

1 (10.15 am)

2 RT HON DR JOHN REID

3 THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning again ladies and gentlemen and
4 good morning, Dr Reid.

5 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Good morning, Sir John.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: In this session we are hearing from the
7 Rt Hon John Reid MP former Secretary of State for
8 Defence and the objective of this session is to examine
9 key discussions and decisions taken on Iraq and their
10 implementation within the Ministry of Defence and the
11 government during his period as Secretary of State for
12 Defence and also wider reflections on the Iraq
13 experience. But the session is directly concerned with
14 the period May 2005 until May 2006, when Dr Reid had
15 this direct responsibility.

16 Two things I say at the start of every bit of
17 hearing: we recognise that witnesses are giving evidence
18 based in part on their recollection of events, and we
19 can cross-check what we hear against the papers, and
20 I remind every witness that they will later be asked to
21 sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the
22 evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

23 I wonder, Dr Reid, if we could begin by taking your
24 sense of the situation in Iraq when you took office and
25 what the strategy was to cope with the situation as it

1 was.

2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, I became Secretary of State
3 in May 2005 and it is always difficult to distinguish
4 between the decisions and conclusions you are reaching
5 because of hindsight and how you felt at the time. So
6 I have done the Committee the courtesy of trying to go
7 back through some of the notes at the time and,
8 objectively, looking back, it was a fairly critical
9 period. I won't use the word "crossroads" but there had
10 been a conventional war, which had lasted six days, and
11 in terms of conventional war gone very well. It was the
12 next six years which were to prove difficult, and we
13 were about two or three years into that with all of the
14 problems of post-conflict planning that your Committee
15 has already discussed.

16 There had been a number of elements to which you could
17 refer, I suppose, as progress. First of all, on the
18 steps forward, there had been elections some four
19 months before I came in, with a high turnout. So there
20 had been, if you like, an advance on the democratic
21 credentials, established in extremely difficult
22 circumstances. There had been a beginning of
23 post-conflict training on the security side of the Iraqi
24 security forces. There had been some degree of
25 restitution of infrastructure and so on. Having said

1 all that, the politics were very slow moving, because,
2 after the January elections there was a sort of
3 interregnum period during which very little happened
4 apart from canvassing for who might form part of the new
5 transitional regime. There was a four month delay.

6 On the post-conflict reconstruction, some of the
7 areas that obviously hadn't been looked at in the
8 attention -- with the attention that they ought to have
9 been, were becoming obvious. The nature of the
10 shattered infrastructure, that had perhaps been
11 underestimated -- I don't just mean physically, I mean
12 in terms of skills -- was becoming obvious and the
13 disbandment of the bureaucracy and the self-disbandment,
14 I suppose, of the army, meant that along with the
15 political interregnum, there was a sort of social and
16 structural vacuum. And then there were ethnic tensions
17 which all had developed.

18 So in that sense, there was, contextually, the
19 beginnings of a vacuum into which various forces were
20 either entering or being sucked, in internationally or
21 locally. So that is the local context in which we found
22 ourselves having to set our military and security
23 priorities.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Could you say something of the flavour of
25 that situation in terms of risks, possible risk, even of

1 strategic failure, possible prospect of eventual success
2 but reduced as against our original aspiration?

3 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I think, on reflection, it was
4 a critical period for that, because there was growing
5 tension between the ethnic groups into which was
6 injected a degree of violence during this period,
7 suicide bombers, the beginning of IEDs, which was awful
8 but wasn't mindless, because much of it was
9 intentionally directed towards causing a provocation,
10 a backlash from the Shia.

11 Samarra, I suppose, was the perfect example of that,
12 and, therefore, there was a genuine possibility that
13 this could get to the extent of not just sectarian
14 killing but potentially a civil war.

15 Indeed, I think one of the reports I read from the
16 military in Basra was from a commanding officer there
17 who was complaining that elements of the British press
18 were almost salivating at the prospect of a civil war,
19 so often did they repeat the assertion that it was
20 there.

21 Now, it didn't get to that, thankfully. There was
22 widespread sectarian violence, but there was a degree of
23 resilience and maturity, already built up within the ISF
24 and within the political establishment and to some
25 extent the religious establishment.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: With Ayatollah Sistani, for example?

2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Sistani in particular, yes,

3 I think, but I think there were also some elements among the
4 Sunni themselves.

5 But to directly answer your question, yes, this was
6 a period during which the strategic direction of what
7 was happening could have -- in retrospect, looking at
8 it - could have gone one way or the other; and of course,
9 I suppose, just to briefly mention, this is in terms of
10 the global context that Sir Roderic raised during the last
11 discussion, where there were the two elements of threat
12 out there, globally, which was the intention to commit
13 damage and human murder on an untrammelled and
14 unconstrained scale, which was evident after 9/11, and
15 over in this corner the capability to do that through
16 biological and chemical weaponry; and, in a globalised
17 world, the prospect of proliferation, of one coming to
18 meet the other.

19 So it was a very difficult situation tactically,
20 operationally, within Iraq, and indeed strategically,
21 Sir John.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'm not sure whether it is simply
23 a matter of semantics, but, had the coalition, by the
24 time you took office in May 2005 -- was it recognised
25 that there was more than sectarian conflict going on,

1 but, rather, there was a genuine insurgency which has
2 a different military significance, I suppose?

3 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, I think there were two -- if
4 I could call them burgeoning - realisations. One was that
5 although there were different elements to the security
6 situation - there was basically criminality, there was
7 disorder, and the third one was terrorism/insurgency - but
8 there was a degree of coherence to this which was more
9 than just individual acts of terrorism; that there was
10 indeed an insurgency.

11 The second realisation which I think was growing
12 during that period, including, not unimportantly, in the
13 United States, was a recognition that, having pulled
14 down the pillars, this was not going to rise again, this
15 state, like some phoenix from the ashes; that there had
16 to be a far greater degree of intervention from the
17 coalition, both in security and politics, including
18 outreaching to the Sunni, because that cross-related, of
19 course, to the insurgency.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, thank you. I would like to ask one or
21 two questions about the British military objectives and
22 strategy and how you saw it at that time, in the sense
23 that we were heavily engaged militarily, actively,
24 operationally in the south, but we also had a role
25 across Iraq as a whole. We had the deputy commander of

1 the whole show. It was an American chain of command,
2 essentially.

3 The question really is: on which foot does one lean
4 more heavily, the operational commitment in the south or
5 the total responsibility with its very heavy American
6 dominance, but which we couldn't, as it were, just
7 ignore or be ignorant of? Could you say something about
8 that?

9 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: If you are asking for my point of
10 view, as Secretary of State, how did I see the various
11 levers here, well, it was horses for courses. The
12 Senior British Military Representative in Baghdad was
13 also the deputy commander of the coalition forces, but
14 it wasn't actually an operational role, and, therefore,
15 whether it was Brims or Rob Fry later on, that was an
16 influence into the strategic thinking of the coalition
17 on an Iraqi-wide basis when it came.
18 But that commander didn't actually
19 command anything. The commander was actually sitting in
20 Basra; and, therefore, Jonathon Riley or Cooper or
21 whoever, that was the person who was commanding the
22 British troops there, and, therefore, that was the one,
23 the person to whom you would speak and give weekly
24 reports -- I actually got weekly reports from both -- in
25 terms of how the British troops were doing. He was also

1 the person that you would discuss the tasks that we had
2 to do, and I mentioned the three tasks earlier, which
3 were the framework security, within which you then had
4 a further subdivision on criminality, order and
5 insurgency, counterinsurgency.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, we have heard from a number of witnesses
7 that, ultimately, looking at the whole coalition task,
8 project responsibility, it was Baghdad and the centre
9 that really mattered, but, on the other hand, we had, if
10 not exclusive, at any rate very much the leading role
11 and responsibility, for the south-east.

12 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Admittedly, it was a multinational thing, but
14 we were dominant. Again, it is the same question,
15 I suppose: how did one balance those two interests, two
16 responsibilities? For example, would you have a direct
17 interlocutory relationship with the Secretary of Defence
18 in Washington?

19 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: With Donald Rumsfeld?

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

21 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes. I would meet Rumsfeld
22 occasionally. I would meet him either in Washington,
23 I would meet him at NATO. I think I met him once in
24 Singapore. We would speak on the telephone, quite
25 often meet Condoleezza Rice and various other United States

1 interlocutors. That's why I said I think that there was
2 a growing recognition that, where they had started from,
3 which is, "We don't do state building", had been
4 inadequate. I might offer you an opinion on that which
5 you may or may not agree with, Sir John.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: We need to listen to it.

7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I have listened carefully to the
8 contributors, the witnesses that you have interviewed,
9 some of them much more learned and experienced than I am
10 in some of these specialist areas, and they have spoken
11 about the reasons why they believe the United States did
12 or did not fail to prepare for the post-conflict era,
13 and they have seen it in terms of personalities,
14 arguments, discrete departments, power struggles and
15 turf wars - all the things that we are familiar with in
16 Whitehall, but perhaps with a multiplier on it.

17 I think you cannot truly appreciate the
18 United States' approach to this without also recognising
19 the legacy and the inherited culture of American
20 military doctrine from Vietnam onwards; because between
21 1975 and 1991 the United States took a view, as a result
22 of Vietnam, soldiers are not going to get dragged into
23 supporting political structures again. We are not going
24 to do low intensity. We are not going to do nation
25 building, we are not going to do nation propping-up

1 because of the failures of Vietnam. And the terrible
2 mistake, I think, was not to recognise that Iraq was not
3 Vietnam. Afghanistan is not a Vietnam.

4 In Vietnam, they were faced with a national liberation
5 struggle and so on. However, the inheritance of that
6 was " American soldiers fight on the battlefield." That's
7 what they did in 1991 - " We are not going to Baghdad. We
8 are going to fight in the battlefield and stay away
9 from it; we don't do nation building, we don't get
10 involved in politics."

11 Some of the guys who came in to Iraq, Tommy Franks
12 and so on, came from a Vietnamese war background where they
13 had that. I think that, unless we just reflect on that
14 legacy of American military doctrine, we won't fully
15 understand why they weren't too keen, in advance, on
16 detailed nation building. Of course, there were other
17 things - the CPA reduction of the bureaucracy, the
18 de-Ba'athisation programme, the disbandment of the army -
19 but I do think that an understanding of where they were
20 coming from helps us to realise why they got to where
21 they were.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: I would very much like to follow up with two
23 questions on that. One is we have heard from a number
24 of witnesses, including military ones, that the
25 Americans learned that big lesson really quite quickly.

1 They did turn around over two or three short years.
2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Absolutely. I think they have
3 learned it. I think they are better at learning than we
4 are. I think they are better, if I might say so, at
5 critical self-assessment than we are. I think they do
6 that in a way which, in this country, is turned into
7 a stick to batter everyone with. In the United States
8 they do it to truly learn lessons, and in
9 counter-insurgency I think they came from behind us.
10 I think they are now ahead of us. I think we could
11 learn a lot from the way the Americans are now
12 approaching this.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That leads neatly into what was
14 my second and perhaps my last question.

15 Looking at our responsibility in the south, we
16 thought, when we went in, accepting the responsibility
17 for the south-east box, the civil as well as military
18 responsibility, we knew how to deal with situations like
19 that, very strong legacy for us, quite unlike Vietnam,
20 of success in Northern Ireland and other places. We
21 thought we knew how to do it. Did we overestimate our
22 powers, our capability?

23 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I think we missed the paradox at
24 the centre of it, and this paradox I would put this way:
25 our objectives there were to help the Iraqis develop

1 their own democratic sovereignty, their own security
2 forces and their own economy. When you are helping
3 someone to develop their democratic and sovereign
4 authority, every inch you go is an inch less in your
5 power, and, therefore, if you wanted to tackle some of
6 the problems of security in Basra, increasingly you had
7 to recognise that the Basra provincial government and
8 the central government had more and more power. But you
9 don't develop a perfect democracy; or you don't develop
10 it, even here, after hundreds of years, so you certainly
11 weren't going to develop it there after two or three
12 years. So the democratic institutions that are
13 developing centrally in Baghdad and locally in Basra
14 have connections, politically, in sectarian terms, in
15 ethnic terms and sometimes in criminal terms, with the
16 people who are causing your security problem.

17 So the longer you go on, the first problem you have got
18 is the connections between the burgeoning power that you
19 are seeking to develop and the security problem that you
20 are seeking to resolve.

21 The second problem is the normal one, the longer you
22 go on, as a visiting force of soldiers in any country, the
23 less the tolerance is, unless people can see very rapid
24 social advances And, of course, they couldn't, not
25 least because the insurgency was undermining them.

1 So those two circular paradoxes I think didn't
2 really apply in many of the other cases from which we
3 drew our experience. I think we quickly developed our
4 operational concept. I think we learned. But I think the
5 Americans learned quicker and faster and better than us,
6 and hopefully it is one of the things that will come out
7 of this Inquiry, Sir John.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I would like to turn to
9 Sir Roderic Lyne to pursue the question. Just before
10 I do, I can't resist -- I have learned a military phrase
11 in the course of these hearings about "the enemy has
12 a vote when you engage with an enemy". It is also true,
13 your paradox, your would-be friends have a vote, and you
14 can't ignore that.

15 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Probably the best military phrase
16 is, "No plan survives the first contact with the enemy",
17 and we found that out in every war we fought and this is
18 another example of it.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Sir Roderic?

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Critical self-assessment is probably the
21 best description we have heard of what this Inquiry is
22 trying to do and, as you say, not only is Iraq not
23 Vietnam, but it is also not Northern Ireland, it is not
24 Malaysia, it is not the UK.

25 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Absolutely.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I just want to ask you a couple of quick
2 questions about the transition and force levels.

3 When you took up your post as Secretary of State in
4 May 2005, Ja'afari's transitional government had just
5 been sworn in about the day before.

6 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What, at that point, were we planning to
8 do in terms of timelines for transition to Iraqi control
9 and what then happened in your period as Secretary of
10 State to these timelines?

11 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: You are right, the first -- the
12 interim transitional government, Ja'afari had taken power
13 the day before I came in And Maliki of the final
14 government took power, I think, the day after I left.
15 So perhaps that was the problem in the middle here
16 because things started to move before I came and
17 afterwards.

18 The timeline which was -- and remember at this stage
19 we are acting under the United Nations Security Council
20 Resolution 1546, which not only endorses our presence
21 there at the invitation of the Iraqi Interim Government
22 but also sets down an endorsement of the timeline
23 programme - from memory, it was January 2005, before
24 I came in, the election of the -- correct me if my
25 terminology is wrong here, but there are so many names

1 given to the various stages. I think that was the
2 Interim Transitional Government. It wasn't actually --
3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was Transitional, the Interim had been
4 the one before. We went Interim, Transitional and then
5 finally Maliki. So the Transitional government elected
6 January --
7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: January. It takes four months, as
8 you said, for Ja'afari to be actually appointed. The
9 next stage was 15 August from memory, which was the
10 scheduled date to have a referendum on the constitution,
11 I think as the next date -- and there had to be an
12 Assembly of people brought together, hopefully
13 inclusively with the Sunni, in order to achieve that.
14 The next date is around December, when you get the
15 final elections for the government. That was the
16 scheduled date. I think the referendum actually
17 slipped by about three or four weeks.
18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: 15 October was the referendum on the
19 constitution.
20 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Seven or eight weeks.
21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The national election was 15 December.
22 So what did that do to your timelines for
23 transition, and, indeed, for drawing down the troops?
24 Because force levels, when you arrived, were around
25 8,000, and obviously we were looking to reduce these and

1 make the transition. How was that affected by what
2 happened in Iraq, both in the political calendar there
3 and also the security situation on the ground?

4 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It wasn't really affected by the
5 political calendar, and indeed, I would go so far as to
6 say it wasn't really affected by any calendar. Of course
7 we have an indicative timescale in our heads, we know
8 what we would like to achieve, but the important thing
9 is -- and every single person from the President down
10 said and certainly on every conceivable occasion I said it--
11 this will be a condition-based withdrawal. We are there
12 as long as we are needed and not one hour longer. And
13 when I did a press conference here with the
14 Prime Minister Ja'afari, when he visited the country, he
15 was asked about six times by a journalist, a very
16 persistent journalist:

17 "Do you want the British there?"

18 He answered, I think five or six times, "We need the
19 British there", and I intervened to say, "And we are
20 only there as long as he needs us, and as soon as that
21 is finished, we will go".

22 How did we judge when we were needed? We judged
23 when we were needed - and when we were no longer needed -
24 when the Iraqi Government themselves decided that they
25 had sufficient security forces in terms of numbers and

1 capability to allow us to go.

2 Was that an ad hoc process? No, it was a rational
3 process. A committee was established in order to judge
4 the criteria. The criteria were set down to judge the
5 capability and numbers of the Iraqi forces. And it was
6 also a staged criteria.

7 So it went in four stages from an Iraqi partnership
8 with us - called assistance to the Iraqi security forces -
9 to tactical overwatch, which was their ability to do
10 certain tactical things with our assistance; to
11 operational overwatch, which was a greater degree of
12 autonomy; to strategic overwatch. Once they had reached
13 strategic overwatch, and, therefore, they could,
14 virtually on their own - they probably needed some
15 intelligence support, they probably needed some
16 strategic headquarters support - but at that stage, we
17 would leave, not before it. And at that stage it would
18 be a joint decision between us and the Iraqi Government
19 themselves. So it was not a time-driven or a timetable
20 politically-driven phenomenon.

21 Of course, one of the things we had to do in order
22 to achieve those conditions was to train up the Iraqi
23 security forces, but we also -- and we were most
24 insistent on this, and that is why, similarly, when we
25 came to consider Afghanistan, that you may want to speak

1 to me about later, I was most insistent that we, and I had
2 an assurance that involving ourselves in the south of
3 Afghanistan would not require us to draw down in Iraq,
4 and I think in a document that was declassified this
5 morning, you will see that I got that assurance.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think Sir Martin want to get on to that
7 in a couple of minutes' time. If I can just stick with
8 the drawdown, on the criteria you have just described,
9 by March 2006, you were able to announce that there
10 would be a small reduction in our forces from just over
11 8,000 to about 7,200, which was going to take effect
12 in May.

13 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But at the time you did that, the
15 security situation down in MND (South East) was getting
16 worse and the training was proving -- the training of
17 Iraqi security forces, including police, was turning out
18 to be a pretty slow process. So how were you able to
19 announce that reduction at that time?

20 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I haven't got the figures here, so
21 I'll talk from memory.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is not the numbers that are important,
23 it is the process that we are trying to explore.

24 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It is not the process either, it is
25 the substance.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Let me just deal with the

3 substance. First of all, after Samarra, which I take it

4 is your reference to the situation getting worse in the

5 aftermath, it was not the judgment of the British

6 commanders on the ground that the situation had got

7 worse. Indeed, the interesting, though again apparently

8 paradoxical thing, is that the response and reports

9 from people on the ground re the Samarra incident, was

10 that it had illustrated, not the fragility, but the

11 maturity and depth of both the Iraqi security forces,

12 politicians and the religious leaders; and I mean, I was

13 interested to read the reports at the time. Perhaps

14 I can just give you a flavour of what was said at the

15 time.

16 This is -- this one here is, I think, from DOP(I),

17 from the Defence and Overseas Policy. This was briefed

18 to me by the Ministry of Defence, that:

19 "The destruction of the Golden Mosque in Samarra two

20 weeks ago was calculated to trigger a massive emotional

21 and violent reaction --"

22 THE CHAIRMAN: I'm so sorry, could you speak a little more

23 slowly for the quote, for the transcript?

24 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I beg your pardon. The combination

25 of the speed and the accent is probably causing the

1 problem.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We are getting pretty used to the accent,
3 it is the speed.

4 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: "The destruction of the Golden
5 Mosque in Samarra two weeks ago was calculated to
6 trigger a massive emotional and violent reaction and to
7 move the country into civil war. Civil war is not
8 either imminent or inevitable. There remains a danger
9 that sectarian violence could escalate, but the
10 assessments I have received point to commendable
11 restraint on the part of religious and political leaders
12 and to an impressively mature response by the Iraqi
13 security forces across Iraq."

14 Now, that was my summation, but you will want,
15 yourselves, to look at what was being said from the
16 commanders on the ground, and I can assure you, from
17 what I have seen, this is what was being said: Sistani,
18 the religious leaders, the political leaders, and indeed
19 the Iraqi security forces, did not allow themselves to
20 be provoked into a major spike in violence at that
21 stage.

22 The second thing is the drawdown from 8,000 to
23 7,200, I think, from memory, was not done for any other
24 reasons than the fact that, one, some of the security
25 sector reform tasks that we had been doing could now be

1 done by the Iraqis themselves. Specifically, they were
2 now guarding their own barracks, they had their own
3 trainers, whom we had trained, and had efficiencies
4 brought about, not least in the logistics and
5 engineering side.

6 So just as the year before we had increased the
7 troop numbers, from 8,000 to 8,500 at one stage in
8 order -- I think that's the figures -- in order to carry
9 out the security sector reform tasks and training, so
10 now, when some of those were completed, we were able to
11 reduce from 8,000 to 7,200. We had made that decision.

12 Then Samarra happened. We then said: what is the
13 effect of Samarra? The immediate response was showing
14 the maturity, strength and resilience of the Iraqi
15 political and security establishment, even at this
16 inchoate stage, and that is why we went ahead with it.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: During your time as Secretary of State,
18 the MoD took over responsibility for the police
19 training. It already obviously had the lead
20 responsibility on the army training in Iraq. But we
21 have heard from other witnesses that there were
22 essentially two problems with the police training.

23 One was that it was difficult to get enough police
24 trainers out from the UK, and the other described to us
25 was a question as to whether we were training on the

1 right model of police force for Iraq, whether we weren't
2 using the model of the British bobby, where the Italian
3 Carabinieri might have been more appropriate.

4 What was your sense of that at the time, that MoD
5 became responsible for police training, and did you
6 indeed feel that your department was the right
7 department to have to lead on police training, in an
8 overseas country, when obviously it was somebody else's
9 business in the UK?

10 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, I didn't go looking for the
11 lead on police training, Sir Roderic. The
12 Prime Minister was kind enough to give me the
13 opportunity to deal with it, although I think
14 technically, it always stayed with the Foreign Office.

15 The second thing is, whoever said that there were
16 two problems associated with the training of the Iraqi
17 police was a master of understatement.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm summarising the evidence we have had,
19 which went into quite a lot of detail.

20 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: One of the first things I did was
21 ask a policeman in whom I had tremendous respect,
22 Ronnie Flanagan, to go and give me his assessment -- his
23 interim assessment. I might just point to one or two
24 things he said. He said:

25 "There was no single national blueprint for the

1 security sector reform."

2 He said:

3 "There was insufficient attention being paid to the
4 need to prepare the Iraqi police for
5 counter-insurgency."

6 He said:

7 "The organisation for the police had a sub-optimal
8 intelligence function. The Ministry of the Interior was
9 insufficiently robust for rooting out undesirable
10 elements", and so on and so forth.

11 To which you might add sectarianism. For 30 years it had
12 been largely ignored by Saddam Hussein. He had other
13 methods of dispensing what passed for justice.
14 Criminality, political connections and a Ministry of the
15 Interior, which its critics would have said was rather
16 sectarian in its own approach. You will remember that
17 at one stage there was a basement full of prisoners
18 found in Baghdad.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So I think we need to make a distinction
20 between the state of the police, which obviously
21 Ronnie Flanagan was describing like that, and which
22 other witnesses have described very much in those terms,
23 and the task that those responsible for the training,
24 how they carried it out, how they improved it from this
25 pretty difficult baseline.

1 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I was coming on to that, because,
2 again, there are far more than two. First of all, it
3 was fragmented, the training. Some people were trained
4 outside the country in Jordan. Some people were
5 trained, I think, in Baghdad. Some people were
6 contractors. Some people were ad hoc brought across.
7 The Italians were training, I think in Dhi Qar, because
8 they have Carabinieri, and some of them were British
9 bobbies, I think, a very limited number, but that's
10 hardly the sort of training you need when you come out
11 of the position that Iraq was in.

12 The big lesson I think in this -- and I may come
13 back to this at the end if you allow me -- we have
14 a desperate need to have an integrated surge capacity
15 to deploy, not just military but civilian skills; right
16 across the range; and one of most important in
17 preventing conflicts or in post-conflict reconstructions
18 precisely Sir Roderic as you say, the training of
19 police.

20 This is not just an operational difficulty. I think
21 it is probably true that, whenever you come out of
22 a conflict of this nature, the last body to be accepted
23 by communities as being reformed is the police. Witness
24 the fact we are still arguing about the devolution of
25 law and order to Northern Ireland. Witness the fact

1 that in Bosnia, even when the three ethnic groups had
2 an army made up of regiments of the Serbs, the Croats
3 and the Bosniaks themselves, they still couldn't agree
4 on policing.

5 So it is a very difficult problem, because it is the
6 people at the end of the street with lethality, and the
7 people living in the street with long memories and long
8 histories. So it is particularly problematic and it is
9 particularly short of resources for training because
10 there are not many nations, particularly in western
11 Europe, that have a paramilitary style police force.

12 There are some French Gendarmerie, there are the
13 Carabinieri and there were the RUC. But there is
14 a desperate need to have that skill as part of a deployable
15 skills base for a post-conflict or even conflict
16 prevention purposes, along with plumbers, electricians
17 and so on, but we may come on to post-conflict later on.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Right, let's turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman.
20 Lawrence?

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just following up where Sir Roderic
22 was taking us with those interesting questions, we had
23 very particular problems, didn't we, in Basra, with the
24 police and the militias, in particular the incident at
25 the Jamiat police station in which two British

1 servicemen were taken hostage and released
2 in September 2005.

3 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What impact did that have on the
5 ability of British forces to influence the security
6 situation in Basra?

7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, because of the action we
8 took, the Basra Council, or elements within it, didn't
9 like it and they broke off relationships with us for
10 a period of time. I think that was unfortunate, but, on
11 the other hand, I think that the protection of the two
12 British soldiers who were taken prisoner was of absolute
13 paramount concern, certainly to me and to the chiefs and
14 the commanding officer.

15 You may remember what happened here is that two
16 British special forces in plain clothes, monitoring as
17 part of the counter-insurgency operations, I think, were
18 approached by two men who appeared to be not only
19 wearing but brandishing guns, I think. I can't remember
20 the exact details, but certainly there was a gunfight.
21 The two British were then taken to a police station.
22 That was worrying enough, given some of the elements
23 that we believed were present in the Iraqi police
24 service in Basra, but then we discovered during
25 negotiations, when we had sent some armoured vehicles --

1 do you remember the pictures in which somebody threw
2 some form of petrol bomb, I think, and the pictures of
3 the young soldiers who behaved very bravely with great
4 courage coming out in the midst of 200 or 300
5 protesters?

6 They were surrounding the police station and then we
7 discovered that the two soldiers had been moved and they
8 had been taken away by one of the sectarian gangs it
9 appeared, and at that stage we authorised activity with
10 the purpose of getting them back, quite frankly. And we
11 did, and we did it in a fairly robust fashion and the
12 Provincial Council in Basra withdrew its cooperation.

13 This wasn't an unusual thing. The
14 Provincial Councils in the four provinces of
15 MND (South East) from time to time would withdraw. So
16 it had unfortunate consequences, but I do not think,
17 quite frankly, we had any alternative.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In the circumstances in which you
19 found yourself, that's probably true, but it was sort of
20 symptomatic of the position that we were now in, that
21 our forces had to put as much effort into looking after
22 themselves as being able to do very much for the local
23 people in Basra.

24 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I think that's right. As I said,
25 increasingly, as the Iraqi establishment and

1 institutions became more and more powerful, and we had
2 to recognise that, it became more and more difficult for
3 us to operate without them. Certainly my memory is --
4 my recollection throughout that period is, if you wanted to
5 carry out activity, it wasn't a straightforward matter
6 getting the support via the central or the local
7 government.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In a sense we were often caught in
9 the middle between them.

10 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Pardon?

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We were caught in the middle between
12 the central and the local government.

13 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Not so much caught in the middle,
14 it is that the central government had political
15 connections in the south, because the south was a big --
16 in Basra it was a big Shia area, the Shia were the
17 majority, therefore, they tended to have, you know, more
18 of the ministerial posts including their own area.
19 Though, to be fair, the Ministry of Defence was Dulaimi,
20 a Sunni, originally, but the Ministry of the Interior
21 which controlled the police tended to be
22 Shia-controlled.

23 That had connections in Basra and in Basra they had
24 connections with political groupings, and, obviously,
25 within the Shia, there were also some paramilitary

1 groupings and sectarian groupings. So some of these
2 people were the people that you were trying to arrest
3 for reasons of criminality or security or whatever, but
4 they were connected politically; and, therefore, when
5 you wanted to move, increasingly you had to have some
6 form of agreement and partnership in Basra and the other
7 provinces and it wasn't always straightforward to get
8 that.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That goes back to what a number of
10 witnesses have told us about the real problem was
11 politics, was moving the political situation amongst the
12 Iraqis forward so that they would be prepared to take on
13 the militias and be much more ready to accept the
14 dangers of criminality in key ministries and so on.

15 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Absolutely. The key to this was
16 the recognition that, ultimately, not only was it our
17 strategy to give the Iraqis sovereign control and the
18 means of defending that, but it was also our exit
19 strategy, because, ultimately, nobody could defeat the
20 insurgents and the terrorists other than the Iraqis
21 themselves.

22 We could hold the fort, but, ultimately, it is the
23 politics of this that comes through, and although there
24 is no template you can take from one place to another,
25 the truth of the matter is that force, military force,

1 has to quote Rupert Smith, "no utility unless it is in
2 the accomplishment of political objectives".

3 So whether it is Northern Ireland or whether it is
4 Iraq, the soldiers hold the fort for us to try and find
5 the political solutions and the political solution in
6 Iraq was in the hands of the development and emergence
7 of a democratic Iraqi Government themselves.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I now want to move on to the
9 question of funding, with which I'm sure you spent quite
10 a bit of time as Secretary of State. By the time you
11 became Secretary of State, we had been in Iraq for over
12 two years.

13 Can you explain the impact that that two years of
14 intense operations had had on defence funding?

15 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, it was very draining.

16 However, unlike almost every other department, the
17 Ministry of Defence budget, which is granted -- you can
18 argue whether it is high enough or low enough, but at
19 the end of the day -- and this will -- it always seem
20 incomprehensible to people outside the
21 Ministry of Defence -- all of that money that you give
22 doesn't actually finance you to fight a war. All that
23 does is maintain the power to fight a conflict.

24 There are three elements of that power. The first is the
25 planning, which is the people that you pay for to think

1 through strategy, tactics, operational concepts,
2 doctrine and so on. The second is the physical one,
3 which is the physical resources and so on; and the third one,
4 which is far more difficult to define, but actually
5 I think, for this Committee, is worth, in your
6 consideration, later thinking about it, is the question
7 of morale - and whether or not it is possible to sustain
8 a conflict in western democracies in the way that might
9 have been the case before 24-hour-a-day media and so on.
10 Certainly our enemies don't think it is.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to come back to that later.

12 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Okay, so those three things, are,
13 if you like, static forces, but then, when you go into
14 a conflict, you have an application for extra money and
15 urgent operational requirements and all the discussions
16 that you had with Geoff Hoon. And I think the cost to us
17 of this extra was of the area of £1.1 billion per annum. I'll
18 stand corrected if somebody has different figures, but
19 I think it is around £1.1 billion per annum, and that
20 was given to us from the Treasury in order to fight this
21 particular conflict.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we have heard a lot about the way
23 that the money for actually fighting the war was
24 protected and the role of UORs. One of the consequences
25 of UORs is that you may take on equipment to deal with

1 an operational setting but once that equipment has been
2 procured, it is part of your normal kit. So it still
3 has longer-term implications and will have to come out
4 of the rest of your defence budget. So that's another
5 part of the sort of gradual squeeze?

6 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, I wouldn't disagree with that.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I interject? You are also using up
8 your existing materiel at a much faster rate, if you are
9 fighting a campaign, aren't you? Your tanks are doing
10 higher mileage --

11 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: You are, absolutely -- although, the
12 key here, I think, is balance. I mean, I had the --
13 I had the privilege of working under George Robertson
14 when we did the Strategic Defence Review. I think
15 probably we got the direction right, but the rate of
16 change dreadfully wrong. It just went faster than we
17 ever thought.

18 But one of the things I discovered there was that,
19 when, in 1997 -- and it bears exactly on this point --
20 we asked the Ministry of Defence how much money they had
21 tied up in capital -- I don't mean in big ships, I mean
22 spares and so on: (a) they didn't know, because it was
23 before we went on to resource-based accountancy, and you
24 didn't have to know that; and, secondly, when we found
25 out, it was of the order, from memory, of

1 16 billion pounds. 8 billion of that I think was arms
2 and weaponry, ammunitions, which you may think you would
3 have on the stock, but the other 8 billion pounds which
4 was tied up, nobody quite knew what these bits and
5 pieces were for, at the end of the day.

6 So there is a fine balance to be achieved between
7 tying up masses in case something happens for every
8 contingency, and ordering everything at the last moment,
9 and then finding you have got a stock of stuff which is
10 counted among your assets. I think the point that
11 was -- you know, it comes into your baseline budget
12 which is the point I think Sir Lawrence was making.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You just mentioned your role in the
14 Strategic Defence Review as Minister of State, and we
15 have just heard from Sir Kevin Tebbit his concern that
16 it was probably underfunded. He said perhaps half
17 a billion, perhaps more. Was that your sense as well?

18 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I didn't actually deal with the
19 negotiations -- this is not a cop-out, but I didn't deal
20 with the negotiations on that. Indeed I may, by the
21 time this was all finalised, have left. They moved me
22 from Armed Forces Minister to be Minister of Transport
23 and called it promotion. I didn't quite see it that
24 way. They kept telling me I was going to the Cabinet.
25 I would much rather have stayed where I was and seen it

1 through.

2 It would have been tight, but I ask you to remember
3 where we were coming from, because, before the Labour
4 government came in. Some years before it was the
5 policy of the Labour Party to cut defence expenditure
6 by, I think it was 6 billion at one stage We
7 gradually changed that, so it became an additional
8 amount that we got.

9 It was a tough negotiation, because, if I remember
10 correctly, we had promised that we would keep to the
11 conservative spending limitation. But if there was
12 a diminution, it was as of nothing compared to the ten
13 years prior to us coming in as a government. I think if
14 you check you will find that there was a 29 per cent cut
15 in real terms in defence expenditure throughout the
16 1990s, including the so-called "Options for Change" which
17 destroyed our medical services, and I don't think we
18 have ever recovered from that since then.

19 So it would have been tight, but it was the
20 beginning of the end of the massive cuts that we had had
21 up to that stage, Sir Lawrence.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Those cuts were in part the result
23 of the end of the Cold War and a shift away from the big
24 war scenarios with which we had been preparing before,
25 but let's move on to your time as Secretary of State.

1 We have heard from Kevin Tebbit about the debates
2 that we had with the Treasury in 2002 to 2004. What
3 sort of debates were you having with the Treasury about
4 getting sufficient resources for your defence budget
5 more generally as well as for operations?

6 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, in the period during which
7 I was there, the two big considerations were Iraq, where
8 it was funded, and the preparations for the move to the
9 south in Afghanistan. Those were tough, but I have to
10 say -- I might be the only witness you have got who is
11 saying this -- that both the Secretary to the Treasury,
12 who subsequently became Defence Secretary, and the
13 Chancellor, who subsequently became Prime Minister, and
14 is Prime Minister now, gave us what we needed.

15 I insisted, for instance, on Helmand, on three
16 conditions, the first one of which was that the
17 configuration that was chosen by the Chiefs of Staff as
18 being necessary for the mission was funded in full by
19 the Treasury. And the then Chancellor, now
20 Prime Minister, provided that.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What about the defence budget as
22 a whole?

23 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I wasn't involved in negotiations.
24 You know, it works on a three-year cycle. So I didn't
25 find myself at the centre, during the period I was

1 there, of negotiations on the defence budget as a whole.
2 So you had better to ask others. I think probably
3 Geoff Hoon before me and John Hutton after me.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have had some discussions with
5 them. Did you get a sense within overall government
6 priorities where defence appeared at this time? Was
7 there a readiness to take a longer view of defence needs
8 and priorities?

9 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It is very subjective - not as high
10 as I would have wanted it to. I just believe that if
11 you are asking young men and women to do what we ask
12 them to do, even when they are not in conflict, they are
13 living in circumstances that most of us would not accept
14 living in. You know, abroad in difficult circumstances
15 and so on. So I have always felt that we ought to put
16 more towards that than we do. And it is true that we
17 have been increasing in real terms the amount of money
18 but we have been decreasing it as part of our national
19 expenditure, our GDP and we have also been increasing
20 what we ask them to do in terms of commitments. So
21 I suppose not as high as I would like it to be,
22 Sir Lawrence.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: During this period, there was a lot
24 of concern about -- the contract with the services in
25 terms of -- given what we were asking them to do, making

1 sure that they had decent housing --

2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Absolutely, the housing -- I have
3 to say the housing -- when I became Armed Forces
4 Minister, the housing was a disgrace and it is going to
5 take, I think it was 12 years to try and get it into
6 something decent. There was no Veterans Agency at all.
7 I established the Veterans Agency.

8 I can remember talking to staff at that time, the
9 families and forces organisation, and they felt
10 completely excluded. I had to insist we brought in the
11 Gulf war veterans, into the Ministry of Defence. For
12 some two years before it, they had not been allowed in.
13 You will remember the -- what we went through then in
14 trying to discover what exactly might have caused this
15 group of symptoms, and, incidentally, one of the big
16 worries was that it might have been chemical weapons
17 that Saddam had during the Gulf war; and just I mention
18 that because I know you have had lots of discussions
19 about whether it was rational in the run-up to the
20 second Iraq war -- whether it was rational to have the
21 view that perhaps he had chemical weapons.

22 I volunteer the view -- and I say this as
23 a historian - I think everyone else you have spoken to
24 has been a lawyer, almost without exception -- I find it
25 difficult, given what we knew about Iraq and the use of

1 the weapons and the discovery of them during the 1990s
2 and all the intelligence reports -- I find it difficult
3 to see how anybody could have come to any other
4 conclusion than that there were -- this guy had the
5 intention and the capability of having them.

6 Now, we haven't discovered them, I fully accept
7 that. But it is difficult to see how rationally we could't
8 come to that conclusion and certainly, with the Gulf
9 war veterans, one of the issues that the families were
10 interested in, it was a big worry that perhaps they had
11 been contaminated with it. So, yes, there were big
12 inadequacies and I don't think they have all been
13 remedied, Sir Lawrence.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that is a good time to break
15 because there are some equipment questions I want to
16 come on to.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Shall we break for ten or fifteen minutes?

18 May I observe, as we break, that there are no lawyers on
19 this panel and at least two historians.

20 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Thank you. Had this occurred to
21 you: Geoff Hoon, John Hutton, Des Browne, Tony Blair?

22 I mean, it is just (inaudible).

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We've noticed.

24 (11.14 am)

25 (Short break)

1 (11.24 am)

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Well, let's continue, if we may, where we
3 left off. Lawrence, I think you were in the middle --

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I wanted to quickly go through
5 issues of equipment. We heard from Sir Kevin Tebbit
6 earlier that, given the pressures on the defence budget
7 that there had been during this past decade, especially
8 these early years, and the need to fund operations and
9 so on, the thing that had suffered most, he said, had
10 been aspects of the equipment programme. Was that your
11 experience as well?

12 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I think so, and I don't think it
13 has gone away. Obviously, there are huge problems with
14 the present capital expenditure as well as recurrent
15 expenditure, so, yes, equipment, not just because there
16 are cuts, but equipment gets more and more expensive,
17 whether you are in the medical profession or in the
18 profession of conflict and war. The rate of inflation
19 is very high.

20 Secondly, it gets -- the cycle of improvement is
21 faster than ever before, because so much of it is now
22 involved with technology, and that's one of the reasons
23 that you get delays, incidentally, when people set
24 a specification. It was all right in the days when
25 there was a ten-year cycle of renewal of ideas. Now,

1 everything is changing so quickly that, by the time you
2 have actually got to the production process, the
3 technology has changed and the armed forces want the
4 best there is at any given point in time. So you change
5 the specs.

6 So yes, there is pressure all the time on the
7 budget, as there is in every department budget, but
8 particularly because of those things that I mentioned.

9 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I just interject to ask:
10 interoperability with the Americans means that the
11 Americans set the technological pace, I guess, which in
12 turn we simply have to react to, and that's expensive.

13 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It is expensive if you go to
14 operate in partnership with the United States. You have
15 to have systems that can speak to each other. On the
16 other hand, I think the Americans don't always share the
17 top technology, even with their closest allies. Indeed
18 they don't always share it even when their President is
19 telling them to share it.

20 In a democracy, unfortunately, even if the President
21 says, "These are our allies, give them this
22 information", you have a legal system and you have to
23 democratic system in the Senate and the House and so on
24 where they may say no and oppose the wishes of the
25 executive wing. That's, as you know, the way the

1 American Government is split up, because it was designed
2 as a system that wouldn't work.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was mentioned again by
4 Sir Kevin Tebbit this morning, I think in relation to
5 the joint strike fighter, in fact mentioned in relation
6 to Chinook.

7 Now, going back to questions that were also raised
8 this morning about our expected or hoped for influence
9 within the United States, how big an issue was this,
10 that on key elements of capability we just weren't
11 getting the support that we needed?

12 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, they didn't actually affect
13 the operations in Iraq or anywhere else. So I'm not
14 implying that they did, but, yes, it is a source of
15 irritation. I can't speak on Chinook as regards the
16 exchange of technology. I can speak on the joint strike
17 fighter, because it is something that I actually raised
18 at the highest level in the United States, as did the
19 Prime Minister.

20 The highest level in the United States, which was
21 the President and Donald Rumsfeld beneath him, to the
22 best of my knowledge, authorised that certain things be
23 shared that ultimately weren't shared. The reason is
24 that, as I said, you have got a legal system and you
25 have got a democratic system there that just can't be

1 ordered in the way it could be in dictatorial countries.
2 So ...
3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Or even in the United Kingdom. We
4 could share in the other direction possibly more easily
5 than they could share back.
6 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, their worry is never -- their
7 worry is genuinely not that they can't trust the
8 British; their worry is that, in the course of trade,
9 that we get things which are classified, we incorporate
10 them in something we are doing and we sell that to
11 someone else.
12 So it is a natural worry about the sell-on of highly
13 classified technology. So it is an irritant. I don't
14 think it is a strategic problem.
15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: On particular equipment -- we have
16 discussed quite a bit in these hearings helicopters, and
17 there has been this Public Account Committee report
18 in February 2005 about the alarming gap in the number of
19 helicopters and some evidence that this position had
20 been made worse by the discussions between the Ministry
21 and the Treasury in 2003/2004. What measures were you
22 taking to try to remedy this gap?
23 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: All right. The 2003/2004
24 decisions, which, as I understand it, meant there was
25 pressure to take money out of the budget, and it was the

1 general area of helicopters it came out of. That
2 actually doesn't feed through quickly. That's separate from the
3 Public Accounts Committee report in February 2005, which
4 points to the existing problems.

5 So there is such a lead time on helicopters that the
6 2003/2004 is interesting for the longer term, but
7 doesn't actually affect the period during which we are
8 discussing.

9 The Public Accounts Committee was a contemporaneous
10 analysis of needs at the time and they used figures
11 which varied, from memory, from 20 to 38 per cent. Actually
12 the figure -- I'm not diminishing it at all, the figure
13 in which we are probably interested is less than that,
14 because I think I'm correct in saying that, when it came
15 to support helicopters, battlefield helicopters, it
16 was 17 per cent, I think.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that's right.

18 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Okay, so if it was a 17 per cent
19 shortfall, obviously we had to do a number of things to
20 try and cope with that. One of them is to get people to
21 do more flying hours, which means that in terms of the
22 harmony rules, which are basically - for the uninitiated -
23 the rules which are the ideal in terms of care of your
24 servicemen and women, it means that the number of
25 people -- the proportion of pilots who would be

1 breaching that would increase.

2 I think throughout this period it probably increased
3 from about -- I'm talking very rough figures, maybe
4 5 per cent to 10 per cent, something like that, in terms
5 of the RAF. So the first thing is that would happen.
6 In Iraq, we also had some surge support from the north,
7 came down. We had a rigorous prioritisation of tasking
8 to make sure that we used them very efficiently. We had
9 a flexible use of helicopter types across tasks. And on
10 occasions we said no.

11 I mean, on all of these things, my benchmark is:
12 what are the views of the Chiefs of Staff? If you want
13 legal advice, you ask a lawyer, if you want to ask
14 about military decisions, you ask the Chiefs of Defence
15 Staff. And, therefore, when the United Nations, for
16 instance, would ask us for a helicopter use,
17 unfortunately at some stages we had to say no.

18 When the Foreign Office asked us, say, for
19 assistance in travel in Iraq, we had to say no as well.
20 I remember on one occasion a Conservative MP complained
21 to me in the House of Commons that there was a shortage
22 of helicopter hours there, and I only remarked to him
23 that part of the reason was MPs were flying about in
24 helicopters, including himself. So we tried to cut back
25 on that. So in the short-term we took a series of

1 measures of that nature.

2 However, when General Jackson went to Iraq, the
3 Chief of General Staff in, I think, the second half of
4 2005, the first six months I was in, he did say to me,
5 "Look, it is very tight over there in terms of
6 helicopters", and we instituted a sort of review of
7 that, and, as a result of that, or partly as a result of
8 that, we tried to find a way to get extra helicopters
9 without incurring the lead time that was necessary,
10 because, as you know, when you order a helicopter, it
11 can take, six, eight, ten years, in order for it to come
12 through.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Or even longer with the Chinooks.

14 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Indeed, even to refit. So what we
15 did is we discovered just after I left that the Danes
16 had ordered some helicopters some years before and we
17 did a deal with the Danes and they allowed us to take
18 their place in the queue, and we got six or seven there
19 and we also initiated a renewal programme for the
20 Chinooks that we had purchased some time before, I think
21 eight in number, which, for some bizarre reason, the
22 specification had never been appropriate to the task and
23 we had to refit that, but even that took a bit of time.

24 So there was -- I did look quite closely at this
25 and, indeed, on Afghanistan, when, if you are talking

1 about that later, I asked for a personal assurance from
2 the helicopter commander on the operations in
3 Afghanistan, that he was satisfied he had enough mission
4 hours to complete the mission he had been given, and the
5 answer then was yes. But, yes, you are right, it is
6 tight and tough.

7 Can I just make one point about Iraq, though? It
8 became increasingly a matter that I would look at and
9 the reason was this, that up until relatively near the
10 time that I came in as Secretary of State, first of all
11 there was a factor which continued, which is we were
12 involved in counter-insurgency which, in British
13 military doctrine, involved a lot of boots on the
14 ground, premium on the people on the ground, especially
15 in a place like Basra, because, if you are deploying
16 helicopters in those situations, it isn't always
17 commensurate with the sort of thing you are trying to
18 do, which is to win over hearts and minds and so on.

19 You only need to talk to some of the people in
20 Northern Ireland about what happened when Chinooks or
21 the helicopters were flying above them in places like
22 Armagh. It became a source of animosity.

23 So it wasn't as if helicopters were suitable for all
24 tasks. Secondly, up until relatively late, 2004, the
25 main threat to our troops was not coming from IEDs,

1 improvised explosive devices, bombs, with the shaped
2 charges and sophistications that became the big threat.
3 It was small arms fire, it was rocket-propelled
4 grenades, RPGs, and, therefore, there wasn't the
5 vulnerability in armoured vehicles that later became the
6 case. There wasn't the same level of vulnerability.

7 The third thing goes without saying, that,
8 tragically, even helicopters and air frames are no
9 guarantee of safety, and it is always the safety of
10 troops that are our primary concern. Tragically, the
11 biggest loss, I think, just before I came in was ten
12 people in a Hercules C130K aeroplane and the next
13 biggest, the day after I went, the day that Des Browne
14 took over, was a Lynx helicopter where I think five
15 people died. So between those two we had 15 tragic
16 death. I merely make the point. We were looking for
17 more helicopters, more helicopter hours, but that in
18 itself -- there is no guarantee of safety for the men
19 and women who are out there on the front line.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But it did mean there was a lot of
21 dependence on the quality of the land transport?

22 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It did.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A lot of casualties were taken as
24 the IEDs got more sophisticated with the Snatch
25 Land Rover.

1 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: That's right. You will know this
2 better than anyone, from the studies and the work that
3 you have done, that -- and it comes back to the cliché
4 which we used earlier, that "no plan survives first
5 contact with the enemy" -- there is a constant struggle
6 between the two sides, with one developing protective
7 measures for itself and the other trying to find ways to
8 ensure they could get through those protective measures.

9 What was happening here was that there was a degree
10 of sophistication which we assume came from Iranian
11 sources, possibly via Hezbollah in the nature of the
12 bombs and shape charges that were being used that were
13 making our armoured vehicles more vulnerable to these
14 than had previously been the case when we were using
15 rocket-propelled grenades or just guns.

16 Therefore, the Snatch Land Rovers which were, even
17 in 2009, assessed as being mission critical. I mean, we
18 need them for this type of counter-insurgency operation.
19 Nevertheless, we upgraded them, I think in
20 2005/2007/2008, but, because we needed something
21 heavier, we then developed out of an older vehicle,
22 reinforcements and so on. I think General Mike Walker
23 was talking about this the other day, the Bulldog was
24 one of them. Then Mastiff, a new armoured vehicle, and
25 then Vector, but none of these give the guarantee of

1 safety. That's why it takes a lot of brave men and
2 women to be at the front in these, but we did try to
3 upgrade and to get better and better armoured
4 protection, and we did try to get means of more flying
5 hours in helicopters in the short-term and more
6 helicopters in the long-term.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This illustrates the very demanding
8 requirements of an operation of this sort and one that
9 is enduring over some time. Was there ever any sense
10 through this period when you were Secretary of State
11 that it was going to be difficult to sustain this for
12 much longer, that the pressures were growing, or else
13 that a -- that what we could do in Iraq would have to be
14 cut back, because the risks -- the operational risks
15 would be too great to do much more?

16 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I don't think I ever lacked
17 confidence in our armed forces and I think, being as
18 self-critical as we are, that some of the criticisms are
19 unwarranted about the end in Basra, because, in my own
20 view -- but you will take your own view on this from
21 Des Browne and John Hutton - but in my own view, one of the
22 biggest obstacles to them doing that which they probably
23 wanted to do was the increasing political sovereignty of
24 the Iraqi Government itself. So I never lacked
25 confidence in them, from the Chiefs of Staff downwards.

1 I did recognise, however -- and probably from the
2 start -- that the exit strategy, ie the way you get out
3 of this, was by the build-up of the Iraqis themselves.
4 And what was difficult was to explain to the public
5 through elements of the press, who couldn't conceive of
6 a struggle, or a conflict that didn't end with
7 a victory parade on a given day, because they didn't
8 actually understand the nature of modern conflict, which
9 I'm sure will be one of the lessons that you will look
10 at.

11 You know, the idea that there wouldn't be a conflict
12 with a defined end on a defined day when somebody would
13 pull up a flag and all the insurgents would be dead and
14 we would declare the war over. The idea that that
15 wouldn't happen seemed inconceivable to some of the
16 people who were writing about this in this country and
17 it was one of the problems that we had, trying to
18 explain, "No, it is not that type of conflict".

19 So when a soldier said, quite properly in the
20 context of the new conflict, "Look, there is no victory
21 of that nature", we got all sorts of people writing,
22 "Oh, someone has admitted we are going to be defeated".

23 So the explanation of what it was we had to do,
24 which ultimately was to empower the Iraqis themselves to
25 fight the terrorists, the recognition that it wasn't

1 going to be a perfect world -- I think in a speech
2 I said, "We have to be honest with everyone. This is
3 not going to be Hampshire or New Hampshire," you know,
4 this is going to be Iraq and there may be continuing
5 insurgency or terrorists, but we will celebrate the fact
6 that the Iraqis themselves will be defending it with
7 their own armed forces under the control of
8 a democratically elected Iraqi Government."

9 In the long run, that's not only our exit strategy,
10 because they are doing it themselves, I believe in the
11 long run that will be the arbiter of whether or not we
12 look back and regard Iraq as a success; because if we do
13 have a largely Muslim, almost entirely Muslim, largely
14 Arabic, democratic government in that strategic area,
15 when the Islamist extremists are saying, "It isn't
16 possible. It is alien. These values are evil", that is
17 the strategic decision that in retrospect will
18 shape whether this war is a success or not a success.

19 So I never had any illusions or any lack of
20 confidence in our armed forces. We were tight in terms
21 of the military equipment, but, at the end of the day,
22 the people who would make the difference are the Iraqi
23 people themselves, and some day, some people will
24 actually ask them their opinion about whether or not
25 they wanted to stay with Saddam Hussein; or whether they

1 think they are better off, despite all of the sacrifices
2 that have been made. I would rather listen to them.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's an issue we are going to have
4 to address, but I think Sir Martin probably has only
5 questions now.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: Let's turn to Afghanistan. Can I just say
7 I wouldn't like any impression to be formed that this
8 Inquiry is extending its reach into Afghanistan per se.

9 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: You are keeping that for the next
10 one?

11 THE CHAIRMAN: But it is essentially relevant to our
12 Iraq Inquiry. So turning to you, Sir Martin.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Some ten months before you became
14 Secretary of State, the Prime Minister had announced
15 that the Allied Rapid Reaction Headquarters, the ARRC,
16 would be deployed to Afghanistan, and six months after
17 you became Secretary of State, the decision was made to
18 deploy into Helmand province.

19 Before we look at the Iraqi dimension of this
20 decision, we have heard mixed evidence about the reasons
21 for the subsequent deployment of Helmand and wonder if
22 you could tell us what you saw as the key drivers which
23 led us to take on this extra military commitment?

24 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Would it be helpful if I gave you
25 a sort of chronological audit trail? Because your

1 chronology isn't exactly correct and I think we ought to
2 get that correct first of all.

3 It is true that, as regards the ARRC deployment,
4 that's the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps Headquarters,
5 which, as Mike Walker said the other day was sitting
6 there without any items on its agenda, let's all agree
7 that that was fine and that was announced.

8 It is true that was announced on 29 June 2004 by
9 Prime Minister Blair standing beside Karzai in Istanbul,
10 and it was confirmed three days later by the
11 Prime Minister's official spokesman in his lobby
12 briefing.

13 However, it is also true that the decision to go to
14 Helmand doesn't exactly start in December 2005. It
15 starts in 2004. I think Mike Walker, General Walker,
16 alluded the other day to the fact that there was
17 a British battalion sitting somewhere between Kabul and
18 Mazar-e-Sharif, which I think he said wasn't living up
19 to the capabilities that the British could bring to this
20 intervention in Afghanistan.

21 During 2004, NATO was wondering how they would
22 accomplish the next step on the ISAF operation.
23 Basically, what had happened is they had decided --
24 there were two operations in Afghanistan. One was
25 called Enduring Freedom, it was the counter-terrorist,

1 anti-terrorist mission led by the Americans. This was
2 the one that went chasing people and trying to get into
3 the Bora Bora mountains and find Osama bin Laden and
4 shoot them up and kill them and so on. The other one
5 was the reconstruction mission, which was under NATO,
6 ISAF. Yes? They went to the north. They then decided
7 that they would go anti-clockwise round Afghanistan as they
8 were cleaned of terrorists. So they then went to the
9 west, and then they turned their mind, during 2004, as
10 to how and where they would go to the south. Right?
11 Those initial discussions took place during 2004.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Before you became Secretary of State?

13 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Before I became Secretary of State.

14 And in January 2005, before I became Secretary of State,
15 the Chiefs of Staff agreed that the then
16 Defence Secretary should reiterate the UK's support for
17 Afghanistan through the planned deployment of the ARRC
18 and indicate our willingness to refocus our military
19 effort from the north to the south; in January 2005.

20 In April 2005, which is the month before I became
21 Secretary of State, the Chiefs of Staff agreed to
22 preliminary operations from September. They agreed the
23 date - before I became Secretary of State - from September,
24 associated with the handover of UK activity in the
25 north, but required further work before deciding on

1 a range of options for deployment to the south,
2 specifically to Helmand province, the month before
3 I became Secretary of State.

4 So I just thought we would get the chronology right
5 because there has been some confusion, I think, in some
6 of the evidence that has been given, so I went to the
7 trouble of looking it up in the Ministry of Defence for
8 elucidation on that, Sir Martin.

9 When I arrived, therefore, at the MoD in May 2005
10 we had already offered to NATO the HQ ARCC which, as
11 you said was done on 29 June, for the period 2006, May,
12 to February 2007. The chiefs had also agreed in
13 principle to a proposal that we would refocus our
14 military efforts from the north to the south of
15 Afghanistan.

16 I was then asked on the advice of the chiefs, which
17 I always take, to reiterate our commitment in these
18 terms at the NATO ministerial meeting on 9 and 10 June
19 which is why I was discussing it during May.

20 When I was asked, I said I didn't care what decision
21 had been taken on principle. This Secretary of State
22 was laying down certain conditions. I remember it was
23 a rather interesting meeting. When you are told, as
24 Secretary of State, "Oh, the decision has been taken",
25 I think you have an obligation to say, "Yes, well,

1 unless the conditions I lay down are satisfied, you had
2 better find another Secretary of State".

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What were those conditions?

4 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I did actually use that wording,
5 yes.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What were they?

7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: The conditions were threefold.

8 First of all, that the military configuration which had
9 been decided upon by the Chiefs of Staff, was financed
10 in full by the Treasury.

11 Secondly, that the configuration of troops around
12 the British that had been promised by NATO, was
13 delivered. That's important. I'll come back to that in
14 a second.

15 Thirdly, that the alternative incomes, money, be
16 produced by DFID, and \$100 million the Americans were
17 already spending there, stayed there. Because I did not
18 want us to go in trying to take away poppy money from
19 farmers, giving them nothing in return, and, therefore,
20 turning them into subversives against us. Because, in my
21 experience, people do not elect to starve to death in
22 a state of grace. So if you take away their income,
23 they will demand an alternative one.

24 So those were the three conditions. Two of them
25 were met by the September/October period because the

1 Treasury had said, "Yes, we'll fund it" and because we
2 had established a group, learning the lessons of Iraq,
3 which I chaired unusually. It would normally have been
4 a Foreign Office lead, but the Prime Minister asked me
5 to lead it to bring together DFID, the Foreign Office,
6 Treasury, MoD and so on to work down from the concept,
7 strategic concept, right down to the operational level
8 and DFID were involved in that. That was met. The
9 problem was we were supposed, from memory, to go in,
10 make announcements in September -- go in
11 September/October.

12 The Dutch would not give the guarantee they would go
13 to Oruzgan province to the north of us, and I said --
14 despite the fact I was getting heavily lobbied by some
15 of our active soldiers who wanted to get out there,
16 I said that I would not give the decision to deploy
17 British forces unless our northern flank was covered,
18 and that accounts for the delay. Because we didn't go in
19 the September, October, November, December or January,
20 but only on 25th/26 January, I was told that the Dutch were
21 just about to agree and I therefore announced in the
22 House of Commons that we would deploy to Helmand.

23 So that's the full story, as far as I can give you
24 it, and you will want to check that against the records
25 and I'm happy to ...

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can I turn to the Iraqi dimension in --
2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Can I mention one other thing? It
3 is very relevant to what you are doing. I also -- and
4 it was declassified this morning -- when the three
5 conditions were met, I was also slightly worried that
6 although there was a chronological coincidence with the
7 downturn in Iraq, the downsizing of forces and the going
8 into Helmand, I did not want one to be reliant upon the
9 other, in case we couldn't get out of Iraq. I did not
10 want our soldiers in danger in Helmand province itself
11 and, therefore, I asked for insurance that we could
12 carry out the Afghan deployment without downsizing in
13 Iraq, and you may have seen the documents which were
14 declassified this morning.

15 On 12 September I wrote, basically -- and I'll just
16 read it in:

17 "The Secretary of State recalls that during his
18 meeting with CDS for an operational update on
19 1 September, he queried whether in the event of a slower
20 than expected drawdown of United Kingdom forces in Iraq,
21 our planning assumptions for deployment in Afghanistan
22 would be achievable. His recollection is that CDS
23 confirmed to him that our current commitment in Iraq
24 would be sustainable when set against a deployment to
25 Afghanistan."

1 It finishes with my private secretary saying:

2 "I would be grateful for your confirmation that CDS
3 would be content for this to be recorded as the formal
4 position as at the meeting in September."

5 As you will see from the reply on 19 September after
6 an introductory paragraph the Chief of the Defence Staff
7 said:

8 "The short answer is yes, but to provide further
9 reassurance for Secretary of State we have taken advice
10 from the Chief of Joint Operations. He is clear that
11 our plans for Afghanistan are deliverable, even if
12 events slow down our Iraq disengagement. Furthermore,
13 DCDS, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments) has
14 factored the possibility of such a slippage into the
15 MoD's strategic planning for Afghanistan and our
16 strategic intent for future commitments."

17 They then point out the pinch points that we have
18 already mentioned on helicopters and one or two others.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Pain and grief, the pinch points that
20 would be, pain and grief?

21 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: That's the pinch points, yes, the
22 ones we have discussed earlier, and then they say:

23 "But our ability to fulfil our plan in Afghanistan
24 is not predicated on withdrawal of such capabilities
25 from Iraq, and notwithstanding these qualifications, in

1 the event that our conditions-based plan for progressive
2 disengagement from southern Iraq is delayed, we will
3 still be able to deliver our DOP(A) mandated force
4 levels in Afghanistan."

5 Obviously I had asked for that reassurance because
6 I was worried, as you, as a Committee are, that one
7 would be dependent on the other.

8 Final comment on the pinch points. As late
9 as March, I still wanted reassurance on that. So
10 I asked, because I had been discussing this with someone
11 outside the military over the helicopter shortage that
12 Sir Lawrence raised -- I asked for a guarantee from the
13 helicopter commander on the ground that he had
14 sufficient flying hours for the mission in Afghanistan
15 and I therefore wrote to the -- and it is recorded in
16 the Ministry of Defence:

17 "On the matter of helicopter availability, I am
18 reliably informed that the commanding officer of the
19 helicopter force is content with the number of flying
20 hours available to him for the prosecution of the
21 mission."

22 So I set down the conditions. I then tested the
23 withdrawal. I then tested the pinch point. At the back
24 of this, of course, was the question of harmony, but
25 I was aware that we were downsizing in Northern Ireland

1 and we had just completed the reformation of the tour
2 plot of the infantry under General Jackson And the
3 percentage, the percentage of soldiers operating outwith
4 the harmony guidelines did not increase as we went into
5 Afghanistan, it actually decreased from a high of around
6 18 per cent down to about 10.3 per cent.

7 This is not to say that among that 10.3 per cent
8 there weren't people whose harmony guidelines had
9 dropped considerably, as Mike Walker said the other day.
10 So basically, as General Walker said, they gave me the
11 advice and I followed it, so they didn't have any
12 difficulty with that.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did you have any concerns? We have
14 just heard from Sir Kevin Tebbit with regard to this
15 undertaking to Helmand at that stage of our Iraqi
16 commitments, that he, as he put it, was very concerned
17 about a new commitment:

18 "I felt that it could be a mission too far."

19 But he went on to tell us:

20 "I did not press my objections fully."

21 Were you aware of his doubts and what they were?

22 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Up until he was sitting in front of
23 you an hour ago, no. Actually, just before that,
24 because he did tell me before he came in. I think he
25 was -- he said that he had shared this with the Chiefs

1 of Staff.

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Not with you.

3 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: He didn't say he shared it with me.

4 I have no recollection. There is nothing in the notes

5 that he did. I took the military advice because, on

6 these occasions, as Mike Walker said, he has no

7 difficulty with it, because I asked the military and

8 I tried to outline the precautions I took to satisfy

9 myself, because I would want you to be assured -- you

10 will want this yourself -- that you don't take these

11 decisions lightly.

12 You did ask me why I thought the British did it.

13 I think Kevin Tebbit covered this. First of all, this

14 was a United Nations entry into Afghanistan, unlike Iraq

15 and a very important one. Secondly, our national

16 security was at risk, we believed. And, certainly, along

17 with the United States I think our Chiefs regarded us

18 as one of the better armed forces in the world to take

19 such a step.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you concerned, given the

21 uncertainty of all military operations, that there might

22 either be a call for an increase in the force levels in

23 Afghanistan, or indeed the increase in force levels in

24 Iraq, which would then make this balance unbalanced?

25 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I wasn't concerned about Iraq

1 because I thought things were likely to move in the way
2 that they did, but with some time slippage in Iraq. But
3 more importantly, because I had been assured that
4 Afghanistan was not dependent on Iraq. Obviously, there
5 is always a concern that you get what is called mission
6 creep and all I can say is that I took the best military
7 advice, and when we sent that number of troops in, that
8 is what the chiefs said was necessary and I procured the
9 funding for it.

10 It is true that not long after I left I think the
11 mission changed. I think the mission changed. I think
12 from the day that we went to Sangin province, that
13 mission changed, and, therefore, the demand for troops
14 became much greater, and whether or not the resources
15 were supplied for that, I think is a question. I'm not
16 saying they weren't, but it is a question I can't
17 answer. By that time, I wasn't Defence Secretary.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: This problem wasn't one which was in
19 your mind --

20 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: As far as your Inquiry into Iraq is
21 concerned, there wasn't a concern in my mind that this
22 would result in a diminution of our resources in Iraq
23 personnel or otherwise. Why? Because I had asked that
24 specific question and been told, "No". Indeed, I had
25 been told, "It has been built into our consideration

1 that that might be a delay".

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was there also an element, given the

3 defence planning assumptions, that what we were now

4 doing, by taking on two medium-scale operations, that we

5 were in fact breaching the assumptions? Did these

6 assumptions still hold?

7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Actually, if I can just again just

8 correct that slightly, because I saw this -- and this is

9 a technical change rather than anything else. The

10 strategic defence review, which I had the privilege of

11 being involved in with George Robertson back in 1998 did

12 not say that we couldn't conduct two medium-sized

13 operations.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Long-term?

15 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: That's right. What it said was two

16 concurrent medium-scale operations. One a relatively

17 short, war-fighting deployment, which is usually a big

18 one, unlike Iraq - it lasted six days at that level,

19 not six months - and the other an enduring,

20 non-war-fighting.

21 However, having said that, whatever the

22 technicalities, the guideline here, is, Sir Martin,

23 isn't it: is this overstretching you? The way I would

24 put it is I think we were stretched. I think we were

25 taut, but my military advice is: you are not

1 overstretched. We can do this.

2 I always rely -- I have the greatest respect for
3 people like General Mike Walker, General Mike Jackson.
4 If they say, yes, fine. If they say, no, I didn't do it.
5 I wouldn't do it. If they said, "Yes, but it is
6 a challenge", it was my job to say, "What are the
7 challenges, what are the conditions, and how can I meet
8 them?" And that is why I laid down conditions.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was this a concern that you put to
10 them, the concern that it might be overstretched?

11 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I didn't use those words, but
12 I asked, in writing, for an assurance that we could do
13 one without debilitating the other. That's the letter
14 I gave you earlier on.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With hindsight, you don't feel that
16 there was a danger that we had undertaken something that
17 might not be capable of --

18 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: You are asking me to get into an
19 area where you are using words like, "There was a danger
20 that we might", with the virtue of "hindsight". There is
21 only one perfect science known to man and that's
22 hindsight. But we are, I believe, sustaining a very
23 dangerous, a very difficult task to protect the security
24 of this country there, and I have utmost respect for the
25 people who are doing it for us.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I would like to turn to
3 Baroness Prashar now on, in particular, machinery of
4 government questions.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you Chairman.

6 Dr Reid, we have changed the subject now and we have
7 been to Afghanistan and Iraq and come back to London,
8 the capital, which is the MoD itself.

9 Do you think enough resources were being devoted to
10 Iraq within the department? Because you have been
11 talking about those on the ground, but what priority was
12 being accorded to Iraq within the department's own
13 machinery?

14 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Do you mean financial resources?

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Both.

16 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I think when you are in an
17 operation like this, the one thing the
18 Ministry of Defence does very, very well is it
19 prioritises. I mean, it does a number of things very
20 well. It has an intellectual rigour to its conceptual
21 analysis, more than any other department I have been in
22 in government. Not to diminish anyone else, but they do
23 that very well. And they prioritise. When you have got
24 an operation, that is prioritised. Why? Because it is
25 usually a matter of national security, and, secondly,

1 because you have got men and women who are risking their
2 lives. So you prioritise the ones who are doing that to
3 the best of your ability.

4 So I think, in terms of finances, whatever the
5 overall envelope is, the department --

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So when you were there, you actually
7 made sure that it was accorded the priority it deserved?

8 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, well, I hope so. That was my
9 responsibility, Iraq, Afghanistan, we had some soldiers
10 in Kosovo, and, you know, there are people in there,
11 just as there are at the front, who work night and day
12 and so should the ministers, and the
13 Permanent Secretaries and the officials.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You were talking earlier, when we
15 were discussing the question of learning lessons, you
16 said that the United States soldiers learned lessons
17 better than we did. I mean, there were various
18 opportunities and the Ministry of Defence could identify
19 learns to be learned.

20 What importance did you attach, during your time, in
21 terms of lessons that could be learned, and were these
22 implemented?

23 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Absolutely. I place a great
24 importance on it. Basically because, in the nature of
25 what we do, we have to be -- I would use the term

1 permanently revisionist. The world keeps changing, and
2 unless we keep changing with that world, which includes
3 our enemy, then we will lose And nowhere is that loss
4 greater, if we don't keep up with it, than in the
5 Ministry of Defence. It is true of all departments of
6 government, but in defence we are talking about young
7 men and women who may lose their lives. So, yes.

8 Therefore when, for instance, the House of Commons
9 Defence Select Committee would come out with criticisms,
10 as it did I think in March of the year I went in,
11 particularly in the post-conflict reconstruction area
12 and the lack of co-ordination and so on, we would take
13 them very seriously.

14 What I was suggesting, it is not that we got
15 everything right, even with revision, but I think we
16 learned the lessons, or some of the lessons, of the lack
17 of co-ordination in the run-up to Iraq through the
18 Afghanistan preparations.

19 Now, I'm not going to come in on what caused that
20 lack of co-ordinated effort between departments, but
21 certainly we tried to make sure that DFID and the MoD
22 worked much more closely together, but there were
23 frictions, as you know, but certainly -- around the Iraq
24 preparations --

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But you said earlier that you were

1 given a responsibility by the Prime Minister to chair
2 this strategy group which was looking at strategy on the
3 operational side. When did you take over?

4 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Probably around September --
5 around -- this was for Afghanistan?

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This wasn't for Iraq?

7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: No. On Iraq, the preparations, the
8 preparatory phase had been -- you have spent a lot of
9 time discussing that -- had been while I was, I think,
10 in Northern Ireland dealing with the decommissioning
11 issue over there. So I didn't -- sorry if I didn't make
12 that clear, Baroness, that wasn't as regards Iraq.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was in relation to Afghanistan?

14 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes. But what I tried to do was
15 learn some of the lessons, because whatever the rights
16 and wrongs of what happened and the run-up to it, in
17 terms of process and co-ordination and friendship --

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In terms of learning lessons, did
19 you at any stage re-evaluate our strategy, because, as
20 the situation was deteriorating, you know, the security
21 situation in Iraq, did you at any stage re-evaluate our
22 approach?

23 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, I think we were doing it all
24 the time. If I had to be asked, "What was it that was
25 changing when I came in there?" I think, first of all,

1 there was the recognition that this was
2 counter-insurgency. Yes? I think that was the big one
3 in terms of military doctrine and concept and so on.
4 I think by and large that was accepted how we should
5 handle it. I was interested to see the evidence given
6 to you by General Sheriff. I think that was an abnormal
7 view, that this would be solved with masses of troops
8 and guns charging into Basra. I don't think that was
9 the general view re Counter-insurgency.

10 Secondly, the stress on the
11 build-up of the Iraqi security forces. They are the
12 people who can solve this, not us. Thirdly, the
13 absolute essential of inclusive government, absolutely
14 essential. I mean, on every occasion I saw the
15 Prime Minister speaking to anybody in the United States
16 or here, the Sunni inclusion, inclusive government. ISF
17 training and so on.

18 So those things were becoming apparent, and I also
19 hope during that period that working with DFID, with
20 Hilary Benn, myself, Jack Straw and so on, I think they
21 were -- that was becoming more cohesive.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Is that what was being described as
23 the comprehensive approach? People have talked about
24 it. Is that a term that was around when you were there?

25 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Absolutely. I know people have

1 invited you to look at 2010, I'll invite you to look at
2 2020.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: At the moment, I want to stay in
4 2006 and 2007.

5 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It arises precisely from then. It
6 arises from the lessons of Iraq, and that is there will
7 not be a conflict fought by conventional means and some
8 transition at some stage towards post-conflict
9 reconstruction. That will occur almost simultaneously.

10 Secondly, unless you can provide the means of giving
11 law and order, justice, prisons, decent services,
12 mentoring for police and all those non-military skills,
13 almost simultaneously. That's the comprehensive
14 approach.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It is comprehensive, but what
16 I really want to know was: was it adequate, was it
17 working, was it having the necessary impact?

18 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: No.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It wasn't?

20 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: No, that's what I'm saying. When
21 I went there, there was an increasing recognition on
22 this because planning had been done, planning had been
23 done, and -- but it hadn't taken into account the state
24 of degeneracy of the skills and infrastructure. It
25 didn't take into account that somebody was going to

1 disband the whole of the bureaucracy of the state, the
2 disbandment of the army and so on. So, in a sense --
3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: By the time --
4 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: -- we had created a vacuum and we
5 didn't have sufficient plans operationally, or the
6 cohesion, to go in quickly enough. What I'm saying is,
7 by 2005, we had learned those lessons and were beginning
8 to do that, Baroness.
9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you think, by that time, we had
10 regained the initiative? Because the planning was
11 inadequate and the plan was being written as events were
12 unfolding, by the time we got there, you think we had
13 regained the initiative?
14 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I go back to my very first comment.
15 I think the jury was out. I think that period was the
16 critical period. I think insurgency was developing and
17 being recognised. I think they were trying to create
18 a civil war, and it was an open question as to whether
19 that would occur, and I think we were beginning to
20 realise that the end-game here was truly empowering the
21 Iraqis themselves, in terms of democracy, security and
22 economic development, and all of us were working pretty
23 closely together in that.
24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Des Browne told us that he was
25 actually the lead minister for Iraq.

1 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Sorry, who told you?

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Des Browne, he was the lead minister

3 for Iraq. When you were there, who was leading on Iraq?

4 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: The Prime Minister.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The Prime Minister?

6 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes --

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So he was the one ensuring that

8 everything was being co-ordinated?

9 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: The Prime Minister, yes. Now, he

10 obviously, like any leader in those circumstances, would

11 devolve decisions to those beneath him. General Walker

12 explained the other day that he had absolutely no doubt

13 about the Prime Minister's commitment and clarity and so

14 on, but he sometimes felt that as it devolved downwards

15 to certain departments, perhaps the Prime Minister's

16 wholehearted enthusiasm wasn't being displayed in the

17 way it might have been. You will have to make your

18 judgment about that.

19 I don't think he was talking about the Ministry of

20 Defence, either under myself or Des Browne or

21 John Hutton or Geoff Hoon. But the PM was leading. He

22 was the one who, as the chief representative of this

23 country, was deeply, deeply, concerned about the

24 possible coming together of untrammelled intention to

25 commit terrorist acts on a massive scale and

1 untrammelled capability through weapons of mass
2 destruction.

3 While that was potentially possible through
4 proliferation in a number of areas, there was one
5 country which was already in desperate breach
6 continually of the United Nations authority and
7 resolutions, and the only person in the world alive at
8 that time, to my knowledge, who had actually used these
9 weapons of mass destruction. So the Prime Minister was
10 leading this --

11 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I'm talking about leading the
12 co-ordination of the delivery --

13 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: -- and then making sure --

15 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: The Prime Minister spoke --

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think --

17 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: -- to the President of the United
18 States. His adviser was speaking to the White House
19 advisers. Everyone else, to the best of my knowledge,
20 who was leading in the departments, was copied into
21 this. When I was there, the Defence and Overseas Policy
22 Iraq Cabinet Subcommittee was meeting -- I don't know
23 exactly, but once a fortnight. The Iraq Strategy Group
24 was meeting, a communication group was established, but
25 all of this was under the leadership of the

1 Prime Minister.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I ask one final question?

3 I mean, you have been in government over this period and

4 we have heard from a number of witnesses about how the

5 Cabinet system wasn't working and most of the planning,

6 pre-invasion and post, was done in ad hoc committees.

7 Is that your experience?

8 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, I was in Northern Ireland for

9 part, and then I was, I think, Leader of the House

10 and -- let me put it this way, Baroness: I never --

11 I was never refused any information that I wanted.

12 I was given every opportunity, as were other members of

13 the Cabinet, to ask questions. I could have asked

14 questions of the Attorney General.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you at the Cabinet meeting --

16 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, I was, and everyone was

17 allowed to speak at these meetings. I don't

18 recognise some descriptions of some of the least

19 quiescent of my colleagues claiming to have been

20 rendered quiescent. But I don't know about the

21 processes. I think people are perfectly entitled to

22 take a different view.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think you were given

24 opportunity to fully look at the legal opinion in its

25 totality or were you content just to be presented

1 with --

2 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I was given the opportunity, but

3 I didn't particularly want to look at some long,

4 "balancing" legal opinion. If I wanted to know "is what we

5 are about to do lawful, or is it illegal?" -the same way

6 I would ask the chiefs, "Is this do-able or is it not?" -

7 then I asked a lawyer, and the primary lawyer of the

8 land. The Cabinet was full of lawyers. I'm sure

9 various departments were full of lawyers, but as far as

10 I was aware, the constitutional convention and legality

11 in Great Britain for the Cabinet is dependent on the

12 judgment of the Attorney General.

13 I think that the access that I had -- and I'm sure

14 my colleagues -- for, for instance, to intelligence.

15 I asked to meet twice with C, I think I met David Omand

16 as well. I discussed it with him. I read the JIC. So

17 let me put it this way: people are perfectly entitled to

18 have their own point of view, but I don't actually think

19 it was worthy to suggest that almost everybody else in the

20 Cabinet is lacking in wisdom, intelligence, courage,

21 integrity, guts. I don't think that's a worthy

22 criticism of my colleagues. I don't think they did lack

23 in them.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But from your point of view, you

25 think the Cabinet system was working?

1 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: I'm not somebody who can give you
2 a judgment on that. I'm not an ex-civil servant. I'm
3 not a constitutional lawyer. I don't know whether the
4 process and the systems were working, in that sense,
5 I wasn't in every department; I was in mine. But I do
6 know that I have never felt any inhibition whatsoever,
7 telling the Prime Minister --

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But you have enormous experience of
9 having served in different departments.

10 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: -- can I just finish this --
11 telling the Prime Minister when he was wrong and asking
12 him questions and openly discussing; and nor, to the
13 best of my knowledge, did any other Cabinet ministers.
14 Some Cabinet ministers were constantly telling him he
15 was wrong - and telling everybody else they were wrong.
16 And if, by that, you mean, "was there the ability to
17 debate and discuss?" Yes, there was. But I'm not
18 qualified to say that this is a process -- you know,
19 some of the people on the panel are better qualified to
20 know the exact intricacies of the Cabinet processes than
21 I am, Baroness.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think a last set of questions.
24 Lawrence?

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. I'll try to keep this brief

1 but it is a big subject.

2 In a speech you made, in fact, to the students at my
3 college in February 2006, you said that:

4 "Our adversary will try to achieve his aims by using
5 our very freedoms against us. It sees the free western
6 media as a virtual battleground in itself where the
7 swaying of public opinion away from support for our
8 campaigns can be the path to a swift victory; a quick
9 way of undermining our public morale and endurance."

10 I'm sure you remember the speech.

11 I'm just interested in your views, as Secretary of
12 Defence, on the importance of public support for
13 a campaign such as this, and, without spending a great
14 deal of time on it, the issues with the modern media,
15 which you raise a lot in this speech, and how that may
16 affect that public support.

17 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: It is absolutely crucial. The
18 third element of fighting power is morale. Morale
19 depends on people believing in the legitimacy of their
20 cause, in the trust of their leaders, in the fact that
21 there is a cohesion and a unity behind it. So it is
22 naturally an area that your opponents and your enemies
23 try to undermine and divide.

24 Point 2: it is much easier to do that in a democracy
25 than it is in a dictatorship. When our media

1 institutions were putting microphones beneath the face
2 of the gentleman jokingly referred to as "Comical Ali" -
3 who was part of a regime that was burning women and
4 children from the inside out by dropping chemical
5 weapons on them - there was no public opinion behind that
6 to be swayed one way or the other.

7 Fascist dictatorships, or any form of dictatorship,
8 find it much easier to avoid the problems of questioning
9 and so on in democracy. So in the short-term, it makes
10 it more difficult. In the longer term, I have no doubt
11 whatsoever that democracy gives you an enduring
12 commitment to a cause which cannot be reflected in
13 fascist dictatorships, but it is much harder to maintain
14 that because there is a constant inter-reaction, a
15 questioning with the public and so on and so forth. But
16 I have no doubt that some of our enemies, in the form of
17 Islamist terrorists, take the view that we are not
18 capable of sustaining a long campaign, because, if you
19 don't have endurance, then your opponent will win, and
20 they believe, rightly or wrongly, that we are so
21 materially comfortable, we are so liberal and
22 individualistic, we have a set of values, which we call
23 freedoms and they regard as licence, which are
24 degenerate, and, therefore, we will never sustain
25 a long-term struggle because it involves sacrifice and,

1 tragically, it involves deaths.

2 That's why they say in the words of some elements of
3 the Taliban, "You may have the watches, but we have got
4 the time", because they believe that they can outlast
5 us. Therefore, they may not defeat us with the first
6 element, planning and strategy; they may not defeat us
7 with the second element, which is resources, funding,
8 money and equipment; but they will beat us in the third
9 element, they believe.

10 Now, that is an open question. But it is much more
11 difficult to maintain that in a multimedia 24-hour-a-day
12 news cycle than it was, say, a hundred years ago. That
13 is not a bad thing in a democracy; it is a good thing
14 that people should know the harsh reality of the sort of
15 conflicts we are in, but I think it is a difficulty,
16 Sir Lawrence.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just follow that up with
18 a point that has been put to us quite strongly by some
19 of the families of those who have lost their loved ones
20 in Iraq? It goes something like this, that they
21 understand that forces go to fight and what people sign
22 up for, but the problem in Iraq was that our forces went
23 in on a false premise, that they were going in to find
24 weapons of mass destruction that turned out not to be
25 there, and that, when they got there, the problems that

1 were faced had not been properly anticipated, that there
2 had been inadequate planning for the situation in which
3 our soldiers had to fight, and that this, therefore,
4 went on for far longer than anybody had anticipated and
5 it became a more enduring conflict, and that this was
6 therefore much more difficult to support and to
7 understand than other conflicts.

8 So my question is: was there an enduring problem
9 that we faced, that the circumstances in which we went
10 to war left public confidence undermined and less
11 willing than in other conflicts to give us the support
12 our troops would have liked to have had?

13 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Yes, around one central question,
14 and I understand the feelings of the families, and it is
15 this: if people believe that we told the truth, that we
16 made the best judgment in terms of the evidence, the
17 suffering won't go away - because they have lost their
18 loved ones - but they will not believe that they were in
19 a sense betrayed. So at some stage there may be
20 closure.

21 If people believe that we intentionally lied, that,
22 for some bizarre reason, all of these people in the
23 Cabinet made it up about weapons of mass destruction,
24 there will be no such closure and there will be even
25 greater anger to add to the grief. I understand that.

1 I know what members of the Cabinet saw. I know the
2 history of Saddam Hussein. I know what he did to women
3 and children with chemical weapons. I know that he used
4 chemical gases against the Iranians that even Hitler
5 wouldn't use because it would blow back on his troops.
6 I know what sort of man he was. I know the evidence
7 that was presented to us. I know what our intelligence
8 service said, which is he had the precursor chemicals;
9 10,000 litres of anthrax, 4 tonnes of VX gas, I think
10 I remember. I know we queried people about it. I know
11 the whole history of the 1990s, of him pushing out the
12 inspectors. I know that he was saying that he had the
13 things, and I know that the weight of evidence, though
14 it is fragmentary - all intelligence is fragmentary -
15 though it is not complete, no body of evidence is
16 complete. All of that suggested to otherwise rational
17 and neutrally-minded people, who had to take these
18 decisions, that he had this stuff. And, in the wider
19 context that I mentioned already, it was very dangerous
20 for our security.

21 People will make their judgments on that. I am
22 content with my conscience that I made a judgment in
23 good faith and in truth.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I just want to emphasise that it is
25 not just a question of whether the judgments were made

1 as you say they were made, it is also a question of the
2 perceptions afterwards about how they were made, and it
3 is a question of whether or not you felt at the time
4 that your task with public opinion had been made that
5 much more difficult because of the beliefs of the way in
6 which we had gone to war, whether you feel these beliefs
7 were correct or not?

8 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Well, they had obviously made the
9 task more difficult, and still do. I mean, there are
10 families who hurt grievously. It is bad enough in any
11 conflict when there is a loss of life. When there is
12 a loss of life and a question at the back of your mind
13 as to the nature of the entry into that, that must make
14 the heart all the more. I don't think that is the least
15 bit non-understandable. It is perfectly understandable
16 and that means it is more difficult.

17 If people, however, believe that this was done in
18 bad faith, I think that's where the capacity to stand up
19 against foes in future becomes much more difficult. Of
20 course it does, and that's why it is so important that
21 we have this open questioning here, so that people can
22 see that this has been conducted in a way where
23 questions have been asked and difficult areas like this
24 are being given.

25 That's why I have no difficulty in having this

1 discussion, because people's lives depended on it. It
2 is just that I happened to have the belief, and still
3 do, that the greatest threat to my children and the
4 future generations of children, the greatest threat - of
5 a magnitude that is almost unimaginable - is the coming
6 together of people who are unconstrained by any
7 morality, indeed driven by a perverse morality that
8 says that there is no distinction between combatants and
9 civilians, that murdering thousands or tens of
10 thousands, it doesn't matter.

11 Now, we have had these regimes before, like the
12 Nazis, but they were constrained by the nature of their
13 technology. They were constrained by having to use the
14 exhaust fumes of vehicles or canisters of Zyklon B.
15 Nowadays, there is no such constraint on the capability.
16 So that unconstrained intent comes together with the
17 unconstrained capability.

18 God help the future generations, and that is part of
19 what was at the back of our mind when we were making
20 these decisions.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dr Reid. I would like to ask my
23 colleagues if they have any last questions before I turn
24 to you for your own fine reflections?

25 Well, can I ask -- we have two things, I think, in

1 mind. One is: is there ground which we have not been
2 able to cover so far this morning that you think would
3 be relevant and useful; and the other is any more
4 general reflections? You have given us a number in the
5 course of this hearing, but if you would like to give us
6 a summation, the time is now.

7 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: At risk of -- you know, I think the
8 most important one I have made is the one that I made
9 here, which is perfectly understandable in matters like
10 this, that we all have deep divisions in this country,
11 because it is a democracy and you should never, ever
12 embark on something that risks the lives of your young
13 men and women without having thought this through.

14 If nothing else, I hope that these will illustrate
15 that, rightly or wrongly, in the end, we did try to
16 think these things through.

17 One, the coming together of unconstrained intention
18 to murder with unconstrained capability to do so in
19 a world where globalisation is bringing proliferation
20 nearer to us all is the context in which your Inquiry
21 takes place, Sir John, and I hope that that in some way
22 is illustrated by the questions you ask and the
23 conclusions you come to.

24 Secondly, the nature of conflict has changed. The
25 nature of conflict has changed. The idea that there

1 will be a conventional war under agreed, legal rules
2 where both sides will respect the rights of others for
3 a determined piece of land for a determined period of
4 time, at the end of which there will be a defined
5 agreement and we will all go home, that has changed.

6 There is a battle which is not about territory. It
7 is an argument sometimes, sometimes, coming into
8 conflict about sets of values. 100 years ago, we didn't
9 have to look at other people's values because we didn't
10 have television, we didn't have 24-hour-a-day media. We
11 had colonial interventions here and there, but now it is
12 impossible to avoid a situation where people have to
13 confront these different values. We have to find a way
14 of resolving that without violence.

15 Thirdly, if we are going to do that, we have to find
16 a way of deploying other than guns, and, therefore, when
17 we think of mobilising an army, we have to find a way of
18 building on the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, on
19 the Stabilisation Unit, on all of these new ideas, in
20 a big sense, so that we can deploy to some areas in the
21 world, in order to prevent these things, the services,
22 at however high a level, and the decent common values
23 interpreted into a better life for many more people than
24 we do, because poverty, ignorance, failed states and so
25 on are the root causes -- they are the soil in which

1 this sort of thing flourishes.

2 Fourthly, the question about our capacity to endure.
3 I leave that open.

4 Fifthly, I wouldn't like to leave without recording
5 formally my lasting appreciation, my admiration and my
6 deep, deep respect for every single person who, in our
7 armed forces, became involved on behalf of this country
8 in these conflicts. They are not part of the
9 controversy. They are not part of the big argument
10 about right or wrong. They just do what they are asked
11 to do, and they do it for one reason, and that is they
12 want to protect the security of this country.

13 So for those who fought and those who fell, I just
14 want to record my respect and admiration and deep
15 sadness at the loss of life.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Dr Reid, thank you. I thank you and I thank
17 those who have been here in this room this morning.
18 I will close this session now. At 2 o'clock this
19 afternoon we will resume the hearing, when Ann Clwyd
20 will be giving us testimony. So thank you all again
21 very much.

22 RT HON DR JOHN REID MP: Thank you, John.

23 (12.35 pm)

24 (The short adjournment)

25

FINAL