

Friday, 15 January 2010

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(10.00 am)

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM BINNS

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning.

MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone and welcome, and welcome to our witness. This morning's session is one of the final sessions in the narrative phase of this Inquiry and the objective this morning is to understand the situation on the ground in Basra between August 2007 and February 2008.

Our witness this morning is Major General Graham Binns, who served as General Officer Commanding the Multi-National Division (South East) during the period.

This session is going to last, I suspect, about an hour, maybe up to an hour and a half.

Now, we recognise, and I say this every time, that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events. We, of course, cross-check what we hear against the papers we have access to, and which are still coming in, and I remind every witness that he will later be asked to sign a transcript of his evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

1 With those preliminaries, can I turn to
2 Sir Martin Gilbert to open the questions?

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: General Binns, when you arrived in
4 Basra, at that stage there were still British troops in
5 Basra City but they were about to move out to the air
6 station as part of Operation Zenith. When you arrived,
7 were plans for the move fully in hand, or were you
8 involved in planning at that stage?

9 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Detailed plans did exist, but they
10 hadn't been finalised. So we were in a period of
11 transition. You know, the plans existed, but we hadn't
12 set a time for the final stages of Operation Zenith.
13 That was very much down to me to deliver.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When the troops were with you in Basra
15 before the move, what was your responsibility then for
16 security and how was it carried out?

17 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Perhaps, could I give a bit of
18 context? During my preparation, I thought the themes
19 would be Iraqi coalition and UK politics. I thought
20 that the whole timeline of transition would be a feature
21 during my time there. I thought there was a hardening
22 of the UK's intent to draw down. I thought that it was
23 possible that we would lose -- or that the UN
24 Security Council Resolution would lapse by the end of
25 the year. I thought it was -- there was an issue over

1 US and UK coherence, and I thought that, you know, I had
2 to make plans to reintervene in all of the provinces,
3 not just in Basra.

4 So the objectives that I was given by the Chief of
5 Joint Operations were to prove the concept of
6 operational overwatch, to lean into the risk of
7 transition, and to transfer responsibility progressively
8 and increasingly to the Iraqi security forces, and
9 latterly to support the Iraqi security forces.

10 So that's by way of context. Now, I could go on to
11 describe the situation as I saw it when I arrived, if
12 you wish.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I think that would be important.

14 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: The security situation was difficult
15 for us. Every move outside our bases required detailed
16 planning and was high-risk. I thought that we were
17 having limited effect on improving the security
18 situation in Basra. 90 per cent of the violence was
19 directed against us, politically there was no contact
20 between us and the local provincial government, and
21 coalition-sponsored reconstruction had almost ceased.

22 But as I arrived, the security situation, as it
23 impacted on us, improved markedly as a result of an
24 initiative by my predecessor.

25 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In those last months in Basra, in

1 Basra City, what were the actual problems confronting
2 our troops? You say how limited they could involve
3 themselves really, but were they under attack, were they
4 in a defensive position, were they able to take some
5 active measures to protect themselves beyond the base?

6 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I had given a range of tasks and my
7 soldiers were deployed in -- working from the south to
8 the north -- the port of Umm Qasr, providing liaison and
9 port security there, and quick reaction to the Naval
10 training mission that was in Umm Qasr. My soldiers were
11 still in Basra Palace, we were deployed in the Joint
12 Co-ordination Centre just outside Basra Palace. We were
13 providing security for ourselves at the airfield. We
14 were securing the main supply route along which
15 everybody moved from Kuwait north towards Baghdad. We
16 were securing our own lines of communication. We were
17 running an airfield at Basra Air Station. So I had
18 an RAF force protection squadron with me.

19 So -- but I think it is fair to say that the
20 security situation was such that we spent a lot of our
21 time protecting ourselves.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Now, General Shirreff told us that,
23 during his time, the strategy was, as he put it, more
24 time-based than condition-based.

25 Would you agree with that assessment?

1 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: The strategy was one of transition
2 and with a view to eventual exit, and so it made sense
3 that the strategy had elements that were associated with
4 time and elements connected with conditions. So
5 I wouldn't say that it was an either/or, both of those
6 factors were in there.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was the exit strategy concept at
8 that time when you arrived?

9 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I wouldn't describe it as an exit
10 strategy, I would describe it as a transition strategy.
11 I think the UK had indicated that it had no long-term
12 intention to remain in Iraq, and, therefore, exit was
13 inevitable, but the strategy, as I was delivering it,
14 was one of transition increasingly to Iraqi security
15 forces, and, as a result, we would draw down our
16 presence.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Several witnesses have spoken about the
18 importance at this point of our growing involvement in
19 Afghanistan. I wondered if you had a sense that somehow
20 the focus of action had moved elsewhere and that Iraq
21 was perhaps no longer the main focus in London?

22 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I think it is inevitable, as
23 our commitment to Afghanistan increased, that people
24 started looking in two different directions. So I think
25 there is a certain inevitability about -- but I didn't

1 feel that it was necessarily a constraint on my tactical
2 action. I just accepted that, you know, that's how it
3 was. So -- I mean, you imply that it might have been
4 a constraint for me.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: It was not?

6 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I did not feel as though it was. It
7 may have impacted on our strategy or the nation's
8 strategy, but I didn't feel as though it was
9 a significant constraint on tactical action. I had been
10 told to deliver a transition, and that's what I was
11 doing.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: Usha, just before you start, if I may ...

13 We have heard passing references in previous
14 evidence sessions to the responsibility for
15 MND (South East) for securing the lines of supply and
16 communication right up to the centre. I wonder if you
17 could say a little bit more about the scale of work and
18 challenge that that presented, because there must have
19 been a very constant stream of large volumes of supplies
20 moving north. Is that right?

21 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I had the equivalent of a main supply
22 route, but -- going through my area, that was the
23 equivalent of driving up the M1 as far as about
24 Nottingham, and so, securing that was significant and --
25 but it was very important that I did, because it was the

1 only supply route and it passed through various pinch
2 points along the way, particularly as it crossed over
3 the rivers.

4 So that had a bearing, but I didn't think -- but it
5 was a fact, you know, that -- when I tacked into Iraq in
6 2003, one of my responsibilities was to secure the main
7 supply route.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: The last point on that, I imagine the Corps
9 Commander in Baghdad up your chain of command took
10 a pretty keen interest in this, because it is their
11 lifeline.

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, and every time there was an
13 attack on the MSR in my area, it was remarked upon by
14 the Corps Commander.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: I said that was the last, but, just finally
16 the last, when you are ordering your own priorities, you
17 said there was really little opportunity for active use
18 of your troops, particularly in Basra City, but you had
19 this among other standing tasks which mopped up quite
20 a large amount of your forces. Correct?

21 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: You mean securing the MSR?

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

23 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Along with the port and the Air Station and
25 the rest.

1 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Maybe I gave you the wrong impression
2 about the active operations. I thought it was
3 inappropriate to be conducting the type of strike
4 operations that had happened during -- previously at
5 that particular time. I still had the capability to do
6 it --

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Right.

8 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: -- if I thought it was necessary and
9 appropriate.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Why did you think it was
12 inappropriate?

13 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: As a result of an initiative by my
14 predecessor, we had agreed that -- with General Mohan,
15 who was commanding the Iraqi security forces -- to
16 reduce the coalition profile, particularly in
17 Basra City.

18 So with each of these strike operations -- and they
19 were designed to detain individuals -- there was always
20 the risk of us causing damage, of us enducing civilian
21 casualties, and so, one always had to balance whether
22 the risk of the operation was worth the gain, and
23 I think both I and my predecessor concluded that, at the
24 time, it was a good point to reduce the number of strike
25 operations that we were conducting into Basra City.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That meant essentially that there
2 was no way of getting at some key troublemakers?

3 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: No, and we did get at some key
4 troublemakers and we arrested a number. But we had to
5 be more subtle about how we did it, and the -- and
6 a couple of operations where we arrested them outside
7 the city, when they came outside the city, rather than
8 going in heavy-handed into the city. But the -- we --
9 they didn't present themselves that often outside the
10 city. So that reduced the number of opportunities that
11 we had.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, I can't resist a postscript on that
13 one too. Thinking of General Mohan's position, his wish
14 to see the visual profile of Iraqi security forces
15 dominant. Every time you saw a British uniform, or
16 an MND South East uniform, I should say, that was
17 a slight compromise to that. So he would like there to
18 be, almost universally, an Iraqi security force presence
19 in the city. Is that correct?

20 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, Iraq police and army. He still
21 wanted what he described as "the toys". He wanted our
22 support, he wanted our intelligence support, he wanted
23 surveillance support, he wanted helicopter support. He
24 particularly wanted fast air support, and he wanted an
25 insurance policy. He wanted to know that we were there

1 in extremis, because that added to his strength as well,
2 that people knew that we were there ready to strike, if
3 required.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Usha?

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to some of the
6 practical issues? In September 2007, the British forces
7 moved from Basra City to the Contingency Operating Base
8 at Basra Air Station. Did this move go as planned?

9 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: It went well. It didn't go quite as
10 planned and it was enormously --

11 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What were the reasons for that?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: These things were an enormously
13 complex piece of military knitting, and trying to bring
14 all of the actors together was challenging.

15 If I take you through the steps: we first had to
16 fold in from the -- what I described earlier as the
17 PJCC, the Permanent Joint Co-ordination Centre. So we
18 had to remove our presence there and come into the
19 Palace. We then had to recruit, train, equip and deploy
20 an Iraqi security force which became known as the Palace
21 Protection Force, to take over the Palace.

22 We had to draw down our logistical footprint at the
23 Palace. We had to decide what it was we were going to
24 leave for the Iraqis and what it was we were going to
25 remove, and over a number of weeks, we had to draw down

1 our presence there.

2 Then we had to conduct a relief in place with the
3 Iraqi Palace Protection Force, and then, the final act
4 in all of that, was to remove ourselves in
5 early September.

6 Now, there are various points along there, where, if
7 one piece of the jigsaw should not fit, then it would
8 delay things. I think -- I reflect that it went
9 remarkably well, considering all of the complexities.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But how did that move affect your
11 ability to carry out your mission?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, our mission was to transition
13 to Iraqi security force control, and, in doing that,
14 that was part of my mission. I saw it as an important
15 milestone in the mission.

16 But it did -- coming out of the city did have an
17 impact on my situational awareness. I found it
18 difficult to keep track of what was going on in the city
19 and so we had to develop more innovative ways of gaining
20 situational awareness.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what you are really saying is,
22 because you were remote, you couldn't really have a feel
23 for what was going on in the city and you developed
24 different strategies.

25 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think that's accurate.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How practical would it have been to
2 re-enter Basra City, if required, in the circumstances?

3 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, we did re-enter Basra City.
4 There were occasions when we went back into the city to
5 escort those carrying out reconstruction, and I think
6 particularly of the Basra children's hospital and the
7 reconstruction that was going on there.

8 We did re-enter the city to transit through the city
9 in order to get to the borders. You had to cross the
10 Shatt Al Basra in Basra City in order to get to the
11 border areas. So practically, it could be done, we just
12 chose not to do it because it would send the wrong
13 signal.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Okay. I mean, in his statement to
15 Parliament on 8 October the Prime Minister talked about
16 tactical overwatch and he described that, but what
17 I really want to understand is: what did this actually
18 mean in practice for you on the ground?

19 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: We agreed with General Mohan that we
20 would deliver to him what we termed a package of support
21 that was scalable, and we drew out for him a spectrum of
22 support that we could provide to him, which -- on the
23 left-hand edge of the scale would be things like
24 communications support, staff support, planning support,
25 mapping, that kind of thing, and then the right-hand

1 edge of the scale would be a battle group prepared to
2 re-enter Basra in support of him, and all points in
3 between, including air support, including surveillance
4 support.

5 So that was our planning and it would be up to him,
6 with us, to develop that package to meet the situation.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How did -- I mean, was it effective?

8 Do you think it worked well?

9 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: There were no occasions, either prior
10 to us handing over to Provincial Iraqi Control or
11 subsequently, when -- there are occasions when the
12 security situation declined to such an extent that he
13 felt threatened. There were car bombs in Basra, there
14 was violence associated with religious festivals. There
15 were occasions where he had direct confrontation with
16 the militias, but on each occasion he was able to cope
17 with varying amounts of support, mostly towards the
18 left-hand end of the scale from us.

19 I give you a number of examples. In October, there
20 are occasions where he had a confrontation with the
21 militias in Basra City and we used fast air to fly low
22 over the city as a deterrent. So he was able to show
23 his strength -- use us to demonstrate his strength to
24 the militias, and we were able to use other techniques
25 as well.

1 But not once did we get to the point -- we were
2 ready to reintervene, but not once did I feel the
3 security situation had lapsed to such an extent that we
4 had to go to the right-hand end of the spectrum.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Was General Mohan's staff at the Air Station?
6 I take it it was. Was he there?

7 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: General Mohan commanded in a unique
8 way. To say that he had a staff would be to overstate
9 it really. He commanded on his mobile phone. He
10 commanded directly, often in person, went to the scene
11 of an incident. He was that style of commander. His
12 staff really -- his planning capacity was my staff. But
13 I suppose your point is: how were we liaising with him?

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

15 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: He did have a framework of a staff at
16 what was called the Basra Operations Centre, and on
17 a daily basis we would link with him by telephone. We
18 didn't have a permanent presence in Basra.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Right. Thank you.

20 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: We had liaison staff at my
21 headquarters as well, some Iraqis at my headquarters.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Right. So it is a two-way connection, but
23 neither is, as it were, complete, and, frankly, not
24 perfect either in real life.

25 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: No.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In your relations with Corps, to what
3 extent did the Americans have reservations about our
4 relocation from the Palace to the Airport and how were
5 you able to deal with their concerns?

6 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, both General Petraeus and
7 General Odierno were entirely supportive of the
8 transition to Iraqi control and they saw the move out of
9 the Palace as part of that transition.

10 They never expressed anything other than their
11 support for our strategy to me, and it was
12 General Odierno who recommended that we go to Provincial
13 Iraqi control. It was General Odierno who was prepared
14 to -- he was the Corps Commander who was prepared to
15 commit corps level capability in order to enable that.
16 I was aware -- there was a dialogue about the timing.
17 There were discussions, but the military, the US
18 military chain of command was nothing other than
19 entirely supportive of our strategy and the way we were
20 executing it.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was the dialogue a question of short
22 means or did it have a security aspect to it?

23 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: There was an issue of timing. You
24 know, the Corps would have to commit a capability in our
25 support, and, therefore, it had to come at a time when

1 they could do that relative to all of the other things
2 that were happening through Iraq. So there was
3 a military aspect. The timing of transition to Iraqi
4 control was -- it was determined by Iraqi politics. It
5 would be the Iraqi Prime Minister who would determine
6 when he was ready to assume control.

7 So, you know, complex factors. But your question
8 was about our relationship with the US. On a personal
9 basis, I received absolute support and General Odierno
10 trusted my tactical judgment.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to return to the question
12 of the Iraqi security forces. Could you describe how
13 you were delivering the training and how our method
14 differed from that of the Americans in terms of
15 embedding?

16 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: We called -- the concept was
17 described as M2T, monitoring mentoring and training.
18 I would say it was a big T. It was a medium-sized M,
19 monitoring, but we didn't do a lot of mentoring and that
20 was the big difference.

21 So if I start with the T, training, I think we had
22 a very successful training centre that we had built at
23 Shaibah Log Base. We were able to take people from
24 initial training, we were able to supervise Iraqis
25 training themselves. We were able to equip them to

1 deploy them, to sustain them, we were -- but the gap
2 was -- and the difference was that we didn't then mentor
3 them when they deployed on operation, and that was the
4 significant difference between the way that we
5 approached support and the way that the Americans
6 approached support in Basra.

7 What was interesting was that, when the unit that we
8 had trained from 10 Division deployed to Baghdad, we
9 mentored and we sent mentoring teams with them to
10 Baghdad. So this was something that had evolved in
11 Basra but not in Baghdad.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: I would just like to go back a little bit.

14 We will come on to the achievement of PIC in December
15 later on, but after the move to the air station, you,
16 your MND (South East), retained security responsibility.
17 Iraqi security forces, police and army are building and
18 General Mohan is there, and, after the move, is, in
19 effect, commanding operations throughout the city.

20 Is there a gradual move or is that a single change?
21 Because Iraq is a sovereign government, Mohan, the
22 security forces but nonetheless MND (South East) still
23 has its mandate. I'm slightly puzzled to know how that
24 worked in those three or four months.

25 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: It was a very grey area. When we

1 came out of the palace, we had effectively de facto
2 handed over control to the Iraqi security forces in
3 Basra province, but we hadn't de jure handed over to
4 provincial Iraqi control.

5 So it worked because General Mohan was prepared to
6 accept responsibility for security, not formally, but
7 informally. He was prepared to accept that, although he
8 didn't have legal authority, he was prepared to take
9 it -- for all practical purposes, he was prepared to
10 take responsibility for security in Basra and I admire
11 him for doing it because it got us out of a bit of
12 a hole.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: He had his own governors breathing down his
14 neck from Baghdad --

15 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Every day.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: -- in this grey area. You, for your part,
17 had your chain of command up to Corps headquarters. It
18 must have been quite an interesting life.

19 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, in an ideal world, we would
20 have gone to Provincial Iraqi Control straight away, as
21 soon as we came out of the Palace.

22 What I sought to do was reduce the gap between
23 leaving the palace and going to PIC.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Plainly, you were having to manage and
25 accept a good deal of risk, more than you would want,

1 throughout that period.

2 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: We will come on to PIC in a minute because
4 that changes things, I suppose. Usha?

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you. Could I just come back
6 again to things on the ground, because General Shaw told
7 us that there was an existence of a southern Iraqi
8 steering group which involved the FCO, DFID and
9 yourselves.

10 Did that remain, during your time, and how did it
11 actually work? What were the relations like between the
12 civilian and military operation?

13 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: By the time that I arrived, the
14 Consul General and his staff -- and the staff of the
15 Provincial Reconstruction Team were all at
16 Basra Airport, they were in the next corridor to my
17 headquarters. They attended our daily updates in the
18 morning and the evening. I saw the Consul General and
19 the head of the PRT every morning at 8 o'clock. We
20 shared the same intelligence briefings, we exchanged our
21 reports and returns back to London, so that we were
22 sighted on that. He would be there -- the
23 Consul General had been longer than I had, so I relied
24 upon him for advice.

25 So I thought the mechanics of the way that we were

1 working were really good and we had moved a long way.
2 We didn't need a -- a steering group because we met
3 every day. We were the steering group.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The fact that you were in the same
5 location nearby, you didn't have any need for it?

6 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: We didn't need this mechanism. We
7 maintained the name of the Southern Iraq Steering Group
8 but it morphed into something else. It morphed into he
9 and I having supper once a week and talking.

10 But it was difficult for him, because he had had no
11 political contact. He couldn't move around, nor
12 could I. He couldn't easily -- he couldn't meet with
13 politicians. They had to come to him, and, until the
14 security situation improved, they were unwilling to come
15 to the Air Station because it was being rocketed. It
16 was difficult for him to -- for the reconstruction team
17 to conduct reconstruction because they had no way of
18 visiting their projects.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So how did they operate?

20 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: They were very innovative. If I give
21 you some examples, the Consul General had a cultural
22 adviser, who was an Iraqi, who was able to do his work
23 for him and travel round the province.

24 As the security situation improved, and it did
25 markedly, local politicians were willing to come back in

1 and meet with him. So one of the real successes during
2 that early period was the political progress that was
3 made locally, that the Consul General made, and it led
4 to an agreement in early December that he brokered with
5 all the political parties prepared to commit themselves
6 to the support of the Iraqi security forces.

7 Reconstruction was more challenging. We were able
8 to restart it, but it was quite risky. It was difficult
9 to visit projects because we didn't have the confidence
10 in the improving security situation to commit those
11 involved in reconstruction to take the risk of visiting,
12 and so it was difficult to monitor contractors.

13 There was no shortage of contractors willing to do
14 the work, but they had to use some innovative techniques
15 in order to monitor that work. They had to monitor it
16 from the air.

17 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But this situation must have had an
18 impact on our ability to deliver the objectives at the
19 speed and the rate that we wanted. There must have been
20 some slowing down of the delivery of our objectives.

21 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Actually, they speeded up, because
22 the security situation improved during the time that
23 I was there, which allowed us to start reconstruction.
24 I think particularly -- I mean, one of the major
25 successes was the Basra Childrens' Hospital and

1 construction on that started almost -- well, started
2 again in August because the situation had improved
3 because we reduced our profile.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I think we are coming on to December
6 and PIC, with Martin.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes, just before you discuss the actual
8 transfer in December to Provincial Iraqi Control,
9 I wonder if you could say a little more about the
10 reasons for the three-and-a-half-month delay, which
11 obviously was something which was a concern to you?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: The process of transitioning to
13 Provincial Iraqi Control was governed by the Iraqi
14 Prime Minister. We would -- there was a complex set of
15 metrics designed to inform that decision, but,
16 ultimately, we knew that it would be a political
17 decision, which he would take when he was ready.

18 I think General Shaw had been recommending that we
19 had transitioned to Provincial Iraqi Control since
20 about April of 2007. That recommendation would be
21 submitted to the Corps Commander, who would, in
22 discussion with General Petraeus and with Iraqi
23 politicians, make a recommendation, and, for various
24 reasons, I suspect that the Iraqis were not ready
25 politically to take the control. So there was

1 a political element to it.

2 There was also a capability element. The Iraqi
3 security forces might not feel that they were ready and
4 then there were the local political dynamics as well.
5 The relationship between Governor Wa'ili and
6 Prime Minister Maliki was difficult, to the point that
7 I think the Prime Minister was trying to get rid of him,
8 but Wa'ili was an arch survivor, and only when it became
9 clear that he was not going to be replaced and that they
10 had to deal with him was there the political will to
11 transition to PIC with him as Governor. So I think he
12 was the principal -- Wa'ili, the local governor, was the
13 principal reason why there was the delay.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Because his status as governor was in
15 a way being questioned at that time?

16 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Indeed, yes.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: He managed to remain by persistence,
18 right?

19 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: He survived.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Just on that, with PIC does the Provincial
21 Governor, at least in a formal sense, acquire more
22 authority as against the central government?

23 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: It would depend on who we transferred
24 power to. There was -- some provinces were transferred
25 to an operational coordinator, who was given security

1 powers by the Prime Minister, and some provinces, it was
2 transferred to the governor. So that added complexity.

3 So we were transferring power -- or the
4 Multi-National Forces were transferring power, sovereign
5 power, back to the Prime Minister. How he chose to
6 delegate that power, whether it be to a Mohan character
7 or to the political governor was up to him.

8 In the case of Basra, it was rather complex and
9 I didn't really understand the dynamics of that
10 relationship between Basra and Baghdad.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Just, though, you saw a lot of General Mohan?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: Would he have been wishing to achieve PIC
14 earlier than his political masters eventually decided he
15 should, looking at the state of his forces and their
16 readiness?

17 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I don't think it really mattered to
18 him. He knew who was in charge. He knew that he was
19 responsible for security. He knew that the
20 Prime Minister -- that -- was looking to him -- I think,
21 for a while it suited him to be in this grey area,
22 because, if it did go absolutely wrong, then he could
23 sidestep some of it.

24 I think -- but we -- he and I never had
25 a conversation about the speed of this. He was not

1 saying, "We should go to PIC now", so he was in no great
2 rush.

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did you have concerns in December 2007
4 about the capability of the Iraqi security forces?
5 Their ability, say, to avoid infiltration?

6 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I had concerns. They had --
7 they had weaknesses, you know, they were well trained,
8 as individuals, but their leadership was not
9 experienced, they were capable of conducting tactical,
10 low-level operations, but their ability to conduct
11 manoeuvre, to sustain themselves logistically, was
12 a challenge to them.

13 But I thought they wouldn't get better until they
14 were given responsibility, and it was a bit like -- and
15 I think the others have used this -- it was a bit like
16 taking the stabilisers off a child's bike. They were
17 going to wobble for a while and I was there to make sure
18 they didn't fall over.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The other point we haven't touched on
20 yet is the police and your relations with
21 Major General Jalil. I wonder if you could tell us
22 something about that and how effective they had become
23 by December.

24 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: The police were a mixed bag. At
25 their worst, they were trouble. They had been

1 infiltrated and they were a constraint on progress.

2 At their best, and there were some very good police
3 units, normally those close to General Jalil, whom he
4 trusted, they were good, they were effective. The
5 national police units, who came from Baghdad, were
6 highly effective and something that the Iraqis were
7 particularly proud of.

8 But at the lowest levels, they were not effective.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I believe that in January 2008, when
10 there was trouble in Basra, serious trouble,
11 General Mohan was actually in London. He was away and
12 General Jalil was called upon to deal with it.

13 Can you tell us something about that and how he
14 performed, how his police performed?

15 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: General Jalil was a military officer
16 in charge of a police force, so he had more -- he found
17 it easier to exercise command in a traditional military
18 sense in -- when there was trouble, than he did to
19 develop the type of capabilities that one would expect
20 in a police force.

21 He is a very charismatic leader. So he had no
22 difficulty whatsoever taking charge when General Mohan
23 was away. I don't think General Mohan realised --
24 General Mohan very much thought that he was still in
25 charge, even when he was in London. He was still

1 exercising command. On one occasion, in his dressing
2 gown from a hotel room on his mobile phone. So he was
3 very much the man in charge.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: On his mobile phone from London?

5 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: From London.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: One final question on this period.

7 There were concerns in late 2007 about border
8 infiltration from Iran, serious concerns, and whether
9 there was smuggling. I wonder how these were addressed,
10 first of all by General Odierno of Corps, and then by
11 you and the troops under your command?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: The Corps Commander ordered me to
13 conduct operations on the border with Iran in order to
14 disrupt the flow of what he described as lethal aid
15 coming from Iran and supporting the insurgencies --
16 insurgents, particularly in Baghdad. He was concerned
17 about the border crossing points and he was concerned
18 about infiltration through the marsh area in Maysan
19 province.

20 So actually, after we had vacated Basra Palace, we
21 then had the capability to mount operations on to the
22 border, because I had troops available to me who had
23 previously been fixed at the Palace. So from September
24 onwards, we started to conduct a series of operations
25 which became known as known as Operation Certain Shield

1 into the border area.

2 I think they may have been effective as
3 a deterrence, but we didn't find anything, because it
4 was a very difficult border to police and it was
5 a border that was in part not well marked. It wasn't
6 agreed upon. One had to be careful, going up to the
7 Iranian border, that you didn't precipitate something
8 else. I had imposed restrictions on how close we could
9 fly to the border, for obvious reasons, and there was
10 a natural trading relationship between Iran and Iraq and
11 one had to be careful that, in conducting operations on
12 the border, you didn't disrupt that as well. So it was
13 difficult.

14 I always felt that actually the -- we -- until we
15 got into the network of supply of those components for
16 improvised explosive devices, until we developed an
17 intelligence to get into that network, then we were
18 going to have limited effect on disrupting supply.

19 I also didn't think supply was that big an issue.
20 There was easy access to the components of making
21 a bomb. So you had to look at the whole network. So --
22 but I was ordered to conduct the operations and I did.

23 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How long did they take? Over what
24 period of time?

25 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: They varied from deploying a whole

1 battle group plus support into the field for up to ten
2 days at a time, sometimes longer, sometimes it would be
3 a surge for 24 hours. Of course, once you put
4 a presence on the border, then people get to know about
5 it and they found ways round it. So you had to move
6 around.

7 I also saw a good way of achieving what we needed to
8 achieve was to develop the capabilities of the
9 Department of Border Enforcement, the Iraqi Department
10 of Border Enforcement. So we improved our relationship
11 with them. The Americans deployed a number of
12 contractors who had experience in border operations and
13 border security to the points -- well, air and border
14 points -- crossing points. We deployed biometric
15 devices.

16 So it is about improving the capacity of the
17 Department of Border Enforcement. It was about
18 conducting military-style border operations. So it
19 became a focus from about September, certainly through
20 until -- the remainder of my period there.

21 THE CHAIRMAN: Just to scale it in my mind. You have got
22 a porous and uncertain border of several hundred miles?

23 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes, but you could -- you know, the
24 traffic across that border was concentrated on a number
25 of crossing points and that's where the majority came

1 across.

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: I think I will just ask whether other
4 colleagues have questions at this point? Roderic?

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You talked about your strong personal
6 relations with the American commanders and the way that
7 you had good support down the chain of command for what
8 you were doing. But did you also feel that the
9 Americans would have preferred us to have worked to
10 a rather slower transition timetable than the timetable
11 that you were under instructions to work to?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: No, I never had that discussion with
13 the Corps Commander. He was -- he supported my
14 timeline -- our timeline. He accepted that the
15 transition to Iraqi control would evolve at different
16 times across Iraq. He was keen to -- that there was
17 progress. He was -- demonstrable progress, and PIC was
18 a measurement of that progress.

19 So I at no time had a conversation with my Corps
20 Commander where he tried to slow down that process.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But our timetable was being driven by
22 strong pressures from London to execute the transition
23 with a view to exit and this meant that the Americans
24 did have to fill some of the capabilities that we had
25 been providing at the time we left. So it probably

1 wasn't optimal for them, was it?

2 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: When we came out of the Palace, when

3 we transitioned to Iraqi control, I still had the

4 capability to do what he required of me. So we had

5 discussions about what would be left and what types of

6 tasks he required of me. He gave me a list of those

7 tasks. I then matched my force against that list and

8 I didn't ask for any additional forces from him.

9 So during my time there, he didn't have to commit

10 any -- other than for the extraction, which was part of

11 a Corps operation anyway, he didn't have to commit

12 anything additional down into Basra. He was content

13 that I was able to do everything that was asked of me

14 with the force that I had.

15 I think he probably had worries about where we would

16 go from the spring of 2008 onwards, but during my time

17 there, I was able to do what I had to. I had more than

18 enough to do what was required of me.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So questions of the Americans having to

20 fill in for us didn't arise in your time. It was really

21 after that that this might have come up?

22 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: They didn't arise in my time.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Well, thanks. Usha?

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you. I want to do a little

1 bit on the question of violence, you know, which, across
2 Iraq, was beginning to decrease in mid-2007.

3 What did you assess to be the drivers for this
4 menace across Iraq?

5 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think a number. I think the US
6 surge had a significant impact, because it displayed the
7 coalition's willingness to see this through. I think
8 the dynamics of Iraqi politics were changing. I think
9 the -- at the Sunni outreach programme in Anbar and the
10 western provinces, they had reached an accommodation
11 there, which reduced the level of violence there, and
12 the improving Iraqi security forces had a significant
13 impact, particularly in Baghdad, and I think the strike
14 operations conducted across the Corps by the coalition,
15 not just US, but UK forces as well, had a significant
16 impact on constraining Al-Qaeda's ability to operate.

17 So I think all of those things coalesced to improve
18 the security situation and I think Iraqi civilians had
19 got tired and they wanted to see things improve.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But was there a corresponding
21 decrease of violence in MND (South East)?

22 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: 90 per cent of the violence was
23 directed against us. If we didn't present the target,
24 then the figures would reduce, and coming out of the
25 city had a dramatic effect on the metrics that we used

1 to measure the violence.

2 I'm not pretending that the security situation
3 significantly improved for Basrawis; it wouldn't, and
4 I knew it wouldn't until the Iraqi security forces got
5 back in there.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But the fact that we consolidated in
7 one location, the Air Station, did that actually make us
8 a target?

9 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, I minimised the target. In
10 theory, it would, but, in practice, it made us more
11 difficult to attack, because we were very secure in
12 Basra Air Station. By late 2007, we had a very
13 sophisticated method of protecting ourselves against
14 rocket attack, which was the predominant form of attack.

15 It was difficult for people to get out to the Air
16 Station because they had to come out of the city in
17 order to get there and our surveillance was pretty good,
18 and the personal protection that was afforded to our
19 soldiers in the base had improved significantly.

20 So although we were concentrated in one area,
21 I thought the level of protection provided there was
22 a match to the threat.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you had anticipated all of that
24 and taken steps or something?

25 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, it all coincided. I think it

1 was fortunate that many of the initiatives taken by my
2 predecessors, perhaps for very different reasons, and
3 some of the equipment that they had asked for as Urgent
4 Operational Requirements started to be delivered during
5 my time there. So I think we were very well served and
6 having everyone in -- concentrated, allowed us to
7 protect ourselves better.

8 I was also able to open a base in Kuwait, and so
9 I was able to reduce the number of people in Basra by
10 putting some of my logistics and some of my helicopters
11 in Kuwait.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What about the threat of indirect
13 fire?

14 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, it reduced significantly and we
15 were able to shoot rockets down. We were able to -- our
16 surveillance having improved to such an extent that we
17 knew the likely firing points and we were able to see
18 them.

19 Our ability to engage those who were firing rockets
20 at us from the air improved to such an extent that we
21 forced them back into the town and the further away they
22 are, the more inaccurate they are. So the whole threat
23 of indirect fire reduced. It was still an irritant, but
24 the number of casualties sustained by indirect fire
25 reduced dramatically from August onwards.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You said earlier that the equipment
2 had begun to arrive because your predecessor had
3 requested it, but it was Sir Richard Dannatt, I think,
4 who, in late 2006 was reported to have said that our
5 presence was actually exacerbating the situation and we
6 should withdraw, and we didn't have equipment, but
7 that -- that simply by being there, there was a threat
8 of attacks. I mean, did you have the equipment, and do
9 you think --

10 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I thought I was very well served.
11 I thought we were very well equipped and I'll give you
12 some examples.

13 Our protective mobility of our vehicles had improved
14 significantly. We spent a considerable amount of money
15 improving our Warrior fighting vehicles' ability to
16 protect ourselves and so we had a programme that was
17 delivered during my time to upgrade Warriors'
18 protection.

19 We had delivered a protective mobility vehicle
20 called Mastiff, which is now employed in Afghanistan as
21 well, which was a very good vehicle for the role on
22 roads and offered significantly improved protection.
23 Personal equipment had improved as well. We had new and
24 improved body armour. I could go on. Our unmanned
25 aerial vehicles had started to be delivered by the

1 autumn of 2007.

2 So I considered myself particularly fortunate that
3 the Urgent Operational Requirements programme had
4 started to deliver during my time there.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Had you enough helicopters?

6 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I don't think you will ever come
7 across a commander that says he has got enough
8 helicopters, and I was no different. I would always
9 have liked more. The issue was not of support
10 helicopters, though, what I really wanted was attack
11 helicopters, and I had to go to the corps headquarters
12 to get attack helicopters. Attack helicopters were
13 magnificent as a deterrent. Whenever we had attack
14 helicopters based in Basra, the opposition knew about
15 it, and the threat of indirect fire reduced as
16 a consequence. So if there was a major gap, it was
17 in -- it was attack helicopters.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: These were a corps level asset held and
19 deployed from corps under your direct control?

20 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Presumably, they would have been more
22 effective against militias in an urban environment than
23 the fast air that you talked about earlier as
24 a deterrent?

25 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Actually, fast air is more accurate.

1 Because of the weapons system, you can deliver a bomb
2 with more precision from fast air than perhaps you can
3 do from attack helicopters. I was content that, should
4 we require to do it, I had the means to engage militias
5 in the urban areas precisely.

6 What you get with Apache, though, is that they know
7 it is there. So it acts as more of a deterrent. So the
8 threat didn't present itself when Apache was in the air.
9 Fast air at 23,000 feet doesn't necessarily have the
10 deterrent that an Apache does. Then you get into the,
11 well, you haven't used the Apache, therefore, it was
12 more difficult to make a case to get it from Corps and
13 deterrence is difficult to measure. So we had those
14 kinds of debates with the Corps, and, across the Corps,
15 the Corps Commander had to have priorities about where
16 he was using attack helicopters.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So those are American Apaches with the
18 corps, but the British brought a lot of Apaches too.

19 Where were our Apaches, were they all in Afghanistan?

20 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think they had started to deploy to
21 Afghanistan, so I think there was a capacity issue.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you actually ask London for some?

23 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I had conversations with PJHQ, where
24 I mentioned that it would be good to have Apaches, but
25 I didn't formally -- I don't recall formally submitting

1 a request for Apache during my time.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was that because you had been given
3 an indication that there wouldn't be any point?

4 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think that was probably the case.
5 I think that's probably the case, but I was able to get
6 them from the Corps, and, as the situation improved
7 across the Corps, then I was able to get more of them.

8 To be fair, the Americans took risks, you know, they
9 recognised the need to give us what we needed to be
10 a good ally and they were prepared to take risks in
11 their own areas to give us Apache.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: I do not want to prolong this, but just as
13 a matter of professional -- the configuration of
14 particular assets, even had there been British Apache
15 available in numbers, they would have had to be deployed
16 to Corps and then by Corps down to you, or could they
17 have been --

18 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I suppose it would -- I suppose that
19 could have been the case, but it would depend upon the
20 command and control arrangements that we had delegated,
21 whether we delegated them operational control to the
22 Corps.

23 I think there were occasions when the Corps asked to
24 use our helicopters that we had in Basra for Corps-level
25 tasking, particularly to move people around. So

1 I suspect, if we had Apache deployed, that there would
2 have been occasions where the corps would have said --
3 asked to use our helicopters, but if they were based in
4 Basra, then I would have had first call on them.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Martin?

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have three final questions about your
7 support role, our efforts.

8 First of all, can you tell us something about the
9 British plans for Basra International Airport, I know
10 you were much involved in that, and what part the UK
11 played and your staff played?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think it is a real success story.

13 I think the expeditionary air wing and the airmen -- our
14 UK airmen made great progress in developing the airport.
15 It was -- and we had a US contractor being contracted by
16 the Corps to bring it up to international standards, and
17 they did that.

18 So -- but it was a national airport. It had not
19 been in commercial ownership. It had an Iraqi manager
20 who managed it. He didn't operate it commercially, and
21 we lacked the expertise to develop it commercially.
22 Yet, it had the potential to be a fantastic hub into
23 southern Iraq and into the oil fields and down to the
24 port.

25 So we were keen, not only bring it up to

1 international standards for safety and security, which
2 we did, but we were quite keen to assist the Iraqis to
3 develop the commercial potential of the airport.

4 I think it became one of the -- one of the
5 requirements prior to our eventual drawdown, didn't it,
6 that we handed over to -- or that we helped the Iraqis
7 develop the airfield? So I thought it was a real
8 success and something that we could focus on and produce
9 and deliver a result.

10 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How were you involved in it? Was there
11 a security issue at this time?

12 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: We needed the airfield as well
13 because we were using it for our troop transport. Over
14 time, the Iraqis took more and more responsibility for
15 the running of the civil side of the airfield. So over
16 time, there developed a civil and a military side of the
17 airport terminal. Over time, we were able to separate
18 the civil terminal so that civilians could get access to
19 it without compromising the security of our camp.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: By the time you left, this was a work
21 in successful progress?

22 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: For the various religious festivals,
23 particularly the Haj, Basra was a very important hub to
24 get pilgrims -- to move them --

25 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That was December 2007/January 2008?

1 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Yes. I think it was developing,
2 and -- commercially it was developing. There were
3 companies who were realising the commercial potential of
4 the airport.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My second question relates to the port.
6 I know also that this was something that you felt
7 strongly about. In what sense was MND (South East) able
8 to make an impact on the development of Umm Qasr?

9 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: The port was very important to
10 Iraqis, an Iranian port. Again, it had enormous
11 potential, but the shipping channel leading to the port
12 had wrecks sunk in it from the Iran/Iraq war. It was
13 reported that there were mines in the area. The channel
14 had not been dredged. The berthing facilities were
15 inadequate for modern container ships.

16 As with many ports, there was a level of corruption
17 there as well. We had with a company down there
18 providing support to the Iraqi security forces. We had
19 a Naval training team training the Iraqi army --
20 Iraqi Navy, but I -- but what it really needed was
21 a commercial operator to come in there to have
22 a contract from the Iraqi Government to operate the
23 port.

24 Getting the Iraqis to that point was challenging
25 really, to get them to let contracts to somebody else,

1 probably from outside, to operate their port, was
2 difficult. I don't think the -- they recognised the
3 potential, but it was just really difficult getting them
4 to realise the commercial opportunities.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You were able to make your points and
6 your --

7 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I was supported by General Rollo, who
8 took a particular interest in the port. The American
9 Embassy had an number of -- they had brought in some
10 transportation specialists who were able to give advice
11 to the Iraqis on how to develop the port, but I didn't
12 see significant progress during my time.

13 I think the port got safer, the channel was dredged,
14 contracts were let for removing the wrecks and goods
15 flowed in and out of the port, but I still had concerns
16 about its -- about its commercial viability and I had
17 concerns about its security by the time I left.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My final question on this area concerns
19 the Department for International Development. We have
20 heard criticism from several military witnesses of the
21 role of DFID in southern Iraq and one of our witnesses
22 earlier this week, Lord Turnbull, the former
23 Cabinet Secretary, expressed his anger at the
24 criticisms.

25 You, yourself, are on record as having opposed

1 beating up DFID, and I wonder if you could tell us
2 something about, first of all, what impressed you by
3 their efforts at that time and what part your troops and
4 your operations --

5 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think there is inevitably
6 a friction between the military desire to -- for quick
7 progress and the development professionals' desire to
8 have sustainable development. You know, we wanted --
9 we, the military, often wanted progress quickly in order
10 to provide the local consent to military operations, and
11 so the inclination is to spend money quickly on projects
12 which are not always going to deliver long-term
13 redevelopment.

14 The Provincial Reconstruction Team took a different
15 view, that, actually, what we wanted was sustainable
16 development and we wanted development that involved the
17 Iraqis, it delivered what the Iraqis wanted, and, if the
18 Iraqis wanted it, were involved in it, then it was more
19 likely to exist after we left.

20 Over time, my view moved towards the development
21 professionals' view, because I saw the logic of their
22 approach. In 2003, when I was commanding 7 Brigade,
23 I wanted it quickly, now, and I wanted to start
24 rebuilding schools because I wanted to demonstrate that
25 we were not an army of occupation, that we were there to

1 help Iraqis.

2 By 2007, the schools that I painted in 2003 were not
3 schools or -- what we really needed was sustainable
4 development. So -- and I thought DFID's approach was
5 exactly right in 2007, because they were able to deliver
6 things that were sustainable, and this wasn't about
7 money necessarily, this was about teaching Iraqis how to
8 use their money. It was about giving them the planning
9 capacity to deliver development that they wanted but
10 that was sustainable. So I became a bit soft really.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That brings me to my final question,
13 which is that you were the commander of 7 Brigade, which
14 kind of led the invasion and entered Basra, and then you
15 led the operation to leave the city. Was the legacy
16 that was left behind in Basra City what you hoped for in
17 2003?

18 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think the soundbite that appeared
19 at the time was I liberated Basra from its enemies and
20 I handed back to its friends.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: A very good soundbite.

22 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: If only I had written it. I suppose
23 if I compare -- and I'm on record as having said that
24 I perhaps was more ambitious in 2003 and I was more
25 pragmatic by 2008. You know, I had experience of

1 stabilisation before. I had seen it in Bosnia, in
2 Kosovo, where we were able to make progress quicker than
3 we did in Iraq and so I was -- you know -- I was
4 disappointed, I suppose, when I reflect over the period
5 of our involvement there, that we were not able to make
6 progress in stabilising the country quicker and
7 progressing reconstruction. But -- so I -- you know, my
8 ambitions -- my level of ambition had reduced by 2008.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What do you think is the legacy you
10 have left behind?

11 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think it is too early to judge. Do
12 you mean -- I think we removed a regime, we rebuilt
13 a country, we handed it back to a sovereign government,
14 we made significant progress in reconstruction, we
15 developed an Iraqi security forces from scratch -- this
16 is all real progress, not at the rate, and perhaps --
17 not at the rate that we initially wanted.

18 There were difficulties, because we had no real plan
19 for day 2, once we had conducted the attack. But
20 I think -- I hope that historians are kind and look back
21 and say, "Well, actually, not bad". When we look back
22 in a few years' time that, you know, Iraq isn't perhaps
23 as bad as we thought it would be. When I left
24 in February 2008, I was optimistic that Iraq might turn
25 out a bit better than I thought it would be in the

1 summer of 2007, and I have been pleased by the progress
2 since.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I ask a question arising out of
4 what you said to Sir Martin Gilbert about going "soft"
5 in all the years in relation to DFID? But, are there
6 any sort of lessons that you want to draw in how it
7 might work in the future? Because you know, quite
8 rightly, you started with kind of the short-term from
9 the military perspective and DFID being focused on
10 long-term sustainable, and we have heard a great deal
11 about a comprehensive approach from other witnesses.

12 Do you have any observations on how you might
13 operate in the future?

14 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I think we are operating a lot
15 better. I think there is a -- if you compare our
16 performance in Afghanistan with our performance in the
17 early days in Iraq, I think we have learned those
18 lessons. I think we, the military, have learned. We
19 understand development much better. We understand the
20 way that other government departments operate. I think
21 those other government departments have raised their
22 game as well. I think the willingness to put civilians
23 in harm's way in order to bring about sustainable
24 development has improved. I think our willingness to
25 spend UK money in conflict stabilisation has changed.

1 I think -- I don't know Afghanistan as well as Iraq,
2 but I think we have made significant progress, and
3 I think -- I'm told that our Provincial Reconstruction
4 Team in Afghanistan is an example of best practice, as
5 it was in Iraq towards the end. It was the model to
6 which others aspired, because we had the three -- people
7 from the three elements of government working
8 successfully together.

9 So it wasn't an easy journey. I think we
10 underestimated the requirements for that style of
11 stabilisation support, but I think we got there -- we
12 got there in the end. I'm told that we got there.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Sir Lawrence? Last chance for
15 lessons to be learned. We have had some already this
16 morning, and thank you for those, but are there any
17 final reflections you would like to offer?

18 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: Well, thank you for the opportunity.
19 I think most of the -- I'm the last of this style of
20 military witnesses, and I have looked at their
21 transcripts and I think most of the lessons have been
22 learned. I think what hasn't come out in evidence is
23 the degree to which we had civilian support from UK
24 civilian contractors and I would credit them with many
25 of the successes.

1 In hindsight, for my -- if I look back on my period
2 of command, and I thought it was going to be the most
3 challenging period ever of my military service and it
4 turned out to be a bit better than I was expecting. So
5 things were a bit better in 2008 than I was expecting.

6 I don't offer you any tactical lessons that haven't
7 been drawn out previously.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. There is one point. It is not
9 primary, perhaps, but it is not trivial either. It is
10 about tour lengths for brigade level. Pretty
11 universally, we have been hearing it needs to be
12 12 months.

13 MAJ GEN GRAHAM BINNS: I'm not about to join the chorus of
14 those who say their successors should do longer than
15 they did. I think there is a need to improve campaign
16 continuity, and I think one of the methods of doing
17 that, when it is appropriate, is that senior commanders
18 should serve longer, but I do think we have to be
19 careful that this doesn't become the default setting,
20 because one can get very tired, if you are being
21 rocketed every day, if you have got the responsibility
22 of command during a very difficult period, then simply
23 extending people's period there isn't necessarily the
24 answer.

25 We have to be -- we have to make the length of

1 deployment appropriate to the circumstances, and if the
2 security situation is such, and if the demands of the
3 command are such that it would be difficult for a person
4 to sustain, then we shouldn't automatically go to
5 a default setting of longer terms. It may be
6 appropriate in certain circumstances to do reduced
7 tours.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That's a very measured response.
9 I'm grateful for that. I would like to thank our
10 witness this morning and to those of you who have been
11 present thought. Thank you, General Binns.

12 We are going to have our next hearing at 2 o'clock
13 on Monday afternoon, when we shall be hearing from
14 Jonathan Powell, who was the Chief of Defence Staff to
15 the former Prime Minister, and, with that, I'll close
16 this session, thank you.

17 (11.15 am)

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