

SECTION 14.2

CONCLUSIONS: MILITARY EQUIPMENT (POST-CONFLICT)

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Introduction

1. This Section addresses conclusions in relation to the evidence set out in Section 14.1, including:

- where there was a failure to address capability gaps in equipment; and
- the impact of running two medium scale operations concurrently.

2. This Section does not address conclusions in relation to:

- how equipment was funded, which is addressed in Section 13.2;
- the failure to ensure that the UK was adequately prepared for post-conflict Iraq contingencies, which is addressed in Section 6.5;
- MOD operational policy, or judgements on the specific circumstances in which individuals lost their lives in Iraq; and
- the MOD's procedure for supporting those killed or injured in Iraq, which is addressed in Section 16.4.

Key findings

- Between 2003 and 2009, UK forces in Iraq faced gaps in some key capability areas, including protected mobility, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and helicopter support.
- It was not sufficiently clear which person or department within the MOD had responsibility for identifying and articulating capability gaps.
- Delays in providing adequate medium weight Protected Patrol Vehicles (PPVs) and the failure to meet the needs of UK forces in Multi-National Division (South-East) (MND(SE)) for ISTAR and helicopters should not have been tolerated.
- The MOD was slow in responding to the developing threat in Iraq from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The range of protected mobility options available to commanders in MND(SE) was limited. Although work had begun before 2002 to source an additional PPV, it was only ordered in July 2006 following Ministerial intervention.
- Funding was not a direct barrier to the identification and deployment of additional solutions to the medium weight PPV gap. But it appears that the longer-term focus of the Executive Committee of the Army Board (ECAB) on the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES) programme inhibited it from addressing the more immediate issue related to medium weight PPV capability.
- The decision to deploy troops to Afghanistan had a material impact on the availability of key capabilities for deployment to Iraq, particularly helicopters and ISTAR.

Addressing post-invasion capability gaps

Defining the capabilities required

The 1998 *Strategic Defence Review* (SDR) defined the military capabilities needed by the Armed Forces. It concluded that the UK needed a more effective expeditionary capability, including “deployable and mobile” forces, with “sufficient protection and firepower for war-fighting”.¹ As a result, the MOD established a requirement for a family of vehicles to replace existing medium weight armoured vehicles. That was to be delivered through the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES) programme which was expected to be in service towards 2010.

The 1998 SDR also emphasised the importance of developing an enhanced Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) capability.

In 2002, the MOD published *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter*; an update on the SDR’s progress and a consideration of the “UK’s defence posture and plans” in light of the 9/11 attacks.² *A New Chapter* again stressed the importance of ISTAR assets: the MOD would accelerate the Watchkeeper programme which was designed to deliver an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). That capability was expected in “2005-06”.³ There were very few similar capabilities that could be deployed in the interim. By 2003, the expeditionary capability defined by the 1998 SDR was not yet in place.

A number of witnesses suggested to the Inquiry that the MOD had not been given the resources to acquire the full range of capabilities specified by the SDR. The Inquiry has not reached a view on that point. Decisions made by the MOD on the balance of investment between immediate operational requirements and future defence programmes in delivering the capabilities set out in the SDR fall outside the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference.

Countering the IED threat

3. By the end of April 2003, barely a month after the invasion, UK forces began to face a threat from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). In July and August, more sophisticated devices were being used with increasing frequency against Coalition Forces.

4. The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) predicted that the IED threat was likely to increase and continue to evolve rapidly. That was clearly indicated in its Assessments of 3 September 2003, 25 September 2003 and 5 November 2003.

5. On 1 September, a Forces and Resources Review reported that the IED threat was being “countered by the use of stripped-down Land Rovers with top cover sentries”.⁴ It recommended that protection would be improved by the deployment of armoured 4x4 vehicles.

¹ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Supporting Essays*, July 1998.

² Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter*, July 2002.

³ Third Report from the House of Commons Defence Committee, Session 2003-04, Lessons of Iraq, HC 57-I, para 235.

⁴ Paper MND(SE) [junior officer], 1 September 2003, ‘HQ MND(SE) Forces and Resources Review’.

6. The Protected Patrol Vehicle (PPV) Working Group discussed how to meet that requirement on 5 September 2003. It was clear that the MOD had few options for the rapid supply of an armoured 4x4 vehicle. Large numbers of Snatch Land Rovers were already in service in Northern Ireland and were therefore available for deployment. There was no other vehicle that could be readily deployed without modification or without considerable cost. The MOD therefore decided to dispatch 180 Snatch Land Rovers to Iraq.

7. Several witnesses to the Inquiry referred to working with “what you’ve got” and told the Inquiry that the Snatch Land Rover was preferable to a completely unprotected vehicle. The Snatch Land Rover had not been designed, however, for the conditions found in Iraq; and by 2002 it was at the end of its planned life in service. No programme to replace it had been agreed.

8. The Snatch Land Rover was therefore not an optimal solution to the urgent requirement for an armoured PPV, but was the best available stop-gap. Given the need for rapid replacement of completely unprotected vehicles, the decision to deploy 180 Snatch Land Rovers was fully justifiable. However; this should have been recognised as no more than an interim solution. Work to find a more effective vehicle for Iraq and similar environments in the longer term should have been put in hand.

9. The Snatch Land Rover was modernised and made more suitable for the weather and terrain of Iraq in several conversion programmes. Because the chassis was incapable of carrying the weight of additional armour the enhancements which could be made to its level of physical protection were limited.

10. The hardening of a vehicle, or any other type of equipment, is only one component of its protection. Throughout Operation TELIC, the UK also deployed a suite of other measures to counter the IED threat, including aerial surveillance, electronic countermeasures, the deployment and up-armouring of heavier tracked vehicles, tactical changes and intelligence-based targeting of the perpetrators.

11. The first IED attack using an Explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) took place in May 2004. In July 2004, the Defence Intelligence Staff stated that the presence and use of EFPs in attacks against the Multi-National Force in Iraq was “a significant force protection issue”.⁵

12. The MOD’s Directorate of Operational Capability (DOC) concluded in February 2005 that the Snatch Land Rover conversion programme had been “a belated reaction” to the IED threat and that sustained investment was necessary to “provide sufficient protected mobility for operations in hostile environments such as Iraq”.⁶

⁵ Report DIS, 26 July 2004, ‘Further Evidence of Lebanese Hizballah produced weapons in Iraq’.

⁶ Report DOC, 22 February 2005, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Vol. 2’.

13. By May 2005, the IED threat had increased significantly. Commanders in Multi-National Division South-East (MND(SE)) had a choice of two vehicles in which they could conduct routine patrols: the Snatch Land Rover or the Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicle. Those two vehicles were at opposite ends of the protected mobility spectrum, with very different characteristics and availability.

14. Lieutenant General James Dutton, General Officer Commanding MND(SE) from June 2005 to December 2005, explained to the Inquiry that towards the end of 2005 all movement was conducted by air or in convoys protected by armoured vehicles. That constrained wider UK operations, including the Security Sector Reform (SSR) effort, because military personnel, police officers and civilian personnel were frequently not able to move around MND(SE).

15. The impact of limited mobility on SSR was regularly raised in meetings of the Chiefs of Staff and the reports of those who visited Iraq (see Section 12.1). The impact of protective security measures on civilians' ability to carry out their jobs effectively is described in Section 15.1.

16. In June 2006, Lieutenant General Nicholas Houghton, Chief of Joint Operations, reported that troops could “manage Snatch – just, but they have no inherent confidence in it”.⁷ Questions were asked in Parliament about what the MOD was doing to ensure the best possible protection of its troops.

17. The Inquiry recognises that there is not always a solution to an evolving threat and that, depending on the sophistication of the device and the way in which a vehicle is hit, any vehicle can be vulnerable to attack.

Requirement for a medium weight PPV

18. In June 2006, Mr Des Browne, the Defence Secretary, commissioned a review of armoured vehicles in Iraq. The review led to the identification of a requirement for a medium weight PPV for deployment to Iraq.

19. The MOD decided to procure 108 Cougar vehicles which were modified for use on UK operations. The modified vehicle was called the Mastiff.

20. The Cougar vehicle had been in service with the US Army since 2004. The British Army had also deployed a Cougar variant to Bosnia in 2003/04.

21. The Mastiff was a wheeled PPV offering better protection than Snatch, but, because of its size, was not suitable for all patrol tasks. Although it was not an ideal solution, Mastiff was positively received by troops in Iraq. The first four Mastiffs had reached Iraq by 30 December 2006.

⁷ Minute Houghton to PSO/CDS, 16 June 2006, ‘Visit to Iraq 13 – 15 Jun 06’.

22. In April 2008, the Equipment Capability branch (EC) in MND(SE) (the formation of which is described below) produced an Urgent Statement of User Requirement (USUR) for an “Urban PPV”. The Ridgback (which was also a variant of Cougar) was ordered to meet the requirement but did not enter service in time for use in Iraq.

23. Neither vehicle was a replacement for the Snatch Land Rover and Ministers continued to receive advice that Snatch remained “mission critical”⁸ in Iraq and Afghanistan because of its profile, manoeuvrability and carrying capacity. Lt Gen Houghton considered that removing it from theatre would have a significant impact on operations by reducing patrols’ situational awareness and restricting movement.

A FAILURE TO ARTICULATE THE REQUIREMENT

24. MOD officials explained to Mr Browne on 21 July 2006 that work was ongoing within the department to source a medium weight PPV and that the armoured vehicle review had accelerated the work by securing additional funding.

25. The Inquiry has considered why it took so long to fill a capability gap that was apparent from the end of 2003.

26. Within the MOD and the Armed Forces the responsibility for meeting an equipment capability gap during Op TELIC was clear: USURs for new equipment were forwarded to the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), which retained ownership of the USUR until it was signed off.

27. What was unclear was where responsibility lay for identifying and articulating capability gaps. Because a USUR could be raised by “any user”,⁹ there was no single individual or team accountable if an essential USUR was not raised. That was a failure of the system. In a statement to the Inquiry, the MOD said that there was “no simple answer to the question where the primary responsibility for identifying capability gaps and raising USURs lay” during the post-invasion phase.

28. The evidence suggests that this was not a problem in every instance. When a gap was clearly identified and there was an appetite to address it, action was taken. That was demonstrated by the deployment of electronic countermeasures and enhancements for the protection of Warrior and FV430 vehicles.

29. An analysis of the land operation in Iraq published in August 2010 (known as “the Barry Report”) stated that a requirement was more likely to be identified, and the subsequent Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) to succeed, where there was “a strong coherent sponsor in the Army or MOD”.¹⁰

⁸ Note CJO to PSO/CDS, 7 November 2008, ‘Limiting the Deployment of Snatch Outside Secure Bases’.

⁹ [Letter Duke-Evans to Aldred, 26 June 2015, ‘Procuring Military Equipment’.](#)

¹⁰ Report Land Command, 31 August 2010, ‘Operations in Iraq: An Analysis From a Land Perspective’.

30. The Barry Report suggested that, where UORs succeeded, “some of these were the result of ‘pull’ from theatre, others the result of ‘push’ from equipment staff in the MOD. The latter was the case with Mastiff, the requirement for which was formulated in London.”¹¹

31. As the Box ‘Attempts to articulate the PPV requirement’ below describes, there were repeated references within the MOD to lack of a coherent strategy and the absence of what was known as a “Customer Two lead”:¹² someone whose role it was to identify such a requirement from the perspective of a ‘user’. In the absence of a strong sponsor, defining the PPV requirement failed to make progress for three years.

32. Before June 2006, the MOD’s consideration of protected mobility lacked the leadership that was ultimately injected by Mr Browne’s armoured vehicle review and driven forward by Lord Drayson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Defence Procurement.

Attempts to articulate the PPV requirement

The 1998 *Strategic Defence Review* did not identify a requirement for a light or medium weight PPV for expeditionary operations.

The PPVs in service with the Army in 1998, primarily to meet the requirements of operations in Northern Ireland, were Tavern and the Snatch Land Rover. The Out of Service Date for the Snatch Land Rover was 2002.

January 2002 – A draft Urgent Statement of User Requirement (USUR) for the replacement of the Snatch Land Rover was produced (Project DUCKBOARD).

July to September 2003 – The MOD held two workshops and produced an operational analysis of the requirement but stated that further work was needed to articulate it.

February 2004 – Funding re-profiled to bring forward the delivery of 80 vehicles from 2007 to 2004.

31 March 2004 – A requirement for an expeditionary vehicle to be deployed to the “rest of the world” was identified but the MOD stated further work was needed to define it. It became known as the Type B vehicle.

June 2004 – The Executive Committee of the Army Board (ECAB) was advised of a need for a coherent plan to deliver protected mobility for both Iraq and Afghanistan.

7 July 2004 – The MOD identified a requirement for three separate vehicle projects, including the Type B vehicle, but described the way forward as “beset with unresolved issues”¹³ including a lack of definition over the capabilities required and number of vehicles needed.

15 October 2004 – A strategy for delivering the three projects was produced but there was still no concept of operations or a clear Customer Two lead.

¹¹ Report Land Command, 31 August 2010, ‘Operations in Iraq: An Analysis From a Land Perspective’.

¹² [Minute MOD \[junior officer\] to D Jt Cap \(AD Jt Mvre\), 15 October 2004, ‘Strategy for delivery of protected patrol and combat support mobility – Project DUCKBOARD’.](#)

¹³ [Paper DEC\(SP\) to D Jt Cap, 7 July 2004, ‘Project DUCKBOARD – Way Forward’.](#)

27 October 2004 – A Statement of Requirement (SOR) for all three projects was raised, including the number of vehicles required.

21 February 2005 – A revised SOR for a Type B vehicle was raised as a result of funding allocated through the Equipment Programme.

7 July 2005 – The Investment Approvals Board (IAB) approved a business case to upgrade the remaining Snatch Land Rovers to the latest variant but cautioned that it had still not seen any operational analysis to support a way forward.

November 2005 – ECAB discussed concerns about the state of protected mobility for UK forces.

January 2006 – ECAB decided to approach Lord Drayson with concerns about the armoured vehicle fleet following a meeting that had focused on further delays to the FRES programme.

3 March 2006 – A USUR and business case for the first tranche of Type B expeditionary Vector vehicles was submitted. Those vehicles were intended for deployment to Afghanistan.

26 June 2006 – Mr Browne announced an armoured vehicle review.

5 July 2006 – Lord Drayson sought clear confirmation from Lt Gen Houghton as to whether there was a requirement for a medium weight armoured PPV.

7 July 2006 – Lt Gen Houghton confirmed the requirement for a medium weight PPV. Lord Drayson sought further advice that same day about the number of vehicles necessary to meet current operational requirements.

19 July 2006 – Lt Gen Houghton produced the USUR for a medium weight PPV.

24 July 2006 – Mr Browne announced the outcome of the review.

ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE THE PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING REQUIREMENTS

33. The Inquiry recognises that, during the period covered by its Terms of Reference, there were a number of attempts to improve the process through which equipment requirements were identified and articulated.

34. Attempts to make improvements to the process began in 2005.

35. In February 2005, an Equipment Capability (EC) branch was created in theatre. It enhanced communication between those in need of new capabilities and those who helped to articulate the requirements, although there was some lack of clarity regarding the EC cell's precise role.

36. In November 2006, Lt Gen Houghton recognised that the UK needed “to improve our processes for identifying the EC dimension of emerging theatre CONOPS [concept of operations] which lay in the domain of the early years of the EP [Equipment Programme] rather than in the UOR process.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Minute CJO to MA/VCDS, 9 November 2006, ‘Emerging Capability Requirements’.

- 37.** In March 2007, the report of a visit to Iraq by Lord Drayson, then the Minister of State for Defence Equipment and Support, prompted work to improve communication channels between the MOD and theatre.
- 38.** Lord Drayson reported that “overall there was a clear perception in theatre that the UK MOD was not taking account of the rate of change. UORs too often sought to deliver a perfect capability, but in doing so delivered so late the requirement had changed or theatre were without any capability for too long”.¹⁵ He suggested that “greater dialogue” between theatre and the Equipment Capability Customer could help to address the issue.
- 39.** In September 2007, following an “extensive review and analysis”¹⁶ of the UK’s force protection capability, the DOC concluded that management of force protection risk must be based “on a thorough identification of strategic and operational threats to ensure that a balance of research, investment and training was achieved commensurate with the threat”.
- 40.** As a result, a force protection policy was produced in November 2007 which sought to apply a standard approach to the risk assessment of force protection and lay out the respective roles and responsibilities across the MOD.
- 41.** The MOD told the Inquiry that the force protection policy in use in 2015 “defines risk ownership and governance more clearly than its predecessors”¹⁷ and that the policy had been integrated into wider MOD risk management processes which had also been revised.

FUNDING AND THE FUTURE RAPID EFFECT SYSTEM (FRES)

- 42.** Lord Drayson told the Inquiry that he believed “the Army’s difficulty in deciding upon a replacement to Snatch was in part caused by their concern over the likelihood of FRES budgets being cut to fund a Snatch replacement vehicle”.¹⁸
- 43.** Although the Inquiry has identified issues concerning clarity of responsibility and communication, it has not found evidence to suggest that funding was a direct barrier to the identification and deployment of additional solutions to the PPV capability gap.
- 44.** It is possible, however, that the need to preserve funding for the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES) programme influenced decisions on the requirement for PPVs.
- 45.** The FRES programme remained distinct from meeting the requirement for an appropriate PPV in Iraq. FRES was never intended to be in service until towards 2010. However, a number of witnesses to the Inquiry made the point that, within a finite budget, resources for an additional requirement would have to be found from elsewhere

¹⁵ Minute APS/MIN(DES) to PSSC/SofS [MOD], 26 March 2007, ‘Minister(DES) Visit to Iraq’.

¹⁶ Report DOC, September 2007, ‘Protection of the Deployed Force Operational Audit Report 1/07’.

¹⁷ [Statement MOD, 26 June 2015, ‘Procuring Military Equipment’](#).

¹⁸ Statement, 15 December 2010, page 4.

in the defence programme (except when provided from UORs or USURs funded by a claim on the Reserve – see Section 13.1). Sir Peter Spencer, Chief of Defence Procurement from May 2003 to April 2007, told the Inquiry that using money from the capital Equipment Programme to deal with the short term had “a fratricidal effect”¹⁹ on the ability to move the FRES programme forward.

46. The focus of the Executive Committee of the Army Board (ECAB) on the FRES programme may therefore provide a partial explanation for the lack of urgency in addressing the more immediate problem of the PPV capability gap. Another likely factor was an over-optimistic assumption about the timing of withdrawal from Iraq. The expectation of an early withdrawal from Iraq inhibited action on an expensive programme that might not be completed before troops left.

Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR)

47. The MOD was aware before 2003 that it needed to broaden the capabilities available for collecting strategic, operational and tactical intelligence. A clear capability gap for an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) to be directed by commanders on the ground had been identified. The longer-term solution was a programme known as Watchkeeper, expected to be introduced in 2005 to 2006.

48. From March 2003, the Phoenix UAV was available to commanders in theatre. It performed well during the invasion but could only be used between November and April because it was not designed to operate in high temperatures.

49. For the first four years of Op TELIC, the lack of ISTAR capabilities constrained military operations. The final DOC report on Op TELIC in March 2010 stated that an enduring intelligence picture had been lacking for “at least the first four years”²⁰ because “up to and throughout 2006 and into 2007, there were insufficient ISTAR assets available to MND(SE), and hence by necessity they were focused on maintaining as much of the day-to-day tactical picture as possible”.

50. There is evidence that the MOD took two steps which did not adequately meet the capability gap:

- A “mini UAV”, Desert Hawk 1, was introduced in December 2003. Because of technical limitations it was only in theatre for a very short period.
- A Combined Joint Predator UAV Task Force (CJPTF) was created with the US in January 2004 but the UK’s requests for access to the capability were often not met.

¹⁹ Public hearing, 26 July 2010, pages 40-50.

²⁰ Report DOC, 17 March 2010, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Vol. 4’.

51. As Major General William Rollo, General Officer Commanding MND(SE) (GOC MND(SE)) from July 2004 to December 2004, reported at the end of his tour, the consequence of that capability gap was that operations were “planned around ISTAR availability, rather than ISTAR being available for operations”.²¹

52. The DOC raised the problem in its three reports covering the post-conflict phase, each of which was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff.

53. In February 2005, the DOC stated that ISTAR was “the most significant capability shortfall” of the post-conflict phase and it was “likely to remain an enduring requirement, particularly for asymmetric warfare”.²²

54. In April 2006, the DOC stated that “a serious gap in current ISTAR capability” had been “a regular DOC observation” that had “been highlighted on all recent operations”.²³ That prompted a more wide-ranging debate across the MOD about how the ISTAR capability gap could be addressed.

55. As in the case of protected mobility, the MOD was slow to respond to the deficiencies identified in ISTAR and showed a lack of understanding of the requirement for an enduring operation. The provision of ISTAR capabilities also suffered from the absence of a clearly identified sponsor addressing the capability gap.

56. Lt Gen Houghton’s review of ISTAR shortfalls in May 2006 stated that the UK was “only beginning to develop a full understanding of the national ISTAR requirements” for transition in both Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴

57. Major General Richard Shirreff, GOC MND(SE) from June 2006 to January 2007, wrote in his post-operation report that the UK’s response was “grindingly slow and ponderous” when compared with the US and Australia. They had shown more “agility and forethought” in identifying solutions.²⁵

58. The position improved when the Scan Eagle UAV was leased from Australia in April 2007 as a temporary measure until Hermes 450 came into service in July 2007.

²¹ Report Rollo to PJHQ MA to CJO, 4 December 2004, ‘Post Operation Report Operation TELIC 4/5 – 14 July – 1 December 2004’.

²² Report DOC, 22 February 2005, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Vol. 2’.

²³ Report DOC, 4 April 2006, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Volume 3’.

²⁴ Minute CJO to VCDS, 18 May 2006, ‘Quantifying ISTAR Shortfalls on Current Operations’.

²⁵ Report Shirreff to PSO/CDS, 19 January 2007, ‘Post Operational Report – Operation TELIC’.

The pressure of running two medium scale operations concurrently

59. In 2002, an MOD review of the 1998 *Strategic Defence Review* (SDR) reaffirmed that the UK's Armed Forces were not equipped to support two enduring medium scale military operations at the same time:

“Since the SDR we have assumed that we should plan to be able to undertake either a single major operation (of a similar scale and duration to our contribution to the Gulf War in 1990-91), or undertake a more extended overseas deployment on a lesser scale (as in the mid-1990s in Bosnia), while retaining the ability to mount a second substantial deployment ... if this were made necessary by a second crisis. We would not, however, expect both deployments to involve war-fighting or to maintain them simultaneously for longer than 6 months.”²⁶

60. Between 2004 and 2006, the MOD regularly made reference to the impact that an additional deployment would have on key capabilities available for Iraq. Choices would have to be made in deploying a finite level of capability.

61. When the Defence and Overseas Policy Sub-Committee of Cabinet agreed in July 2005 to deploy around 2,500 personnel to Helmand province, Afghanistan, the UK was still engaged in a medium scale operation in Iraq. As set out in Section 9.8, the assumptions about when personnel might be withdrawn from Iraq were high risk.

62. In March 2010, the DOC recognised that running two medium scale operations concurrently had had a “profound and fundamental impact” on resources afforded to Iraq.²⁷ It concluded that “knowingly exceeding Defence Planning Assumptions requires the most rigorous analysis”. The Inquiry has not seen evidence of such analysis.

63. It is difficult to determine whether or not Ministers adequately appreciated what the July 2005 decision to deploy to Helmand meant for the capabilities available for Iraq. There were discussions about the over-stretch and pinch-points in provision but those were no substitute for the “rigorous analysis” to which the DOC referred.

64. Decisions were not based on a realistic assessment of the likely duration of either operation and were consequently flawed.

65. One example was the decision not to harden accommodation for British troops in Iraq in March 2005. That decision was supported by balanced and pragmatic advice but the UK's optimistic assessment of how soon operations in Iraq would conclude affected its analysis of the requirement. That meant that the issue had to be re-opened three years later when it was too late for the matter to be addressed in an appropriate and cost-effective way.

²⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter*, July 2002.

²⁷ Report DOC, 17 March 2010, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Vol. 4’.

SUPPORT HELICOPTERS

66. The availability of support helicopters in MND(SE) was constantly stretched because of two factors.

67. The first was that support helicopters were used to supplement other shortfalls. Support helicopters were needed to move personnel by air when circumstances were too dangerous for ground transport. However, the same helicopters were also required for surveillance in the absence of sufficient ISTAR capability.

68. That meant that commanders were faced with a conflict between two requirements, and the need to compromise effectiveness.

69. As General Sir Richard Dannatt, Commander in Chief Land Command, wrote, there is an “inextricable” link between ISTAR, protected mobility and helicopters: “When the two former capabilities are under stress ... we invariably place a higher call on the latter.”²⁸

70. The second factor was Afghanistan. Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of the Air Staff, anticipated in February 2004 that support helicopters would be “seriously stretched”²⁹ by increased involvement in Afghanistan. His prediction was borne out.

71. Reports from Iraq in the second half of 2005 stressed the need for more helicopters. General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of the General Staff, stated in October that the fleet was “creaking badly”.³⁰ In December, Major General James Dutton, GOC MND(SE) between June 2005 and December 2005, wrote that “the simple fact is that we need more helicopters (and aircrew) urgently”.³¹

72. The DOC wrote in April 2006 that capacity had “become parlous at times during 2005”.³² It added that the Joint Helicopter Force (Iraq) had “struggled to meet its tasks even with rigorous prioritisation” and the UK’s battlefield helicopter force “was stretched to meet the requirement of the current operation”.

73. In June 2006, Lt Gen Houghton stated that there was an endorsed requirement to increase helicopter provision for Afghanistan but not for Iraq. He acknowledged that operations had at times been constrained by a lack of helicopter support. Lt Gen Houghton concluded:

“With no reductions on the horizon in Op TELIC and escalating requirements in Op HERRICK [Afghanistan], our national aviation requirements now need

²⁸ [Letter Dannatt to Jackson, July 2006, ‘The Level of Operational Risk on Current Operations’.](#)

²⁹ Minute CAS to PSO/CDS, 6 February 2004, ‘Operational Tempo’.

³⁰ Report CGS to CDS, 18 October 2005, ‘CGS Visit to Iraq: 10-13 Oct 05’.

³¹ [Report Dutton to CJO, 12 December 2005, ‘June to December 2005 – Hauldown Report’.](#)

³² Report DOC, 4 April 2006, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Volume 3’.

departmental scrutiny to determine the concurrent requirement to resource both theatres and define how our national aviation resources should be realigned.”³³

74. Mr Browne and Lord Drayson intervened in August 2006. Lord Drayson told the Inquiry that he had asked Mr Browne to authorise him “to explore whether helicopters could be found quickly and to worry about how they would be funded after we had identified a possible solution”.³⁴

75. An exchange between Mr Browne and General Sir Timothy Granville-Chapman, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, on 7 September illustrated how Ministers injected urgency into addressing equipment shortfalls. When Gen Granville-Chapman suggested that options to add capability would be considered in October, Mr Browne responded: “No: it should happen tomorrow!”³⁵

76. That prompted a review of what short-term relief could be offered to improve helicopter availability. In December 2007, Mr Browne wrote that helicopter support to Iraq was “generally assessed as satisfactory”³⁶ and that the priority was therefore Afghanistan. The Inquiry has not seen any evidence to suggest that that assessment was reconsidered for the remainder of Op TELIC.

Lessons

77. In deciding to undertake concurrent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the UK knowingly exceeded the Defence Planning Assumptions. All resources from that point onwards were going to be stretched. Any decision which commits the UK to extended operations in excess of the Defence Planning Assumptions should be based on the most rigorous analysis of its potential implications, including for the availability of relevant capabilities for UK forces.

78. At the start of Op TELIC, the MOD knew that it had capability gaps in relation to protected mobility and ISTAR and that either could have a significant impact on operations. Known gaps in such capabilities should always be clearly communicated to Ministers.

79. The MOD should be pro-active in seeking to understand and articulate new or additional equipment requirements. The MOD told the Inquiry that there was no simple answer to the question of where the primary responsibility for identifying capability gaps lay during Op TELIC. That is unacceptable. The roles and responsibilities for identifying and articulating capability gaps in enduring operations must be clearly defined, communicated and understood by those concerned. It is possible that this has been addressed after the period covered by this Inquiry.

³³ Minute Houghton to MA/VCDS, 12 June 2006, ‘Quantifying Battlefield Helicopter (BH) Requirements on Operations’.

³⁴ Statement, 15 December 2010, page 8.

³⁵ [Manuscript comment Browne on Minute VCDS to SofS, 7 September 2006, ‘Helicopter Capability’.](#)

³⁶ [Letter Browne to Brown, 6 December 2007, ‘Update for the Prime Minister on Helicopter Issues’.](#)

80. Those responsible for making decisions on the investment in military capabilities should continually evaluate whether the balance between current operational requirements and long-term defence programmes is right, particularly to meet an evolving threat on current operations.

81. During the first four years of Op TELIC, there was no clear statement of policy setting out the level of acceptable risk to UK forces and who was responsible for managing that risk. The MOD has suggested to the Inquiry that successive policies defining risk ownership and governance more clearly have addressed that absence, and that wider MOD risk management processes have also been revised. In any future operation the level of force protection required to meet the assessed threat needs to be addressed explicitly.

