

Wednesday, 2 June 2010

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will open the session with a welcome to Major General Graham Binns. Welcome Major General Graham Binns.

This is your second session appearing before the Committee. Unlike the other occasion, this session is being held in private as we recognise that much of the evidence we wish to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's "Protocol on Sensitive Information", for example on grounds of national security, international relations or defence capability. We may also wish to refer to issues covered by classified documents.

We will apply the "Protocol between the Inquiry and the government regarding documents and other written and electronic information" in considering whether and how evidence given in relation to classified documents and/or sensitive matters more widely can be drawn on and explained in public either in the Inquiry Report or, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.

Now if other evidence is given during this hearing which neither relates to classified documents nor engages any of the categories set out in the Protocol on Sensitive Information, that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry Secretary's letter to you.

We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events and we check what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

I remind each witness on every occasion that they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons we won't be releasing copies of the transcript outside the Inquiry's offices upstairs here at 35

Great Smith Street. You, of course, can access the transcript whenever you want to review it. With that, let's get straight on to the questions.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can we start with this question of a cap -- we are talking about the readiness for the invasion -- the question of the cap on military manpower. We have recently been talking to some officers who found the process frustrating. Can you give us your views on that?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: During my time as Brigade Commander?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are talking about 2003, yes, 2003.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I was aware that there was -- or that there was a perception that there was a cap and I became aware of that during our planning that we were doing with the First Armoured Division planners in September 2002. I had to argue the case for the size and shape of the brigade that I needed, or that I thought I needed, against that cap. But I mean as far as the details, well that was a matter between First Armoured Division and Headquarters Land rather than Seven Armoured Brigade and Headquarters First. I just made the operational case for what I thought I required, mindful at that time I thought I was going through Turkey and attacking into Northern Iraq.

But I had it in mind what I thought an armoured brigade suitably structured would look like that was flexible enough to do anything that I thought was required of it and I got that: I got a square armoured brigade with four square battle groups. I think that compromises were made elsewhere in terms of provision of close air defence and some long range artillery in order to get me the brigade that I wanted. So capped didn't impact on me as Commander of Seven Brigade.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But it had an impact elsewhere?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, I think on -- I recall conversations about prisoner handling organisations. I recall there being a discussion about air defence.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just following up on something you just said then, you designed a force that would take you through the north and in January 2003 you went through the south. Did that require a lot of restructuring and reconfiguration or did you stick more or less with what you had already decided?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: No, because it was quite a big -- Seven Armoured Brigade with four square battle groups, each of them square, was about as big as First Armoured Division that we put in to liberate Kuwait in 1991. I had more tanks than the US Marines had. It was big enough. It later transpired that it was adequately resourced to fight tanks in the desert but we went into a more complex environment where it would have been -- with hindsight, there are other capabilities that we would have required for the stability operations that I didn't think about in 2002.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that was more a question of your ability to think it through in advance rather than anybody saying we couldn't handle it?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, I was generally content --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That you had the forces?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, it was a huge, huge brigade.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In your post-operational tour report you said that:

"Never again must we sent ill-equipped soldiers into battle. Logistics must always match our readiness criteria."

What caused you to write that comment?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: We were very raw. In 2003 we had one of those moments with my commanding officers in early March when they were saying, "I don't think we can be ready". I will give you some examples. We couldn't find the operational ammunition for the warrior. We knew that it had left Bicester and there was evidence that it had arrived in Kuwait, and there was a risk, a real risk, that ammunition was in such short supply that we may have fired it in training. And because the ammunition had just been taken to the range, they naturally assumed that that was the ammunition, and I thought we had fired it. So there was a risk over ammunition.

We lost a company of warriors at one stage. We knew that it had been offloaded from the boats, but I didn't know where it was. There were a quarter of a million men in the desert and we couldn't find this company of warriors -- empty vehicles that had been taken off lowloaders. So there were thousands of containers down at the docks and some of them contained the equipment that we needed and we couldn't find it.

We had not done logistics of this scale previously, my brigade hadn't, and I can give you another example. When the Black Watch went to collect their operation ammunition, their Quartermaster turned up with a couple of trucks and trailers and he was pointed to his ammunition which was loaded in 30 iso containers. We just had not really got a clear idea of the scale of the logistics that were required. So there was that, there was a scale issue, there was an education issue, and there was a lot of raw feeling that there was insufficient body armour. Tragically that resulted in people getting killed and injured. There were soldiers who didn't have desert combats, you know, we were asking them to go to war incorrectly dressed.

I think, at the time, and mindful that that was raised pretty quickly after the event, I sort of felt a responsibility to say to people that this was not right. To do it in private, through the post-operational report, but to say we should never do this again, we should never put soldiers in harm's way if they are inadequately equipped and I felt, as did my commanding officers, on March 19th when we attacked that we were unbalanced logistically.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: "Unbalanced" meaning that there were certain things you couldn't have been able to do?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, as it transpired, no, but I just felt that we lacked the logistic depth. There were some vehicles -- my vehicle, my warrior, we had ten rounds in it because the priority was elsewhere. The tank gunners -- the tanks were full, but they were saying, "Well, where's the next turret load of ammunition? There isn't any, that's it, that's what you've got, you will have to redistribute". We were just too -- and it played on people's minds. So that's what I mean by unbalanced. We just felt that we lacked the logistic depth.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You mentioned you had these discussions with your commanding officers. How were these concerns expressed up the chain of command?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Robustly. This was the subject of every conference call between the brigade and the divisional staff and the joint force logistic component. That's just the way it was, you know, we were trying to be honest and not gild the logistic requirement but there were some serious shortfalls which eventually some of them were helped by a redistribution of ammunition across the division. I mean, I do reflect the 3 Commando Brigades logistics -- because they were more expeditionary, their logistics worked much better than the

Armoured's logistics.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was there ever a point where you felt you might need to say "we are just not ready"?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: No. No, that never even crossed my mind. I was in the business of articulating risk and I would have just had a conversation -- well, I mean I thought to myself, you know, that we were just carrying more risk than I was comfortable with, but I never got to the point where I said to the GOC, "I'm not ready". We were ready and, as it transpired, we were ready enough to do what was required of us. I don't know whether not going north of the Euphrates was a political constraint in order to carve out an area in the south, or whether it was a logistic constraint: not going beyond the Euphrates actually meant that our logistic team was capable of resourcing what we were required to do. I never had that conversation, but I was quite relieved that we didn't have to take an army brigade to Baghdad, because logistically it would have been difficult to sustain.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would that have been part of your original concept?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: No, but I know that I had private conversations with the US Marines who said, "We really could do with some more tanks, Seven Armoured Brigade you have 150 of them, can we have some to go with us?"

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The Chairman will ask a question about Basra in a moment, but as we sort of improvised -- as all campaigns are, to some extent, improvised -- campaigns, one possibility might have been to leave Basra well alone and go -- to keep it covered and then go up to the north?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well that was -- I think that's the

way that the US Marines would have done it had they not had the First Armoured Division on their right flank protecting them. I think they would have taken the risk and driven on towards Baghdad.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask you, you mentioned the body armour issue, were you aware of the way the body armour issue was being handled?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, I took a decision. We had insufficient body armour to equip all of those who were likely to be coming into immediate contact with the fighting companies and squadrons and I took a decision to reallocate based on mitigating the risks to those who were most vulnerable to the dismounted troops and those sat behind 70 tons of armour I was prepared to take the risk with.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What other sorts of risks did you see yourself undertaking, for example, with the ammunitions supplies? It was basically about redistribution so that they could manage for the first encounters, but you would have trouble with the later encounters?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I think by having to redistribute ammunition, we would have taken extra risk in terms of the movement on the battlefield of the people doing that redistribution. That was a risk that I was comfortable taking in advance. In fact the risk was minimal, because the nature of the threat was such that we didn't face a threat to that kind of degree in the areas where we were conducting movement. I think -- what other risks? I think we've learned since that we carried too much risk in our ability to deal with prisoners and detainees and that's a risk that we didn't appreciate -- or we didn't mitigate enough in advance.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think I will stop there, I have some other questions coming up.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks a lot. I would like to hear more about the decision to take Basra City. We've heard differing views. Generals Franks and McKiernan are quoted on 30 March saying they didn't see Basra City as being of strategic significance. That's not to say we shouldn't take it, but they didn't see it as strategic. Was that your view and General Brims' view?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: General Brims and I had a conversation which went along the lines of that General Franks' view was that he wouldn't enter any urban areas until he had to and that he was prepared to block and bypass and isolate until he got to Baghdad. Therefore, when we did the relief in place of the Marines on the outskirts of Basra, there was no pressing military need to do anything other than to block the exits from Basra in order to defend the right flank of the Marines, which in part helped because I didn't really have a clear idea of how we were going to enter Basra. The operational analysts were saying, "It will take you three months, you will suffer 25 per cent casualties and there will be thousands, if not tens of thousands, of civilian deaths" and Robin Brims and I then had a conversation, "Well, we can't do that and therefore we've got to come up with a different way of doing it, so we will only enter Basra, hopefully on our terms, when the time is right and in a manner that reduces casualties on both sides".

So not having to enter Basra, from an operational reasoning, was helpful because it bought us some time to think about how we were going to do it and we got to the stage where, at the end of March/beginning of April, I could see the Marines and US Army getting close to Baghdad and I remember a conversation on attacking into Basra would -- it's Baghdad that's vital and if

Baghdad falls Basra might fall anyway because the regime would be removed and therefore we might not have to attack, we might just drive in. And then another conversation, "Well actually it would be good to have a go at Basra because then we would learn some lessons about Baghdad and there may be some techniques that we employ in Basra in fighting in the urban areas that might be relevant for Baghdad". So that kind of judgment.

I then had a sort of conversation with a friend of mine who was working in General McKiernan's headquarters. I said, you know, "Have I got this right, this is my thinking", and he said, "Actually the view here is that we would like you to go into Basra as soon as you can". So mindful of that, in early April, I then said to the commanding officers -- at that stage we were doing a number of raids in and out of Basra to test how far we could go and I said to the commanding officers, "Well, you know, start pushing a bit further and a bit further and let's see how far we can go". Do you want me to go on?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, a little. Am I right in forming the impression that this was a series of tactical and opportunistic --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, yes. Well, I had a concept and we described it as "Bertie Basra", which is a body, and I said: look, what I want to do is imagine Basra to be a human body and I want to decapitate it, meaning I wanted to remove the regime, I want to remove all of those things that are in power in Basra, and imagine the arms of that body to be those who will fight us. Now we don't necessarily want to fight them, we want to tie them up, and we may have to do some surgical removal of the limbs, but actually I want you to keep this body alive and I want you to keep the vital organs intact, and the vital organs to me are power, water and food. So if we can minimise the damage in order

to preserve the body and then if we can -- and this was where it got complex, and then we will apply some military first aid to keep the body alive until such time as the second echelon of first aid, meaning the NGO community and others, catch up and rebuild this body and apply the prosthetics. So that was my concept.

Now that's as far as I got, really, because I hadn't really applied that thinking to a city of 1.5 million people.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. You mentioned just then the role that you would have to play -- the military would have to play -- before the arrival of civilian agencies in preserving security and stability. Your force structure was designed for quite different purposes than that. Did you feel that, you know, you tested the -- you didn't say testing the water, but testing your ability to get further and further into Basra, that you could actually look after the place for as long as it might take before civilian agencies could provide the necessary security and stability?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I felt reasonably confident. Mindful that I had done something like this in Pristina, and two of my battle groups had been with me in Pristina, so conceptually we had an idea of what was required. We knew it would be very different, but we knew the types of things that we would have to do in order to create the environment for stability. So I knew that it was about politics; I knew that it was about engaging with the local population. So conceptually I was confident enough in the brigade's ability to adjust rapidly and there was still a legacy of experience from Northern Ireland. So when we said, "Set up a checkpoint on the main entry into Basra", we never trained to do it but there were enough people around who knew what a vehicle checkpoint looked like.

So I thought we could apply our latent knowledge and do the thinking to meet the circumstances. Now, whether we had enough troops -- well at the time I thought we had, because otherwise I wouldn't have stood down the armour, because I got rid of the armour pretty quickly, because there came point when the armour was doing more damage than help. So I felt in those early days that it wasn't a matter of the number of troops, in those early days.

Looting was a problem. We reached the conclusion that the best way to stop looting was just to get to a point where there was nothing left to loot. So once the food -- the food warehouses were being looted and we could either try and stop the looting, in which case we would have to shoot people, or we could try and prevent it but knowing that we weren't going to prevent it and take a pragmatic view of let them get all the food that's in there and then when we are ready we will restock it and guard it. But actually trying to interpose ourselves was difficult.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You mentioned rather earlier at the start of the operation that scale was one of the key factors. Was that also true in terms of occupying and securing Basra City -- what is it, 1.5 million people? A lot bigger than Belfast. So scale or situation?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: It's the situation. I never felt we were overwhelmed at the time, because during those heady days we were an army of liberation and, you know, my farewell was in a restaurant on the Shatt Al Basra, with a beating retreat performed by the mass pipes and drums of Seventh Armoured Brigade and I sailed off into the Shatt Al Arab. So we were welcomed: we could send out for pizza, we could get the kebabs delivered, I could go for a hair cut in town, I could go shopping. So okay, there were problems, but violence was not directed at us. Now

some would say, "Now had you imposed a tight rod of security in those early days you wouldn't have faced the bow wave of the insurgency that was created", but who knows.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Who knows, yes. Last question before we move on to your time as MND South East. You left in April, I think it was, after the fighting?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I left in May.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: May, and you had a new commander coming in. Was that a good moment to hand over? This is about this continuity of --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes. Well, mindful that I was supposed to hand over in December, and I was extended in order to go and fight the war and Adrian Bradshaw was in Jordan [REDACTED] and there was a discussion about whether I should hand over in December and let Adrian do it. In retrospect, it was not a good time to hand over. But I felt a moral obligation to get Adrian in as quickly as possible in order that he, from a personal point of view, had been to Iraq with Seven Brigade, so for the remainder of his tour he was part of the brigade. I think the bigger issue was not us handing over, it was the handover between Seven and 19 brigade and whether that was too rushed, whether we should have been handing over brigades not just Brigade Commander.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Last question and then I will pass on to Baroness Prashar, but you mentioned earlier on this morning that there were other capabilities you would have liked to have had, had you known before the start of the operation. For instance, is this ISTAR and things like that?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, the whole insurgents thing. What we lacked was the ability to apply precise fires and the

reason for that is because we couldn't find targets precisely and then we couldn't engage them precisely. So the whole precision fires and ISTAR.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] So I think, on the hoof, we built quite a sophisticated intelligence organization that was fit for purpose at the time

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and I thought it was extremely impressive.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, okay, thanks a lot. I think we need to move on in time now to MND South East.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask one question? Looting. Did you discuss your approach to looting with Northwood?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I didn't. I mean I would have discussed it with the GOC, so I didn't, no. This was -- I thought I had enough experience to make my own judgment about that and quite often, you know, Northwood cannot rule on these things. You know, you've got to trust the soldier to make the decision about whether or not to use lethal force, and he will tell you. He will decide whether he thinks it's appropriate to shoot somebody who has obviously suffered who is carrying away a bag of flour: it is not appropriate. He will decide whether it is appropriate to open fire on somebody raiding the bank, he might do that. So I don't think you can, in the early stages of a campaign like that, rely on looking back for advice because all you get is, well it depends on the circumstances.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, because of the way that we went into Basra and because of the assumptions about it beforehand, and

whether and how it would be taken, what interests me is whether or not there was a policy for what you do with Basra when you get it. You clearly were having to improvise quite a lot. Looting, as we saw, became a real problem, so one can imagine the tactical situation you faced and exactly how you described it, but in terms of the policy one can imagine something different: that it was very important to have curfews, to impose clear law and order early on and so on. But there was no sort of tactical plan for --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: No, I felt as though I had sufficient freedom of action and I didn't feel constrained by the absence of a policy. So if I had thought the right thing to do -- and I did think about imposing a curfew and if I thought the right thing to do was impose a curfew then I would have done it.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Okay, let's move on.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So we are fast-forwarding to 14 August 2007. Were you aware of the negotiations that were occurring with [JAM1]¹ before you arrived in Basra?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Would it be useful if I just took you through my thought process?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That would be very helpful.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Because I've got an extract from my notes at the time which really sort of -- and I've used it before -- which really sort of encapsulates what I thought on the day. May I just ...?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, please.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I may have tidied my thinking up in

the intervening years but what I thought, and these are the notes from my preparation was that it was no longer safe to assume that Iraq will survive as an entity and that in 2007 it was on the verge of fragmentation and collapse. I thought the outlook was increasingly bleak. I thought that the four years since 2003 had been largely unsuccessful in the south. I thought that the UK was becoming increasingly irrelevant and I thought at the time --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Irrelevant in the south or Iraq --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Iraq-wide. I thought the Iraqis were longing for foreigners to leave in 2007 and I thought -- and a lot of this was not my thinking, it was a combination of what I was told and the academic thinking at the time in the newspapers, but these are the notes I made. I thought that a western solution to a Middle East problem was destined to fail.

I thought -- and this was before I knew about reconciliation -- that only by engaging and seeking to reconcile leaders and organisations that possess some degree of credibility would there be any chance of a solution and that solution would be political and we would find it and we would meet it in Iraq. I thought that the academic community were doom-laden about the chance of success and one of them told me that the Iraqis were seeking to strike all infidel masses and kill them and warned me that if people started talking about the twelfth Imam then we should take heed. I thought that security was declining, violence was increasing and there would be no improvements to public services in those four years. In the UK, the mood was that people were asking was it worth the blood and treasure of us being in Iraq in 2007. So that was my mindset.

Tactically I thought we were engaged in a difficult fight,

¹ The UK's interlocutor within the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) is referred to as [JAM1] to preserve his anonymity.

that we were doing great things, that we were conducting successful strike operations, that we were interning large numbers, that our detention facility was full, but almost every time we resupplied, the price just to deliver the bread and water there was a death, and that our impact outside the immediate confines of our bases was limited and we had become focused on force protection and trying to break the bones of this amoeba that was called JAM was difficult, if not impossible. I thought that the Iraqi army and police were standing by and watching us get killed, I thought that the rate of casualties was amongst the highest in Iraq and that self-protection and administration was consuming us. I thought the time for the UK was running out. I thought, in any counter-insurgency, patience is key and I thought that the UK in Iraq had lost its patience with Iraq and we were turning to other things like Afghanistan, so I thought I was running out of time. So those were my thoughts.

I hadn't really applied that thinking to what I was going to do about it and, as I said in my first session, the direction I got was to transition, to take risks on transition, but I had only just heard in passing about General Shaw's initiative to engage with the opposition. So that was my thinking and those were the circumstances when I arrived on 14 August. Jonathan Shaw said to me -- he outlined the nature of the deal that he had made, he said that it had great potential --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So he told you when you got to Basra?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: When I got to Basra.² [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

² The witness explained how the accommodation was presented to him on his arrival in Basra.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But I had no better idea -- set against all the background I've just explained, I couldn't think of a better idea. So I stepped into it rather than stepped back from it and I thought it was precisely the right thing to do.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What was your understanding of the objective of negotiations?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I think at the time we had a rather grand ambition for the negotiations, ranging from separating the extremist elements from the biddable element of JAM to cause a fraction between what we were describing as the special groups and the mainstream of the Shia militia; a grand ambition. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We had ambitions to engage in political dialogue; we had ambitions to restart reconstruction.

They were grand ambitions, but in my own mind I thought, "Well, even if we just go a month without any British casualties

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and we draw down our profile, even if we have a month of no casualties, then we will have changed the conditions and we might have done something to have changed the mindset back here and we might have bought ourselves some breathing space just to rethink our strategy". So I was prepared to have nothing -- I was prepared for what I thought was rather inevitable, that this would break down at some stage, so I mentally prepared for that,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were quite comfortable?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I was comfortable. Now, I may have been one of the few and I suspect the further away you got from myself and Jonathan Shaw, the more uncomfortable people were about this, and I mean the two of us. I mean I think back here in London there were people who were deeply uncomfortable with this and the further you got away from Basra, the more uncomfortable people got with the nature of the deal. But you had to live it and if you were receiving 30 rocket attacks every day on to your base and if you were having to go to numerous repatriation ceremonies, as Jonathan did, then it shapes your thinking.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was there discomfort in London? You say the further you got from Basra -- is that what you are saying?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I had a conversation with the Secretary of State when he visited, just the two of us, and he said, "I'm entirely comfortable with this, I know exactly what's going to happen and I'm comfortable carrying the risk". But I think, you know, I think there were people in outer offices who wanted -- not unreasonably, they wanted to mitigate that risk. But once I knew that the principals -- the chief of joint operations, DCDS Ops, the Secretary of State, General Odierno, Petraeus, the Ambassador -- that's all that mattered, really, if I had that support then I could drive this process forward. Then the Chief of Joint Operations said, "Look, there will be some rocky events in this process, but just keep it on the rails", because the results were quite astounding: overnight we went from 30 attacks a day on our bases to almost zero and that endured for six months and during my six months, we didn't lose a soldier to enemy action. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So that was -- the political risk -- the first risk was to the domestic population of staying and at the end it was departing because we changed the landscape. Now, people may be uncomfortable with how we did it but the fact is that I think it set us up for another rocky event which was Charge of the Knights. But my view -- and I wasn't around during Charge of the Knights obviously, but my view is that the accommodation got us to the stage where the Iraqis took responsibility for the security of Basra and they wouldn't have done that if the violence had still been at an unacceptable level.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: A long answer, I'm sorry.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: No, that was good thank you. Rod?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had you really not been told about this before you actually arrived?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I hadn't been told the detail. CJO mentioned -- mindful of the security classification at the time, the CJO mentioned to me that there was a process of engagement with [JAM1] and that when I deployed Jonathan Shaw would brief me on it and then the CJO would want me to take a view on whether I was comfortable with the process.

I suppose, thinking further back from it, during my reconnaissance in February, I remember Jonathan Shaw and I having a conversation, because he had reached the same view about the situation, that really we ought to start engaging in dialogue and are we doing that and he said, "Yes, don't worry, I've done some thinking", and so we left it between about February, the conversation with CJO in June and then the detailed brief on the situation in August.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?³

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I didn't feel rushed --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: -- as you know, because I mean I have maybe overplayed that out a bit, I mean that was a fact, but it was an instant decision, know, it was, "I'm so pleased that I have got something, I've got a plan around which we can conduct action". I mean, I was just absolutely delighted with it. So in many ways I was very, very relieved that this had gone to the stage that it then had, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So I'm not surprised, no, and in retrospect I don't wish that I had had more notice

³ With reference to specific issues, Sir Roderic asked the witness whether he thought that he had been properly briefed on developments.

political dialogue, so that the Consul General, who had had no contact with local politicians I think in the previous six months, could restart a dialogue again. The only way that dialogue could start was if the politicians came out to our base at the airport. They wouldn't come out to our base if it was being rocketed and therefore as soon as the rocketing stopped political dialogue started.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And you had at this point a Consul General who had the skills and the inclination to do that, because there was an uneven quality of consuls generally?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I can only comment on the one that was there at the time and as soon as the window opened, he was straight in there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Who was he, can you remind me?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Richard Jones.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, okay.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: So I mean another long-winded answer but this was -- you know, we were thinking on our feet here. Now, in retrospect, I said, "Well, look, we've done this before, surely, negotiated with terrorists, surely somebody could give me some advice on negotiations", and I didn't get any, so we were thinking on our feet about this process of negotiation. We were just trying to come up with a policy and all the while we were being asked, "Well, what's your strategy when [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?" I said, "Well, I haven't got one at the moment, we've just got to see how this process goes".

But I will give you some examples of where I thought it was particularly useful. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE:

[REDACTED]

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, yes, sorry, yes, you are right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you tell us about that?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You also had a timetable. We wanted to make the move and this was also linked into a transition to PIC, although it didn't actually coincide in the end.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, what I tried to do was keep the negotiations going in order to achieve all of those things inside the negotiating window. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The next thing was convincing the Iraqis and Americans to go to Provincial Iraqi Control and I thought it would be inconceivable to go to Provincial Iraqi Control if there had been a huge upsurge in violence, so I really, really pressed to get it done before Christmas, because also I was conscious that at some stage we would lose the real negotiating lever, which was [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What determined the timing of the move, the precise timing of the move, from the Palace to the COB? It was very soon after you arrived.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, so it was an operation that had been planned -- the early stages of the plan had been done, the logistic drawn down had been done by the time I got there. The decision on the timing was mine. The constraint on the timing was the ability of the Palace Protection Force to do a relief in place to guard the Palace, so we had to raise, train, sustain, deploy and mentor a Palace Protection Force sufficient that then Mohan would say to me, "Okay, I'm now happy now to assume security of the Palace". Once he said that, then I was happy to conduct the withdrawal.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you needed to ensure that the ceasefire negotiated and the deal would cover that period and go beyond it?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And so the time you actually negotiated was what period for this?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I wasn't conscious -- I mean I think, from memory, we came out of the Palace at the end of the September, was it, so I wasn't conscious of tying the deal to the negotiations. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So I'm not sure I'm answering the question, but I hadn't linked the precise timing of the relocation from the Palace with the accommodation --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Basically it wasn't a fixed timescale of sort of 30 days and then we go back to --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: No, no.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Can I ask just one more question and then I think we are going to take a short coffee break, just to bring the next stage of the story up to date. You talked about the process of seeking permission from back home, through submissions and so on, and in your post-operational tour report you commented that it had been hugely frustrating to you that you had not been trusted with delegated authority and that decisions were taken in London by those least able to keep track of the events. Was that what you were referring to: having to at each stage submit back home and wait for several days, rather than being able to just get on with this thing and be told, "Well, you are responsible for the outcome, make the decisions on the spot"?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I'm wiser now and I think in

that report I was just expressing the natural frustrations of somebody who is really trying to make the process work, living with the consequences of failure, and just being frustrated by what I thought was a risk averse culture back here. But I'm wiser and I'm probably now grateful that there was oversight and that somebody back here had taken responsibility and had been properly briefed. But at the time, as a field commander, I was frustrated by what I perceived to be a lack of delegated authority.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So if you had been back here now you would be insisting that you did have these decisions referred back to you?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I think so, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Could we have done more to speed up the chain of decision-making?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, yes, I mean that's the issue. I mean decisions happen quickly when you get decision-makers talking to each other. When you put a staff in between you add friction, because there is a need to cover all the bases in case there is a supplementary question that comes out and if you give people cause not to make a decision because you haven't briefed them on every eventuality, then they will take that option of not making a decision. So I think in some of the submissions they were overly detailed. I thought that it was unnecessary here for people to know [REDACTED]

Why do you need to know [REDACTED]? [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Just trust me [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I need to tell you that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and we have to answer for this, but I think it was the level of detail that was frustrating

me and then the process of submissions, you know. What was driving this process was not the negotiations on the ground, but it was the need to submit, to get it into a minister, to get it cleared, and then which minister? You know, this couldn't -- people were telling me, "This can't go to a duty minister, you know, this has to go to somebody who has read into it".

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So if you were doing it again you would seek to streamline the decision-making process, using real-time communications so that instead of waiting three days you could get it through in 12 hours or 24 at the most?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: That's it, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And have one person taking the decision rather than it passing from pillar to post?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: You will have heard it before, but Brian Burridge described it as submission command.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you've stepped back a bit from the --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: But I've stepped back from the raw feelings that were there, I mean because I recognise now that I benefited by having political top cover for these decisions.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay, thanks.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's break for no more than five minutes, okay?

(A short break)

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's restart. Rod, back to you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You expressed your conviction that this was the right thing to do. Did we in fact have any alternatives, if we had wanted to reassert our control over the security that had slipped away from us during the years of insurgency? Was there an option of reinforcing or would that not have been feasible?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, it depends who "we" are.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We, the UK.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: In August 2007, I think we believed that we had surged, we believed that SINBAD was a surge of sorts, that we had done what we could in Basra at the time, and my view was that the only tactical alternative was to -- there were two alternatives. We could have stood and fought. We could have continued to do strike operations at the rate that 19 Brigade were doing them, we could have done that. We would have just had to endure, so we could have endured, we could have hunkered down and we could have just taken it and waited for some form of Iraq-wide impact of the surge that the Americans were conducting. Had we done nothing and just endured it's possible that Muqtada Al Sadr's ceasefire announcement would have had an impact in the south as well and it is possible that the surge -- not having solved the problem, but the US surge having solved the problem in Baghdad, then the US corps commander's attention would have then turned to his strategy for Shia and the south and that could have resulted in corps level reinforcement, as eventually happened during the Charge of the Knights.

Other alternatives. We could have increased our engagement with the Iraqis. We could have stood alongside them and mentored them and we could have increased --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That would have required more troops to be brought in?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Not necessarily more, but troops of a different nature. It would have required more infantry to do that, because mentoring is rank heavy. So troops of a different nature.

So those are the range of alternatives. Now, of those, what ran through my mind in August 2007, well, SINBAD, we had tried

SINBAD, we tried both the strike operations for SINBAD and reconstruction and it had worked to a degree but it was a -- the US Corps was not about to switch his attention from Baghdad. This campaign was not going to be won in Basra, it was going to be won in Baghdad and the US surged to sort out Baghdad and Anbar and my direction, or the feeling I got from General Odierno was that he was content for the south -- as long as it was quiet, that it didn't have to divert any attention away from, as a Corps Commander, Baghdad. So he was relatively sanguine: he knew that he would have to come down or divert the corps assets eventually but he was loath to do it whilst he was still fighting a battle in Baghdad.

The Corps were interested in how we would solve Basra because they had a similar problem in Sadr City. Sadr City is about the size of Basra with a similar number of Shia in it living in similar conditions and what might have worked in Basra could have worked in Sadr City as well.

So I didn't think there were any realistic alternatives.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: This was obviously a fragile arrangement: it worked but it could have broken down. If it had, would you have had the capacity to reintervene or would you have needed support from a pretty reluctant corps level in Baghdad?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I didn't really define what "reintervention" meant, because it implies that we were intervening in the first place in 2007 and we weren't. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we were not conducting any joint operations with the Iraqi security forces. The limit of our interventions in Basra were strike operations [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So we could have conducted strike operations, we had the capacity to do that, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So I knew I could intervene to conduct strike operations. I wasn't conducting any operations with the Iraqis and the only other thing we were doing was guarding our bases, and we didn't have those bases anymore, so I didn't need the capacity to do that at the Palace. Did I have the capacity to go back and reoccupy the Palace? Yes, at a stretch, but it never really crossed my mind because I was so glad to get out of it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: One bit of kit you mentioned in your earlier public evidence that you would have liked to have had ideally would have been more attack helicopters, but you said you hadn't formally requested them and I think the impression you gave was that any request wouldn't have been likely to have succeeded, presumably because the Apaches were deployed in Afghanistan. That's correct, is it?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: That was my understanding at the time. I do remember having a conversation with the Joint Helicopter Commander who said that the priority was Afghanistan and we just have enough operational to sustain Afghanistan, so ...

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So that was one constraint on you. Another constraint obviously was the need to have Iraqi consent all the way through. Now you were obtaining this mainly through your relationship with General Mohan. Where did General Jalil come into this?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Jalil and Mohan were a double act. They were both military people, one just happened to run the police and the other one happened to run the army.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Mohan [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] is a political animal, you know, his roots are in Baghdad, he is quite well-connected, he used to go up there every weekend, he had a route into the Prime Minister's office [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and Jalil was more of a soldier's soldier really.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But Mohan's route into the Prime Minister's office presumably was pretty important because otherwise Maliki could put a stop to this anyway?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, yes. I think it was important to keep Mohan on side.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And PR was a constraint? All of this was done with a lot of secrecy. If it had all been blown in public would that have messed things up from your point of view?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I think it would have messed things up in the early stages. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. There was speculation in the US press that this was happening anyway and [REDACTED] in the UK press and I

think I was asked by Panorama and Channel 4 [REDACTED] about, "Well you are doing a deal, aren't you?" you know, I was asked a direct question. So the press in theatre knew that something was going on. The term "accommodation" was out there. Difficult not to, when I had to stand in front of soldiers and explain what was going on [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. So the term "accommodation" was on the streets. So I expected that the press knew about it and there was speculation, but they never got to the details and [JAM1]'s name was kept out of the press which I thought was important. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Sorry, and there was one other thing. I think Paul Newton was engaged by Petraeus then, Graeme Lamb as well, to begin the process -- or the process of reconciliation in Anbar had started and I think there was even a question to Paul Newton about, "Are you talking to terrorists?"

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Paul Newton would be?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: He was the two star general in Baghdad who ran the reconciliation cell that was set up by General Lamb and then Newton came in and then Hughes. I think Newton said, "Yes, of course we are talking to people with blood on their hands, you know, why wouldn't we?"

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Martin, over to you.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could turn in more detail to the American aspect and the American side.

When you arrived, had Petraeus already signed off on the negotiations?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: He knew about it, yes. I think

Jonathan Shaw had to go and convince him personally that this was the right thing to do [REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In your post-operational tour report, you say that although you had the support of Odierno, you felt that at a lower level the US was finding it more difficult to come to terms with the notion that --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well I think it was counter-cultural. The whole notion that you should negotiate was just not ingrained in the psyche of US officers in perhaps the way that it is in the Brits [REDACTED] So there was the cultural aspect.

Then they had some real concerns, you know, they were asking, "How does this end?" And I was unable to reassure them that this would end successfully really. So they were asking me some very sensible questions. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was your direct reaction?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, because I believed it was the right thing to do and because it had General Petraeus's support then the key thing was to keep their support and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So it didn't really affect the wider US/UK relations?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I think it probably did. But I'm not an expert on what's happening in Baghdad. I mean it was --

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did you get a sense?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What visibility did Maliki have in terms of what we were doing?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I am told - and I was reassured at the time - that Prime Minister Maliki is aware of this. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So I

think there was general comfort that this was okay.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Excuse me, when you finish I want to do a quick supplementary.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes. Did he explicitly, as far as you know, sign off on the deal?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Not explicitly. That was a matter for the ambassador. I didn't have to submit to him.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My last question really was what were the Mohan/Jalil relations with regard to this?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. So there were frictions but they were never significant.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just a quick supplementary if I may, General.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you, that's fine. Lawrence?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Really following on from that. The price of this deal was that the Sadrists, JAM -- whatever groups came under that heading -- were in control in Basra and that was, in a sense, the perception you were having to deal with that was coming from the [REDACTED] and so on?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, yes, that was the perception. The fact is that they were in control way before we started this.

The militias controlled their areas of Basra with relative impunity and the only time that we were able to hit back against them was when we conducted precise strike operations and then we came out and they were back in control. So we would conduct pin pricks but we could never impact their control on places like the Shia flats in Basra. So I rejected the claim that, you know, we had left the Sadrists in control: they were in control anyway.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That in itself was conceding a point about what had happened with MND South East previously, that for some time you had really been unable to --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: But the thinking was that foreigners would never -- we would never reassert control. The only people that would reassert control would be the Iraqi security forces because they would have the people behind them. So we had to get to a position where the Iraqi security forces were in command and help them reassert control.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But at the time in September, the Iraqi security forces were not particularly able to reassert control?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: No they were not.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, yes, that's fair.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So can you just give us some sense, then, of the relations with the city? I mean how much did you have an idea of what was going on? I mean you have given us some indications before in terms of the intelligence.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I mean I have a couple of friends who I met in 2003 who I had maintained contact with

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] so you get a range of views. For the majority, life was still the same, it had been bad and nothing had changed. The militias were in control, we had left the Palace and militias were still in control. I asked one of my friends, I said, "What's it like now?" and he said, "It's bad, but it's a lot better since you left". What he meant by that is that we were not conducting strike operations into the Shia flats night after night, and this was bad because there was always a gun fight and there would be civilians injured in the fighting, and that was not happening anymore. So that's what he meant by "better since you left". So I think, you know, you got a range of views. There was also some articles in the press about the murder of women after we left, but we could find no evidence that the murder rate had gone up after we left.

The place still functioned. Electricity was still bad, but it hadn't got any worse. There was food in the markets. You know, this was a dysfunctional city that continued to function in a dysfunctional way, so it didn't get any worse as a result of leaving. So it was pragmatism really. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I was continuously asked, "What's the atmospherics in Basra?". Well, the only way we had of knowing was to get our intelligence sources, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We had UAVs, but we can't get atmospherics.

We employed polling companies to go downtown and ask what it was like and of course we would ask the politicians and the police and others and people -- we had 1,000 Iraqis working on the base and we would ask them what's it like. So that's how you gathered atmospherics. But they would tell you what you wanted to hear really and we would interpret it in a way that suited us,

I suspect, as well. So it was really difficult to maintain a situational awareness and, I have to be honest, I wasn't that interested in knowing, you know, providing it was quiet. I was consumed by keeping this process alive and I was consumed by the requirement to get to Provincial Iraqi Control and that filled almost all of my day just keeping the process going and convincing the Iraqis and convincing the Americans that the right step was to go to Provincial Iraqi Control because it wouldn't get any better and you had to go to Provincial Iraqi Control whilst the negotiations were still going on, and we just made it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Provincial Iraqi control of Basra at that time was not really the case, I mean, if we use the word "control" literally.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, you are right, it was Provincial Iraqi Command. They had notional command, but they were not in control. So when we went on 16 December -- I think it was important to send a signal to the population -- this is what I thought at the time -- that we were no longer an army of occupation. That's what Provincial Iraqi Control did, it restored sovereignty back to the Iraqi security forces, it put us in a supporting role. So I think it was an important milestone, but in terms of the security on the ground and the degree of control exerted, I think there was probably more tolerance to the Iraqi security forces once they were in control. So they got the support of the population perhaps in a way that they didn't when we were alongside them.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But initially it was more a question of us stepping back rather than them stepping forward?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: We stepped back before they were ready to step up.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And just part of that relates to this whole question of embedding, and we've already had some discussion on it and you made the point that you need quite senior people working very closely. Was the nature of the negotiations going to make it difficult for us to embed forces directly with the Iraqis because that meant we would be going back into the city?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes possibly, possibly. Yes, I think that's a fair comment. I would have been reluctant to have -- I never faced the question, but I think I would have been reluctant to have had soldiers going back in and mentoring alongside Iraqis at a time when we were conducting negotiations [REDACTED] It would have sent the wrong signal, so I wouldn't have been minded to put forward a case to do that. The mood didn't seem right then to do that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Again, I mean this goes back to something you have inherited. The question of embedding was one that might have been taken some time earlier.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Some time earlier, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Because when we did embed it had a better effect --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Exactly, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- than the Americans would possibly.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I think that's true. You might argue that had we embedded at an earlier stage we wouldn't have faced the circumstances that we faced in 2007.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That was really the question I was getting at.

Just to conclude, one or two questions first. You've

mentioned getting people in -- contractors into the children's hospital. Presumably that was a priority, but was there anything else you could do in terms of reconstruction?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So we resourced a number of projects in the Shia flats. We put the roof back on a mosque and we made great store of opening a thing called the Jameat market. Having demolished the police station we rebuilt a market there. So by getting the Jameat market restarted we were trying to demonstrate that we were more than just about doing strike operations; that we were enabling reconstruction. But it was pin pricks, you know, it was more to build consent and employ people and demonstrate intent rather than a huge reconstruction effort. So we tried to do that, and some projects were restarted, but the most visible one was restarting the Basra Children's Hospital.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So essentially what you are trying to do over this period is give clear signals about where things are going without being able to get the whole way --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: The other thing was the importance of the political dialogue, the importance of the Consul General reengaging in politics and the Iraqis reengaging in politics and the political parties -- you know, the council met again in our air station and I think that was really important. I think there was a political agreement signed in early December as well which was a precursor to Provincial Iraqi Control with all the political parties. In advance of going to Provincial Iraqi Control all the political parties signed a memo that was drafted by the Consul General and his staff committing their support to the Iraqi security forces. That would not have happened had we

not been able to re-engage in the dialogue.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yet over this period there was planning going on for what became the Charge of the Knights and Maliki must have started to be thinking that he doesn't really like what's going on in Basra. So in the early months of 2008 before you leave, how aware were you of the Baghdad/Basra tensions and how might this be resolved?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I was aware that Mohan kept getting called -- because he was now in charge. Mohan kept being called to Baghdad and being told, "You've got to retake the city". We would engage with the planning and we would provide him with a background briefing as to how he should do it, the force that was required to do it, the timing for it, that kind of thing, all to say, "You don't want to do it now, you want to push it further back because you are not ready to do it yet". But he talked openly to us about a battle to come to retake the city.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you knew that the issue was there, but your view was that they just weren't ready for it?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, they weren't ready for it up until -- well they weren't ready for it full stop. They certainly weren't ready in January or February and he knew they weren't ready. We hadn't generated the whole of 14 Division. We had no reinforcements. They had operated well in Baghdad, but these were Basrawis and would they fight their own people? Would they fight in the Shia districts? That was the question and we hadn't tried them.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But given that this was an issue that had to be addressed at some point, what would have been your timescale at the time? Within 2008 or would it have taken longer?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I admit that I didn't think adequately enough about the timescale. I suppose at the time I was so relieved to have got to the point of PIC and put them in charge that we had only just -- once Mohan had got the hang of the fact that he was in charge, we only started on the process of what being in charge actually meant in January and February and my focus in January and February was to begin conducting joint operations again with the Iraqis and we would do that on the border and we conducted a limited number of counter-smuggling operations on the Shatt Al Arab in order to get them the confidence (a) in us, (b) that we would support them, and (c) build up confidence in the Iraqi security forces. I thought we could take little bites and then get to a point where these people were confident enough to do something else.

Now I hadn't in my own mind put a timescale on it. I knew that I didn't want to do it during my time and I had since heard people discuss, "Well, you know, we were thinking more of the autumn", but I don't remember coming to that conclusion. I just thought no time soon, just take it in little bites.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally, looking back, what long-term impact do you think your negotiations, or the negotiations, with JAM had?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: You know, in my own mind I could produce a tidy solution and say, well, Charge of the Knights wouldn't have happened unless we got to PIC -- well, we wouldn't have left Iraq in March 2009 or whenever it was unless Charge of the Knights had happened. We wouldn't have got to Charge of the Knights without Provincial Iraqi Control. We wouldn't have got to Provincial Iraqi Control without the impact of the violence reducing. We couldn't have reduced the violence without the negotiations. So mentally I can tidy all of that up.

But I didn't see the light at the end of this tunnel when I embarked upon it. So I can now very lucidly articulate a strategic vision from the other end of the tunnel and explain why I embarked upon this process, but as I described at the beginning I didn't see an alternative. This was the best of a number of bad options at the time and I didn't believe I had another option in August 2007.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks very much.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Hindsight is wonderful. We are very aware of that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is a very good example of strategy: the best strategies are clearer after they are over than when they start.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: A couple of questions about equipment and resources. In your post-operational tour report you said that you did not feel the conditions were right for the draw down of forces. Did you make it known to your chain of command that that's the way you felt?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I felt there was pressure to draw down in Iraq in order that we could rebalance to Afghanistan. I felt that pressure prior to deploying; I felt it in August 2007. Indeed, a lot of planning had been done to rear-base a lot of our logistics. We got the helicopters back, established the Kuwait support facility, all of that kind of thing, in order to rebalance.

I remember that people were talking about a headline figure of 2,000: you've got to get it below 2,000. I think the argument was that overall the army had got to get to a steady state that it could supply 2,000 in Iraq and whatever was required in Afghanistan at the time. So 2,000 was the figure, get it under

2,000. Well when we did the work, 2,000 just didn't add up. It would have been pointless being there, because all you can do with 2,000 people is guard yourself and if all you can do is guard yourself, well, why be there, other than the political statement of the fact that we were there. So militarily I couldn't make a case for 2,000. I remember having this conversation with the ambassador and he was saying, "Well, look, the danger is if you push for anything more than 2,000 it will go to zero because we won't be able to sustain any more than 2,000, so people will take the option to withdraw", and that would have been a bad thing.

So we did the work and I think I put in my post-operational report that I'm optimistic that things in Iraq could be a little bit better now than when they started and I cannot recommend drawing down to 2,000 and 4,000 feels right. But that was not popular because there was a drive to get down to 2,000. So it was all about numbers and I then said, "There are ways you can get round the numbers if we employ contractors more". You can actually get the military headcount down if you are prepared to take more risk with contractors.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The numbers remained at 4,000 in 2008 --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: But I think that was on the back of Charge of the Knights. You couldn't -- I still think there was a drive. When I left, people were still talking about 2,000 and then Charge of the Knights came along and it was a totally different argument. We had to reinforce in order to sustain Charge of the Knights.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But in your public hearing you said that you felt that you were well equipped. Is there anything you would like to add on equipment that you found you couldn't say during the public inquiry?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I mean I mentioned attack helicopters as a way of precision fires. No, I think by that stage in 2007 we were well equipped. I mean you are never as well equipped as you would, in an ideal world, like to be and sometimes you don't know what equipment is out there until you ask the questions. But I didn't feel as though equipment was a constraint in 2007. We had what we needed to do to do the job.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So resources and equipment didn't actually affect your ability to operate?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I didn't feel that. I didn't feel that there was a constraint. I had the vehicles, I had the weapons, I didn't have attack helicopters. There were other bits and pieces that I now know were deployed to Afghanistan that perhaps I wished we had -- more UAVs, that kind of thing -- but that's hindsight. At the time I didn't feel as though I was constrained.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Finally, are there any lessons, particularly in respect to the negotiations with JAM, that you would like to offer to us?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I think we've got to get smarter at the business of negotiation.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can you expand that a bit?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well I think we were just amateurs in negotiating. I think there is a whole strand of -- you know, why didn't I have a trained negotiator there? You know, these people exist, why didn't I have somebody giving me advice on negotiating strategy? I think that would have been a real bonus. So negotiations, I think that would be the big point.

I suppose the other thing that I felt was inadequate at the time was I really didn't have a cultural understanding of Arabs

and Iraqis. So I needed a cultural adviser and I didn't have a cultural adviser. So those two things would have helped me personally to understand things better.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But in your public hearing you paid tribute to the civilian interface. Were they not providing you with the insights into the culture and so on?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, to the degree that they could. I think I mentioned that the Consul General had a very good cultural adviser who was able to travel throughout the city. But an adviser is a personal relationship, I wanted a personal relationship with a cultural adviser, somebody who I could just have a dialogue with, who could sit in my meetings, who could help me with negotiating strategies and that kind of thing. That's what I was really interested in. So those two things would be of support to a commander.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Okay, thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You said a little earlier that you were pleased you actually had political cover for the negotiation at the highest level, but it wasn't being offered in the sense of help with the political aspect of the process that was going on?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: In theatre, I felt I was, the Consul General --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I suppose I imagine further up the chain --

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: The ambassador was helpful. So from the Foreign Office point of view ...

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just as a matter of curiosity, when you were in the negotiating process [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?
MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Important you shouldn't?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: It's striking how the negotiation process with [JAM1] and the JAM was a mixed military and political one. You mentioned much earlier about Pristina, which was I think similar -- though all run very different -- but lessons not carried from that body of experience into Basra in 2008? They were just not available to you?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: I think that's the case, yes. It would have been really good to have been able to reach back to somebody or something or -- I don't know, the literature may have been there and it may have been our fault that we didn't find it, but it wasn't available to us readily.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: So looking ahead, lessons learned, when there is a body of experience that needs to be made available and articulated, those situations will repeat itself exactly?

MAJOR GENERAL BINNS: I think so, yes. Well not exactly, but we should be more agile in -- well firstly in learning the lessons and then being able to apply them to future campaigns.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: This is a very general question before I close, but we've heard that the US military either was, or at

any rate became, in the course of the Iraq operations a learning organisation, it taught itself.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Is the British army sufficiently so?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well I've got a lot of respect for the US army, I served with them for two years, I think they are a learning organisation, I think they did learn very quickly, but you learn as quick as the bloke leading them is prepared to adapt the organisation and in General Petraeus they had somebody who was prepared to drive the force forward to learn. What we didn't have in theatre was that degree of ownership of the campaign.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Am I right, not because of personalities but because of the places and command structure?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: That's right, we had nobody driving forward the campaign in theatre and the learning. But I do think it's wrong to say that we are not -- we are a learning organisation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The whole business of responding to indirect fire, we were the market leaders. Many of the ideas for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were our ideas by bright young things taking ideas up to Baghdad. The whole notion of reconciliation was our idea, not in Basra but elsewhere throughout Iraq. The way we conducted surgical strike operations using straight line infantry battalions was unique. We were doing things that Special Forces -- well, using Special Forces. So there were many things that we were doing well.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The last question from me. Any comment about the [REDACTED] Special Forces/regular military interaction and cooperation?

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Well, my observations from Basra

were that the interaction was extremely good, but [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] So maybe Basra gives a sort of
different view, but I was entirely comfortable with that
SF/regular [REDACTED] relationship.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Okay, thank you very much.

In closing, can I just draw attention to the fact that the transcript will have to be read here, for review whenever you like. If, on reviewing it, there is something that you think you might have wished to put in you can always put in a written note in supplement. So do do that if you want to.

Otherwise, I will declare this session closed, with thanks to you.

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS: Thank you.

(The session closed)