have liked to have
2 had? You talked just now about the way that ISTAR came
3 in at a slightly later stage.

4 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We were, but only in the way that any
5 divisional area was short of corps assets if they
6 weren't the main effort, and, as I have described,
7 towards the end of 2007, the beginning of 2008, the
8 corps main effort was on Mosul. That's what
9 General Austin saw as his principal challenge.

10 Of course, there was lots of activity going on
11 around Baghdad and the rest of Iraq, but that was really
12 where his focus had shifted at that stage. So that is
13 where all the corps assets were. Once Basra became on
14 the main effort, which it did when Charge of the Knights
15 was launched, then the corps assets were shifted.

16 So I don't say this in any way as a criticism.
17 Corps assets are focused where they are needed at the
18 time, which is where the commander judges his main
19 effort to be.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So there was an interim period before the
21 focus after Charge of the Knights in which they were
22 a bit thin down in MND (South East)?

23 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Baroness Prashar?

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you. Sir Jock, I want to ask

1 a couple of questions about our continued military
2 presence in Iraq.

3 At this time, there is a British Naval presence in
4 Iraqi waters. What are their objectives and how are
5 they conducting their task?

6 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Their principal objective is to get
7 the Iraqi Navy to the stage where they can deliver
8 littoral security for themselves. The security is
9 important, because much of Iraq's wealth flows through
10 the south and the oil terminals just off the coast. So
11 providing security for those and for that small amount
12 of Iraqi coast is crucial to Iraq's progress and to its
13 economic wellbeing.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How long do you expect the
15 Royal Navy to continue this role?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: That will be an issue of discussion
17 between us and the Iraqis. We are there until the end
18 of this year. We anticipate there may be a requirement
19 for us to be there a bit longer than that, but not --
20 but I wouldn't have thought more, at the maximum, than,
21 say, another year before the Iraqis can take on the task
22 themselves.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What about the question of training?
24 Because I think in 2008 training was seen as quite an
25 important component both to the navy and the military

1 generally. What has happened about that? Why were we
2 not able to perform that role?

3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We are training the navy in Umm Qasr
4 with our training team. That has been going on, of
5 course, all throughout this operation. It doesn't
6 attract much attention before 2009 because all this
7 other stuff is going on, but it was still going forward
8 in that period. We provide some physical security for
9 the oil platforms and for patrolling the surrounding sea
10 space, as well as training the Iraqis on the job, as it
11 were, to do it for themselves.

12 We also contribute to the NATO training mission in
13 Iraq, which provides officer training and education at
14 a variety of levels, which we see as extremely important
15 in developing the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi
16 army for the future and is an important part of our
17 bilateral relationship, at the military level, with
18 Iraq.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So we are doing this through NATO,
20 not directly?

21 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: On the land force side, we are doing
22 it through NATO.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you regard that as quite an
24 important component of what we do?

25 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I do. I think the NATO training

1 mission in Iraq, again, it doesn't get a great deal of
2 publicity but it does extremely good work. We are
3 a major contributor to it, along with the Italians, and
4 it is developing the higher level capacities of the
5 Iraqi army in terms of command and control and
6 governance.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And what do you see in terms of our
8 own long-term bilateral relationships? How
9 strategically important are they?

10 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think since Iraq is in
11 a strategically important area, then our relationship
12 with them is likely to continue to be important. I'm
13 talking about at the national level, not just at the
14 military. If it is important at the national level, if
15 it is part of our overall foreign policy to engage and
16 be involved in these areas, then the military has a role
17 to play in that and will continue to do so.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Lawrence?

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to talk about equipment again
21 now, and this is probably a very unfair question, but
22 I'm just wondering, when you became CDS, or as CDS, were
23 there decisions that you had wished you had taken
24 differently when you had been Deputy Chief of the
25 Defence Staff (Equipment)?

1 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Of course, as Deputy Chief of Defence
2 Staff (Equipment Capability), one didn't take the
3 decisions, one constructed and recommended an equipment
4 plan, but of course it then had to be agreed by chiefs
5 and by ministers.

6 I feel that one of the -- that one of the
7 difficulties that we faced between the time I stopped
8 being DCDS(EC) and CDS was that, separate from the
9 operational funding coming from the reserve, the
10 pressures on the overall defence programme and the
11 equipment plan meant that we had taken money out of
12 areas that really did need increased investment, simply
13 because it was money that was available and uncommitted
14 and, for example, I mentioned up until 2002 we had
15 managed to increase the funding in intelligence,
16 surveillance, targeting, acquisition and reconnaissance
17 by about 15 per cent. Some of that was removed in
18 subsequent years as savings measures.

19 I also felt that we were far too slow to improve our
20 capabilities in persistent surveillance, particularly
21 through unmanned vehicles, and when I became CDS, one of
22 the first things I did was to stop the arguing about
23 whether we should purchase Reaper from the United States
24 and tell people to go and buy it, and it is now in
25 operation as a consequence.

1 So I think it is in those areas of intelligence and
2 persistent surveillance and, to some extent, strategic
3 mobility as well.

4 When I left my job as Deputy Chief of Defence Staff
5 for Equipment Capability, we had a plan for eight C17s.
6 That came down to four. It is now back up to seven, so
7 we haven't quite recovered all the lost ground.

8 And, of course, there were a lot of areas that we
9 did not foresee in 2002, in terms of equipment
10 investment, but I don't think it is a matter of making
11 the wrong choice, it is just that we didn't understand
12 what we would need and therefore we weren't in
13 a position to make that choice. I think if I -- just to
14 conclude, the real difficulty we face in our equipment
15 plan and equipment procurement -- it was true in 2002,
16 it was a frustration to me then and remains the same
17 now -- is our lack of short-term agility. Our
18 requirements always change, and they change very rapidly
19 when one is on operations, because the enemy has a vote,
20 and you field a perfectly satisfactory piece of
21 equipment and they find out its weaknesses and they try
22 to exploit them, and we have to react to that, and our
23 ability to be agile enough in that situation is not
24 nearly as good as it should be.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would you say UAVs was a very good

1 example of that? We have had evidence of frustration
2 amongst our commanders that they just couldn't get these
3 things.

4 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, I think that we looked at it in
5 the context of a ten-year equipment plan, where things
6 were inserted in the programme and would arrive in
7 five years' time. Actually, we needed these things
8 yesterday, tomorrow would have to do, but the day after would
9 be too late.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And helicopters again. We have
11 taken, obviously, quite a bit of evidence on this but
12 I would be interested in your view of how it seemed over
13 the 2006/2009 period.

14 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: First of all you can never have
15 enough support helicopters or attack helicopters. They
16 are such important and valuable assets that a commander
17 will always be able to do more and to do more, more
18 flexibly, with more assets, but I think that our
19 principal constraint on helicopters was twofold. First
20 was we had eight Chinooks sitting in a shed unable to
21 fly. That is a significant percentage of the total
22 Chinook force, and the Chinook is the real workhorse
23 that lifts the large amounts, as you know.

24 Secondly, we were operating in two theatres, which
25 was well beyond our planning assumptions, and although

1 it was a strain to generate sufficient infantry
2 battalions for the rotation between the two theatres,
3 the really critical elements were actually the enablers.
4 They were the strategic and the tactical mobility. They
5 were the helicopters, they were the ISTAR, they were all
6 of those specialist areas that are so important for any
7 operation, wherever it is and whatever it is.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So in effect, we became quite
9 dependent upon the Americans, at corps level, to provide
10 some of these things in Iraq?

11 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We certainly utilised American
12 assets. I don't know that we became completely
13 dependent upon them.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: No, to an extent.

15 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: To an extent, yes.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What was the consequence of the
17 limitation on helicopters, the lack, on our ability just
18 to move troops around and our dependence on ground
19 mobility?

20 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: It was less of a constraint in Iraq
21 because we were, towards the end, talking about quite
22 a small area around Basra. It was certainly
23 a limitation earlier on, when we were still trying to
24 resupply forces in Maysan. Once we had withdrawn from
25 Maysan, then you are dealing with a relatively small

1 geographical area and moving troops in and out of Basra,
2 for example, by helicopter, rather than by a ground
3 convoy, has advantages, in that you don't get the ground
4 contacts, but the helicopters, as we saw with the tragic
5 shooting down of the Lynx, are not invulnerable. So it
6 is a balance of risks.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We heard from John Hutton when he
8 said it is hard to imagine a worse procurement shambles
9 than the Future Rapid Effects System.

10 When did you become aware of the problems with FRES,
11 and what steps did you take to address these issues?

12 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Could I first of all say that, while
13 I normally agree with John Hutton on everything, I don't
14 agree with him on this. It is quite easy to imagine
15 a worse one, and that's Chinook Mark III, as I have made
16 clear.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is some competition for the
18 role.

19 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I am afraid so. The FRES was a very
20 large programme in the equipment plan in 2002. The
21 difficulty with FRES was that it was overcomplicated and
22 overcomplex, and the desire to provide a common family
23 of vehicle that would fulfil a wide variety of roles and
24 a very, very large number of these vehicles, and the
25 notion that you would just change the things that were

1 inside but have a very great degree of commonality was
2 an understandable aspiration, in that clearly it makes
3 logistic support less expensive and easier to do. But
4 it just makes the whole acquisition programme too
5 complex. There are so many interdependencies, one of
6 them is always having a problem and it holds up
7 everything else and the programme simply could not go on
8 like that.

9 So actually federalising the whole approach to
10 armoured vehicles in the army and taking a much more
11 pragmatic view of it and doing what is achievable within
12 the timescale and going for 80 per cent solutions rather
13 than 100 per cent solutions clearly is the right way
14 forward, and that's what is now happening. It has taken
15 us a long time to get to that point.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Meanwhile, it meant that instead of having
better

17 armoured personnel transport, we were relying on Snatch
18 Land Rovers and suchlike?

19 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Of course, FRES to a very large
20 extent was about replacing the 430 series of vehicles,
21 which are not suitable for a wide range of roles in the
22 kind of environment we had in Basra and that we have,
23 indeed, in Afghanistan. It is true that the improved
24 version of the 432, the Bulldog, has done very good
25 service, but you need a wide range of vehicles because

1 you are going into some quite small places where you
2 have quite small turning circles, and you also are
3 dealing with the population. The critical battleground
4 if Afghanistan is the same as it was in Iraq, which is
5 the population. It is not the insurgents. So you have
6 got to interact with the population. You have got to
7 get them into a position where they will accept the
8 political solution, and you can't do that from behind
9 several inches of armour.

10 So you have to have people out on the ground and you
11 have to have people in smaller and lighter vehicles. So
12 commanders need a wide range of vehicles, and FRES would
13 not have solved the problems that we had been facing in
14 Iraq and Afghanistan, with, perhaps, one exception,
15 which is the scout variant, which is our top priority at
16 the moment, and that is to replace the CVRT vehicle,
17 which is doing very good service in Afghanistan, did
18 very good service in Iraq, but which is pretty
19 unreliable because it is very old.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You do have the problems of the IEDs
21 which was increasing in sophistication in Iraq over this
22 period. So given our dependence on the Snatch Land
23 Rovers, how concerned were you that we should find some
24 way of dealing better with this particular
25 vulnerability?

1 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Very concerned. We wanted to get rid
2 of Snatch outside the wire as quickly as possible, and
3 that's what we had been seeking to do, but you can't get
4 rid of it by using just a big, heavy vehicle. You need
5 vehicles that can go down small streets and can turn
6 around in small places and from which people can
7 interface with the population.

8 So the challenge is to have a vehicle of that size
9 and mobility with as much protection on it as you can
10 get, but we have to be clear, in a vehicle of that size
11 and that mobility, there is going to be a limit, and, as
12 the enemy has shown, they just make bigger IEDs.

13 So it is a mistake to believe that simply by
14 increasing the armour on a vehicle, you can defeat an
15 improvised explosive device. You have to take a broad
16 spectrum approach. You have to improve your detection
17 of the devices themselves. You have to provide as much
18 physical protection in terms of armour as is consistent
19 with the mission the troops are trying to carry out,
20 but, crucially, you have actually got to attack the
21 people who are doing this. You have got to be offensive
22 about it, you can't just defend, and that's a major
23 effort for us in Afghanistan as it was in Iraq.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that's probably a good place
25 to stop.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Just as a postscript, I think we heard
2 evidence, but my memory may be at fault, that, in fact,
3 an IED pierced the floor of a Challenger tank on one
4 occasion, thereby setting the obvious limits to how much
5 you can armour.

6 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, and the Americans have lost main
7 battle tanks as well. Clearly, it is a bit more of
8 a challenge for an insurgent to place an IED that will
9 take out a main battle tank than a smaller vehicle, so
10 the -- more armour does help, there is no question about
11 it, but it is not the only part of the solution. It is
12 just part of a broad-spectrum approach to what is still
13 today in Afghanistan the tactical issue, tactical threat
14 that we face.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we are coming to the
16 closing bit of this session. I really wanted to ask
17 a couple of questions drawing on all your experience,
18 both as CDS and beforehand, and then I will ask my
19 colleagues whether they have got any final questions and
20 then give you a proper opportunity to say what you would
21 like.

22 The two points in my mind, from previous evidence,
23 one is, in a sense, quite a limited one. We have had
24 a lot of evidence, including from military commanders in
25 the field, that the tour length question is one of the

1 lessons learned from Iraq, that short tours at field
2 commander level above, I guess, brigade, the tours need
3 to be longer. Is that something you have a clear and
4 final view about?

5 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, there is a requirement to
6 understand the local, political and personal dynamics,
7 which I think I said at the beginning of my evidence,
8 and, although, as outsiders, we are never going to be
9 able to understand it the way indigenous people can,
10 nevertheless we have got to understand it as well as we
11 can, and that takes time, it takes effort, it takes
12 experience, and you build that up through the course of
13 a tour. So if you rotate people very quickly, then, of
14 course, they are constantly having to learn those
15 lessons.

16 On the other hand, both in Iraq and now in
17 Afghanistan, we are talking about intense combat
18 operations. People are taking -- you know, are taking
19 on a real burden when they deploy to those areas. If
20 you leave them there too long, they get too tired. They
21 become less effective and it becomes riskier for them.
22 So you have to balance those requirements.

23 Now, it is easy to say, "Down at the battalion
24 level, we'll rotate them every six months". Battalions
25 don't fight on their own, they fight as part of

1 a brigade, and there is a very clear view that a brigade
2 needs to train, fight and recover together. So that
3 presents you with a difficulty, since you would actually
4 like your command team, who are making these crucial
5 decisions, to stay there longer.

6 The way we sought to balance this circle is to have
7 more and more continuity posts that are in theatre for
8 a year, and they run over from one brigade to another,
9 and they -- they are particularly in the areas of
10 intelligence and cultural understanding.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that. For me, at least, that's
12 a new one. So it is not just at the two-star level and
13 above, there are actually specialised posts further down
14 the chain of command --

15 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: A great many of them.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: -- which can be kept on a more continuing
17 basis?

18 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: And are.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The other is a rather open and
20 perhaps even loose question, but we found ourselves
21 operating as the major junior partner in a multinational
22 coalition with the Americans as the largest partner,
23 twice at least.

24 Are there lessons to be drawn from the Iraq
25 experience of that, looking to issues such as influence,

1 knowledge, sharing, even equipment, assets, certainly,
2 that we can draw from Iraq in the way we manage our
3 position as this major junior partner?

4 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Yes, I think we have to be much more
5 aligned in terms of doctrinal evolution, not just
6 doctrine, but doctrinal evolution.

7 It is clear that the Americans in 2003/2004 were not
8 in a good doctrinal position. So they went through
9 a very rapid evolution. We didn't stay abreast of them
10 in that. We had done our own, but it was a bit after
11 them. I think we were a bit slow, but it would have
12 been much better if we had done it together so we
13 retained a fairly common view of how doctrine was
14 evolving in the light of current operations and current
15 threats. That's the first point.

16 The second point, I think, is that the process that
17 we have had of embedding people in American
18 organisations is extremely important, because it gives
19 you an insight, it gives you an understanding of what
20 they are thinking, but it also gives American commanders
21 an insight into the quality and the value of our people,
22 and I know, for example, that General Petraeus has told
23 me, as he has told many others on frequent occasions,
24 how very highly he values the people that we contribute
25 to these operations, and, indeed, I had enormous

1 difficulty prising General Lamb out of his grasp. He
2 would have kept extending him forever, I think, as his
3 deputy, if he could have done. So that's another
4 important lesson.

5 I think, though, that we should just be a little
6 careful about the extent to which we think we can
7 influence what a major partner like the Americans can
8 do. We can have significant influence. We can have
9 significant influence in terms of approach, in terms of
10 the detail in how you approach a problem, but we are not
11 going to be able to turn an American supertanker just
12 because we provide some very high quality people. So
13 I think we need to be realistic about the extent to
14 which we can influence.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I will just turn to my
16 colleagues and ask if they have any last points to make.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It has been suggested to us by
18 earlier military witnesses that there is a difficulty
19 for politicians, indeed civil servants, in fully
20 grasping some of the issues that are faced either on the
21 day-to-day military experience or in the -- some of the
22 basic problems of strategy and tactics that you have
23 been discussing.

24 Is there anything that can be -- firstly, do you
25 accept that that was a problem, and are there ways by

1 which this sort of grasp of what they were getting into
2 could be improved?

3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I'm sure -- you can always improve
4 everything, so I'm sure you can improve that grasp, but
5 I think that the fundamental lesson is the uncertainty,
6 the fog of war, if I can put it that way, and,
7 therefore, the requirement to be agile in terms of your
8 equipment, in terms of your training, in terms of your
9 doctrine, and, most importantly, in terms of your whole
10 intellectual approach to an operation, to understand
11 viscerally, as well as intellectually, that no plan is
12 going to survive first contact with the enemy and so to
13 be ready to adapt constantly in the context of an
14 ongoing campaign.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Fog of war takes us back
16 to Clausewitz again, but the lesson that one might draw
17 from that is for the political side to be more
18 sceptical, perhaps, of plans and not to allow themselves
19 to be too dependent or to be too sure, when they are
20 doing their job of presenting these to the public, about
21 what may result from the implementation of these plans?

22 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Very few conflicts in history have
23 been foregone conclusions. They have been struggles in
24 which the outcome is not decided until the end, and, to
25 a large extent -- I mean, clearly it is an issue of

1 capability, but it is also to a very large extent an
2 issue of will.

3 So I would agree with you that understanding that it
4 is a struggle, that there will be ups and downs, but
5 that actual focus of enduring national will is
6 fundamental to any such endeavour.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Martin?

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Following the end of the combat mission
10 in Iraq, and given our Afghan commitments, what
11 opportunities have the soldiers for recuperation and for
12 retraining and other training?

13 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We work very hard to ensure that,
14 after an operational deployment, our people are given
15 a chance to decompress, as we call it, obviously take
16 their post-operational tour leave, spend time with their
17 families, but the real problem that we faced during the
18 period that we were in Iraq was that doing two such
19 operations meant that the time between deployments was
20 too short, and although you can give people their leave,
21 there are lots of other things they need to do in terms
22 of their own career development, in terms of spending
23 extended periods with their families, in terms of
24 training for a wider range of tasks that somewhat fell
25 by the wayside, and although those tour intervals have

1 increased now that we are no longer engaged in Iraq,
2 nevertheless the demands of the operation in Afghanistan
3 and the intensity of the operation are such that people
4 are really focusing on little else other than preparing
5 themselves for the next operation in Afghanistan, but
6 then that is our main effort and delivering success
7 there is the total focus of everyone in the military.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: One last one from me, if I may. We have
9 heard a certain amount of evidence from various -- many
10 military witnesses that the chain of command from the
11 Ministry of Defence, PJHQ, the leading field commanders
12 seems quite a long chain, sometimes.

13 Looking back, I mean, how do you rate the
14 effectiveness and direct communication and authority of
15 the chain of command from top to field?

16 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Chain of command is always crucial
17 but the chain of command is always long, and you can't
18 rely just on the sequential chain of command. I do not
19 think anybody ever has, and nor should they.

20 I had weekly reports from the Deputy Commanding
21 General of Multi National forces Iraq and from the
22 Deputy Commanding General of the corps and a weekly
23 report via the Chief of Joint Operations from the
24 Commanding General in MND (South East). I visited
25 theatre frequently. I was in Iraq, for example, seven

1 times in 2007, speaking to people face-to-face, and, of
2 course, speaking to my American colleagues as well.

3 So -- and you know, one talks to commanders
4 occasionally by telephone. None of this is to
5 short-circuit the chain of command, which is crucial,
6 but it is just to make sure that there are alternative
7 avenues so that you have a sort of cross-reference, if
8 you like, and you can triangulate the messages that you
9 are getting.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Jock, an opportunity for
11 final comments from yourself with that long span of
12 experience you have brought and heavy responsibility you
13 have carried, and do carry?

14 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I would, if I may, make two comments.
15 One is a specific one, one is a more general one. We
16 haven't talked about the negotiations that went on with
17 some of the militia groups in Basra. I know that
18 Jon Day gave some evidence of that and I know you are
19 going to take some evidence in closed session on that.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Correct.

21 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I would just like to say, reiterating
22 the evidence that Jon Day gave, that there were
23 accusations at the time that we had done a deal with
24 militias to get out of Basra City. I hope I have been
25 able to demonstrate that this was our approach from the

1 second half of 2006.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: That was our willed purpose.

3 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The negotiations came much later than
4 that, and the purpose of the negotiations was
5 essentially twofold, which was to counter Iranian
6 influence and to split mainstream Jaysh Al Mahdi from
7 the special groups. Any notion that we did some kind of
8 dirty deal to allow us to get out of Basra City is just
9 completely and utterly wrong.

10 I wanted to put that on record, because I said that
11 before in public.

12 My second, more general point is there is also
13 still, I think, a prevailing sense in some of the
14 reporting one sees that the British military, the
15 British army, somehow has something to be a bit ashamed
16 of in Basra. Nothing, in my view, could be further from
17 the truth.

18 Again, as I sought to demonstrate, what we did in
19 Basra, the reposturing in Basra was a deliberate plan to
20 force the Iraqis' hand politically. The British army
21 did all of this brilliantly. Did they make mistakes?
22 Of course. We all make mistakes. No human endeavour is
23 ever free from failure and there were absolutely lessons
24 to be learned from our engagement in Basra, and we have
25 learned them and we have recorded them, but they

1 actually carried out an incredibly difficult operation,
2 where they were subject to constant fire and casualties,
3 not allowed to respond militarily, had to sit there and
4 take it, but had to deliver a political solution. They
5 did it brilliantly, and, in my view, you know, the
6 British public should be enormously proud of what the
7 British military and the British army in particular did
8 in Basra. They did achieve strategic success, or should
9 I say they enabled strategic success in Basra, which was
10 what it was all about.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I would like to thank
12 our witness and those of you have been here through this
13 morning. We are going to resume at 2 o'clock, where
14 Lord Walker, former Chief of the Defence Staff, will be
15 giving testimony. With that, I'll close the session.
16 Thank you.

17 ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Thank you, Chair.

18 (1.02 pm)

19 (The short adjournment)

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