

1 (10.50 am)

2 SIR BILL JEFFREY

3 THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome to our witness.

4 This morning's second witness, and the last one for this
5 brief resumption of hearings, is Sir Bill Jeffrey. You
6 have been Permanent Under Secretary of State at the
7 Ministry of Defence since November 2005, I understand,
8 and you still hold the post.

9 You were unable to appear before us when you were
10 a bit unwell the other day, so thank you for coming
11 along on this final morning.

12 During this session, we are going to ask Sir Bill
13 about the machinery of the MoD and its ability to
14 support two significant military operations
15 simultaneously, about the priority afforded to Iraq
16 during your time, and about funding and equipment.

17 There are two things I say before the start of every
18 session: we recognise that witnesses are giving evidence
19 based, in part at least, on their recollection of
20 events, and we cross-check what we hear against the
21 papers to which we have access, and I remind every
22 witness that they will later be asked to sign
23 a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the
24 evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

25 To kick off, I'll ask Sir Martin Gilbert to open the

1 questions. Martin?

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Your predecessor, Sir Kevin Tebbit
3 explained to us that the Permanent Under Secretary of
4 State for the MoD was responsible for policy advice,
5 finance and general management of the department. Could
6 you tell us something about your role of providing
7 policy advice with regard to Iraq?

8 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is true that my predecessor said, as
9 head of the department, I'm the Secretary of State's
10 principal policy adviser. In practice, I was,
11 throughout the period of the four years or so when I was
12 Permanent Secretary when the Iraq campaign was
13 continuing, involved in many of the discussions with the
14 successive Secretaries of State. I attended weekly
15 meetings of the Chiefs of Staff and their meetings with
16 ministers. I did not become involved in the detailed
17 day-by-day provision of policy advice. That was in the
18 hands very much of senior people on the policy side,
19 military and civilian, and you have heard from many of
20 them in the course of the Inquiry's hearings.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How did you view your role within
22 directing of the Chief of the Defence Staff? How did
23 you see that?

24 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think that whoever does my job has to
25 have an extremely close relationship with the Chief of

1 the Defence Staff. It is a more complicated
2 organisation than most government departments,
3 because I have the role as head of the Department of
4 State, I am the accounting officer and the principal
5 policy adviser. The Chief of the Defence Staff heads the
6 armed forces as the strategic military commander. But, in
7 practice, in order to deliver defence, particularly at
8 times like these, with heavy levels of deployment, we
9 have to work extremely closely together. I chair the
10 Defence Board, he chairs the Chiefs of Staff Committee,
11 but the relationship needs to be a very close one
12 indeed.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What, as Permanent Under Secretary of
14 State, is the balance of your time taken between things
15 directly related to current operations and
16 non-operational responsibilities?

17 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Over this period, the sheer scale of the
18 commitment to current operations over several years,
19 both to Iraq and Afghanistan, has been such that I found
20 it -- I wouldn't care to put a figure on it, but it
21 certainly consumed a good deal of my time.

22 As a Defence Board -- and the CDS and I discussed
23 this -- we have been clear that it constitutes the
24 department's highest priority. As a consequence,
25 I think I have been more involved in the respects in

1 which the department supports these operations than in
2 almost anything else.

3 The other really significant thing, I feel, as the
4 holder of this post, is the responsibility for ensuring
5 that we get the best people into some of the key posts.
6 One of the reasons I would say I have not been, week by
7 week, involved in the detail in policy-making, is that
8 I have a great deal of confidence in those who were.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of Iraq, which is, of course,
10 our focus, how does your level of involvement with Iraq
11 compare with the level of involvement on decision-making
12 on Afghanistan and perhaps other military operations?

13 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I suspect, actually, since we have
14 reduced to the single operation in Afghanistan, I have
15 become more involved in that than I was in Iraq, but
16 I certainly -- particularly, as there were changes in
17 Secretary of State over the period in question, I was
18 typically -- and I noticed from his evidence to you that
19 Sir Peter Ricketts said something similar -- in a sense
20 the longstop. I was the person with whom the Secretary
21 of State might well have a quiet discussion after the
22 main meeting, and I saw it as my function to stand back
23 a bit from the advice that was being provided by others.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have discussed at some length with
25 other witnesses, including the Prime Minister, the

1 decision to extend commitments in Afghanistan, while the
2 British military was still heavily committed in Iraq.

3 When you took up your position as Permanent
4 Under Secretary, we understand the decision to go into
5 Helmand province had been taken in principle, but that
6 the specific details were yet to be determined.

7 In January 2006, the Cabinet agreed to the shape of
8 the UK mission to Helmand. Did you contribute to that
9 decision-making process leading up to the Cabinet
10 agreement?

11 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I was involved in many of the
12 discussions. I was probably -- at the time when the key
13 decision was taken, in mid to late January 2006, I had
14 been in my post for probably six or seven weeks, so
15 I wouldn't want to exaggerate the extent to which
16 I brought influence to bear at that point. I was
17 certainly conscious that ministers of the day were keen
18 to be assured by the Chiefs that the job could be done
19 in Afghanistan.

20 Like the Chief of Defence Staff, when he gave
21 evidence to you a week or so ago, felt that there was an
22 awareness among himself, his predecessor at that time,
23 and their colleagues among the chiefs that this was not
24 without risk, but there was also a belief that it was
25 manageable and could be done.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What actual apparatus was in place at
2 the MoD for planning the resourcing in Iraq and
3 Afghanistan simultaneously and was this apparatus, in
4 your view, adequate to the task?

5 SIR BILL JEFFREY: The military plans, as you will know, are
6 generated principally by the Joint Headquarters and by
7 those responsible for the operations on the military
8 side in the head office. I always felt, as someone who
9 has not spent his entire working career in defence, that
10 the thoroughness with which military plans of that sort
11 are conceived and worked through into detail and put
12 into practice is admirable.

13 I think, as I have felt many times elsewhere in
14 government, there are respects in which the rest of
15 government could learn from the way in which the
16 military do plan for major operations of this kind.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of what the respective plans
18 involved, did you have concerns that the military would
19 be stretched, would be possibly overstretched by
20 conducting two significant operations simultaneously?
21 Was this something which you communicated to ministers?

22 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I shared the general sense -- and the
23 Inquiry has heard from a number of different witnesses
24 that that sense was in the air -- that, by taking on the
25 Afghanistan operation as it was then conceived, there

1 were undoubtedly risks, because, as the Chief of the
2 Defence Staff said to you, there was a risk that we
3 would end up being stretched in two theatres for longer
4 than was desirable.

5 My recollection -- and I checked it against
6 submissions of the time -- was that, first of all, there
7 was a strong expectation in NATO that we would follow
8 through in southern Afghanistan. Secondly, that the
9 military understandably had a strong desire to do the
10 job properly and to resource it properly, and, thirdly,
11 that the overall advice, military and civilian, was that
12 the deployment, as it was eventually agreed by
13 ministers, involved significant challenges, but
14 challenges that ought to be manageable.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was this something that you accepted,
16 the manageability? This was something you accepted, or
17 did you have questions about it at any time?

18 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I shared the general view that this was
19 something that we ought to take on, but I think, as
20 other witnesses have said to this Inquiry, there was
21 some apprehension that if we ended up being involved in
22 Iraq longer than we were then assuming, then we would
23 become very stretched indeed, as proved to be the case.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was there a point, or when did the
25 point come, that the operation in Afghanistan resulted

1 in fewer assets being available for Iraq?

2 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I don't know if the connection between
3 the two was quite as tight as that, but there is no
4 doubt that, implicitly at least -- and let's remember
5 that in both cases we are talking about
6 a UK contribution to a wider effort and in the Afghan
7 case a NATO effort -- being involved in both theatres
8 undoubtedly constrained how much we could contribute to
9 either of them.

10 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My final question is: in relation to
11 the case of our withdrawal and the policy of withdrawal
12 from Iraq, was this also affected by the then growing
13 commitment to Afghanistan, what was clearly going to be
14 something that would mean that Iraq would (a) not be
15 reinforced in any significant way, and (b) might have to
16 be drawn down more quickly?

17 SIR BILL JEFFREY: There is no doubt, over that period --
18 and we are talking now of 2006 to 2008 essentially --
19 that there was a very strong desire to draw down in Iraq
20 as early as we properly could, but I would emphasise the
21 words "properly could".

22 In my estimation, that desire did not cause us to go
23 against the essentially conditions-based approach that
24 was being taken in Basra in particular, and the best
25 evidence of that is, I think, as other witnesses have

1 said to this Inquiry, is that although, when Charge of
2 the Knights took place in the spring of 2008, the
3 Prime Minister had previously indicated a desire and an
4 intention to draw down to 2,500, in fact the military
5 advice was that we needed to stick at 4,500 for all
6 sorts of reasons to do with supporting the Iraqi
7 security forces, and that's the decision that was taken.

8 So I don't feel that we departed from our driving
9 instinct on what would be the proper conditions for our
10 withdrawal from Iraq, but it is undoubtedly the case
11 that, over that whole period, other things being equal,
12 we would have liked to have drawn down from Iraq as
13 early as possible, both for Afghan military reasons and
14 because operating what was, in effect, two medium-scale
15 operations for that period of time is very stretching
16 for defence.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: Just a couple of points on the back
19 reflection from Afghanistan. The operation, as planned,
20 conceived and decided in January 2006, has since grown
21 markedly at the same time as we have had the drawdown
22 from Iraq and eventually military exit.

23 Am I right that the key stretch point has often not
24 been so much the number of troops on the ground, but
25 rather the enablers, things like ISTAR, helicopters,

1 whatever, and that that's where the real competition for
2 priority sets up a tension?

3 SIR BILL JEFFREY: You are right, and I would add to ISTAR
4 and helicopters, air transport. There is no doubt
5 that -- and it goes to this continuing argument about
6 the sustainability of two medium-scale operations over
7 a long period. That's not what we were planning to do.
8 That's what, to my mind, to everyone's credit, we
9 succeeded in doing for the best part of three years, but
10 it does stretch, not only the military capability; it
11 causes unwelcome implications for the intensity with
12 which we use our troops, the so-called harmony
13 guidelines, but in particular, it stretches the key
14 enablers, as you have described.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Thank you. I'll turn now to
16 Sir Roderic Lyne, if I may. Roderic?

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think my colleagues, in a minute, would
18 like to talk about specific items of equipment, but can
19 I just ask you first about the broad issue of funding,
20 which has taken up quite a lot of time at this Inquiry?

21 We heard from earlier witnesses, like Mr Hoon,
22 Sir Kevin Tebbit, General Lord Walker, that, in their
23 view, the MoD was not resourced to deliver the full
24 programme that had been envisaged in the Strategic
25 Defence Review of 1998. What was the state of the MoD's

1 finances when you arrived in 2005?

2 SIR BILL JEFFREY: First of all, there had been a serious
3 dispute between the Treasury and the MoD, about which
4 the Inquiry has heard, in the latter part of 2003, with
5 the MoD believing that the newly-introduced tools
6 on resource accounting allowed essentially unlimited
7 switching from indirect expenditure to cash, the
8 Treasury allowing some such switching in the end, but
9 fundamentally believing that it would be wrong to do so
10 on the scale that the MoD was planning. That
11 undoubtedly left the department -- because it had been
12 budgeting on the assumption of being allowed to use the
13 whole of the defence allocation from the 2002 spending
14 review in that fashion -- with a significant problem
15 because the budget exceeded -- the estimated cost of the
16 programme exceeded the budget and there were decisions
17 taken, before my time, in 2004, attempting to bridge
18 that gap.

19 I would say that, when I arrived, that pressure in
20 the defence budget was still there and arises from the
21 fact, not that the government has cut the defence
22 budget, it certainly hasn't. As the Prime Minister said
23 throughout the period, the defence budget has been
24 rising in real terms by a percentage point or so each
25 year. The Treasury eventually, through these 2003

1 discussions, did allow some easement of the position.

2 The real problem -- and it persists to this day,
3 I would say -- is that, despite these increases and
4 easements that were allowed -- and I certainly would not
5 question that -- the defence budget has been stretched
6 and our estimated cost of the programme has exceeded our
7 ability to pay for it.

8 Now, that's not unusual in government, it is
9 something that, in the end, it is up to us to deal with.
10 The reasons for that are many and various. They include
11 the increased cost of the equipment programme, partly
12 because there were some large commitments to deliver
13 major equipment, cost increases in staff pay, armed
14 forces pay, the side effects of the high level of
15 deployment that we had experienced, additional costs of
16 which were met, but there are, nonetheless, things that
17 defence still has to do when deployment is as high as
18 that and, more recently, movements in currency of the
19 kind that the Foreign Office experienced.

20 Now, all of that does mean, not that defence is
21 underfunded or has been cut, but that we have a very
22 serious management issue, which we have been trying to
23 work through in the last few years.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Within these many and varied demands to
25 the MoD's budget, how does the MoD's management ensure

1 that sufficient priority is given to the capabilities
2 that are required for deployed operations like Iraq and
3 Afghanistan?

4 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Well, we tried to do so in a number of
5 ways, the most significant, obviously, is the Urgent
6 Operational Requirements process, about which the
7 Inquiry has heard, and that is funded from the Reserve,
8 and has been throughout, and I think in most cases has
9 led to our acquiring, remarkably quickly in many cases,
10 key equipment -- about which the Inquiry may want to ask
11 me later -- to field in theatre, but we have also, over
12 that period, notwithstanding the fact that there have
13 been upward pressures in the budget of the kind I have
14 described, to find, to the extent that we could,
15 resources for other operationally-related core defence
16 budget investments.

17 The most obvious example of that is the statement
18 that the Defence Secretary made shortly before
19 Christmas, in which he did indicate that we had decided
20 on some reductions in equipment programmes, but,
21 equally, he was able to announce plans to acquire more
22 Chinook helicopters, for example, more ISTAR.

23 So I think, although it has been difficult against
24 the wider financial background that I have described, we
25 have certainly tried, over the whole of the past four

1 years, where we could, to redirect expenditure towards
2 more operationally-relevant programmes.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you think they are getting the balance
4 of effort right between the immediate and the longer-term
5 now?

6 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is very hard to do so, and partly
7 because, in the nature of this activity, the investments
8 are very long-term. I mean, some of our programmes take
9 longer than they should, that is well-known, but many of
10 them are bound to take a long time, even if they are
11 perfectly managed.

12 I also feel that, to some extent, in the last few
13 years, the fact that there has not, for some time, been
14 a Strategic Defence Review has constrained some of our
15 choices and it has been perfectly natural for ministers,
16 and indeed Chiefs of Staff, to argue that reductions of
17 certain kinds ought to wait for a defence review.

18 So my own view is that, first of all, the fact that
19 all three political parties are now committed to
20 a defence review after the election is extremely welcome
21 from the department's point of view, and, secondly, if
22 we get it right -- and we are working in preparation now
23 to do so -- we ought to take the opportunity to get the
24 overall programme into better balance to make exactly
25 the kind of point that you are making.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If I can just turn to the UORs briefly,
2 in Iraq, in total, we spent about £1.8 billion on UORs.
3 That increased significantly in the later years of the
4 operation. In Afghanistan, there has also been a very
5 high UOR expenditure right up to this date. One recalls
6 that, in 2008, the House of Commons Defence Committee
7 expressed concern at the extent to which UORs represent
8 a partial failure to equip our forces for predicted
9 expeditionary operations and they were concerned about
10 the effects that UORs would have on the core budget in
11 future years.

12 Does this very extensive use of UORs mean that we
13 got the main equipment programme wrong?

14 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is a very difficult question for me to
15 answer, Sir Roderic. I think, if we had anticipated the
16 nature of the deployments we would have had over this
17 period, we might have invested in different
18 capabilities.

19 It is certainly the case, for example -- and this
20 Inquiry has touched on the FRES programme once or twice
21 through these hearings -- that we started in Iraq and
22 Afghanistan, in the early part of this century, with an
23 outdated stock of our vehicles, protected vehicles, and
24 one of the things that the UOR programme has done,
25 I would argue, remarkably effectively in the

1 circumstances, has been to acquire significant numbers
2 of vehicles that are not only capable, but are designed
3 to meet the particular and demanding conditions of both
4 these theatres and Afghanistan in particular. So with
5 the benefit of hindsight, might our predecessors have
6 invested differently? It is the great defence conundrum
7 in some ways and it is one that, in a sense, we will
8 face as we get into the defence review next year: what
9 is the best balance between the kind of equipment that
10 one can use in these intensive land operations and the
11 longer-term investments that any Defence Department
12 worth its salt ought to be making in larger platforms
13 for different kinds of engagement?

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So there is a question here for the next
15 Strategic Defence Review, but not necessarily yet an
16 answer to that question?

17 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I don't think there is, and it is
18 a personal view, but I think there are some false
19 dichotomies around. I think the idea that we either
20 invest wholesale in more of the same -- the "same" being
21 Iraq and Afghanistan -- or we invest in maritime and
22 fast jets, these sorts of capabilities, the truth is
23 that a defence nation of our size is always going to
24 need to look to a mix of capabilities, but the judgment
25 that the defence review will need to make in the latter

1 part of this year is an extremely difficult one,
2 because -- for the reasons I gave earlier, because our
3 unit costs of what we acquire are rising, both in terms
4 of equipment and people, and against that background,
5 one has to make pretty tough choices between the
6 capabilities in which to invest.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. All right.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Lawrence?

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sir Kevin Tebbit told us that he
10 felt he was always operating with a sort of crisis
11 budget. Have you felt the same?

12 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Probably because we are different people,
13 I shrink from the word "crisis", but it has certainly
14 been the case and, as I said earlier, against
15 a background where the government has provided real
16 terms increases for defence year on year, that the
17 upward pressures to which I have referred have meant
18 that, in successive years over my time, our ministers
19 and we have had to think hard about what we could cut.

20 The other thing we have done, and it was true both
21 in the 2002 spending review -- sorry, the 2004
22 spending review and in the 2007 spending review, is to
23 embark on very significant efficiency programmes, and in
24 each of these spending reviews we committed to between
25 2 and 3 billion-worth of efficiencies and have delivered

1 on them, but even allowing for that, we certainly have
2 had to look consistently at ways of reducing the
3 estimated cost of the programme.

4 Whether that constitutes a crisis, I don't know. At
5 one level, it is the business that all government
6 departments have to do when resources are tight. But it
7 certainly felt quite -- more than quite tight over the
8 last period.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the consequences of the
10 pressures bearing down, as you describe, is that the
11 equipment programme is the natural place to look for
12 short-term savings. Programmes get delayed for a couple
13 of years, things get cancelled, and this, as we have
14 heard in a variety of Select Committee reports, leads to
15 some cumulative inefficiencies.

16 What has been the main effect in terms of the
17 provision, not of the Urgent Operational Requirements,
18 but, should we say, the medium operational requirements,
19 the new equipment that you might have hoped would come
20 available during the course of the Iraqi and Afghan
21 operations in terms of this constant pressure to manage
22 the equipment programme?

23 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is certainly the case that our
24 response to pressures I have described in the last few
25 years have tended to involve the reprofiling of

1 expenditure on equipment and the rescoping to reduce
2 their scale. We have reduced a number of the main
3 equipment programmes, and we have, in one or two notable
4 cases, chosen to acquire things later than we originally
5 planned. As the NAO has pointed out, that doesn't
6 always represent best value for money, because acquiring
7 things later tends to increase their overall cost.

8 But that's certainly -- I mean, that -- the view
9 that defence ministers have taken over the last few
10 years has certainly been that these are the best choices
11 to make, although they do, in some cases, lead to
12 increases in longer-term costs.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can we look at some particular
14 items? Let's just start with surveillance equipment,
15 particularly UAVs, unmanned aerial vehicles. We have
16 had evidence that there was a major requirement here
17 that was not being met. Why do you think that was so?

18 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I didn't quite catch the question. Is it
19 UAVs or armoured vehicles?

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: No, this is UAVs, unmanned aerial
21 vehicles.

22 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It has certainly been the desire, both of
23 the CDS and myself, to maintain UAV programmes, not
24 least for longer-term purposes, because there is no
25 doubt that that is the direction in which things are

1 moving.

2 I couldn't give details of particular changes in the
3 last few years but I am in no doubt that that is one of
4 the areas, where, if we had been able to do so, we would
5 undoubtedly have done more.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: General Shirreff gave us evidence
7 that the Australians had managed to procure UAVs
8 relatively easily, within eight to ten weeks, by drawing
9 up a requirement, going to a contractor and getting
10 them. Why couldn't we do that sort of thing?

11 SIR BILL JEFFREY: The particular issue that
12 General Shirreff raised was a product of the situation
13 in late 2006, when he was GOC in Basra. We were using
14 a UAV called Phoenix as part of our layered approach to
15 the provision of ISTAR. It hadn't been designed to
16 Middle East conditions and became unreliable over
17 a period and had to be withdrawn in June 2006.

18 There was then a study of ISTAR requirements and
19 capabilities and the requirement for a successor to it
20 was submitted by theatre towards the end of 2006 and
21 delivered within seven months. So -- I mean, there may
22 be, as your first questions implies, Sir Lawrence, an
23 issue about our ability to fund as much UAV investment
24 as we would have liked to over that period, but in the
25 particular case that General Shirreff referred to,

1 theatre submitted a requirement in late 2006 and it was
2 responded to with a new system delivered within seven
3 months.

4 In the meantime, as I understand it, we relied on
5 other allies' assets, including the Americans and the
6 Australians.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What about the Watchkeeper
8 programme? Wasn't that system delayed in 2004?

9 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It was, but I don't think that's what
10 General Shirreff was asking.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: No, but just in terms of the general
12 capability?

13 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I'm not pretending that we have invested
14 as heavily in UAVs over this period as ideally we would
15 have wished.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's now turn to helicopters. The
17 Public Accounts Committee report of February 2005, just
18 before you arrived, it referred to the gap, depending on
19 how it is measured, of 20 per cent to 38 per cent of the
20 number of helicopters needed and those available -- and these,
21 are battlefield helicopters -- and it said:

22 "The department is no longer proposing to fill this
23 gap and this will potentially increase risks, including
24 the risk of overstressing equipment and pilots."

25 I know there has been some recent announcements on

1 this, but are you concerned that there has been quite
2 a long period in which two major operations going on --
3 we've had reference before to the importance of these
4 enablers between -- to make the difference in these
5 operations -- that we haven't been able to improve our
6 helicopter capacity?

7 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think, in the end, we have been able to
8 improve it in terms of availability and do so quite
9 significantly. The period I can answer from direct
10 experience for, which is from November 2005 onwards, we
11 have been, first of all, trying to find ways of
12 generating more new helicopter capability and that
13 included the acquisition of the Merlins that were
14 designed for Denmark, it included the version of the
15 Chinooks that I know you took evidence from the Chief of
16 the Defence Staff on. But the most significant impact
17 on helicopter availability has come through changes in
18 the way we have supported them, changes in the way we
19 have crewed them, and the consequence of that, and of
20 some upgrading of existing helicopter fleets, is that in
21 Afghanistan now -- I know it is not the subject of the
22 Inquiry's main interest -- we have twice the helicopter
23 hours available that we had in 2006.

24 So, as other witnesses have told the Inquiry,
25 military commanders could always use more helicopters,

1 but we have certainly succeeded over the last few years
2 in increasing availability very substantially.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think part of the concern -- and
4 these decisions go back, obviously, to before your time
5 at MoD -- but that's true of almost all procurement
6 decisions that are still coming through at the moment
7 because they have all got such long histories -- that,
8 as we moved into these operations -- and Iraq we moved
9 into in 2003 -- that more provision wasn't made in the
10 core budget to make sure that new systems would be
11 coming through when necessary, so that, in the case of
12 Iraq, in many ways, these measures that you have talked
13 about are just too late.

14 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Well, to some extent -- I can only speak
15 for the period of my own time in this post, and
16 certainly, over that period, the main effort -- and it
17 has been a very intensive effort within the
18 department -- has been to -- both to deploy, as rapidly
19 as we could, better-protected, medium-scale armoured
20 vehicles and to improve helicopter availability.

21 I would say these are the two headline items, along
22 with efforts on ISTAR and -- whether, with different
23 investments earlier, we would have had to do less than
24 that, I find it quite hard to say. I suspect we would
25 still have had to do a good deal of it, because, in

1 particular in Afghanistan, the conditions are really
2 very extreme and ones for which most military aircraft,
3 in particular, are simply not designed.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It has also been pointed out to
5 us -- and I think maybe your earlier answer was
6 referring to this -- that with helicopters it takes
7 a long time to train up the crews as well.

8 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It does.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Have you been able to address that
10 issue of training enough people so that new helicopters
11 coming in can be used properly?

12 SIR BILL JEFFREY: The improvements in availability that
13 I referred to earlier are largely -- well, in some
14 significant measure the consequence of greater crew
15 availability and arrangements to improve the training of
16 crews.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Next issue, strategic lift. Again,
18 we have had evidence of how shortages here, the means by
19 which we transport equipment and personnel in and out of
20 theatre has affected our ability to operate in Iraq and
21 also had an impact on the morale of service personnel.

22 Could you describe, perhaps, a bit about the
23 problems associated with strategic lift, and, again,
24 what you have been able to do to improve the situation?

25 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is certainly the case that the air

1 bridge has at times been less reliable than any of us
2 would wish, and you are absolutely right to draw
3 attention to the impact that has on morale.

4 I think both the present Chief of the Air
5 Staff and his predecessor have applied a lot of effort
6 of the kind I have just been describing in relation to
7 helicopters to improve the delivery of the service by
8 the RAF.

9 As far as aircraft themselves are concerned, we have
10 acquired some C17s over this period and, indeed, C130s.
11 The disappointment, although even if it had been on
12 time, it would only have been delivering around now, has
13 been the A400M project, which has caused us to rethink
14 quite substantially how we can provide air transport
15 over the next few years, given the delay that the A400M
16 project is experiencing.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: These are issues that were there in
18 the Strategic Defence Review in the late '90s. It is
19 surprising that, more than ten -- twelve -- years on, we
20 still haven't managed to crack them.

21 SIR BILL JEFFREY: All I can say is that we are doing our
22 best to crack them, and have been, and it is a broadly
23 improving position. Again, I would say there have been
24 some improvements since we scaled down from two
25 operations to one. I don't want to overstate it, but

1 there is no doubt that for the department to be --
2 against a defence planning assumption, that a second
3 medium-scale operation would be run concurrently with
4 the first for no more than six months.

5 We have in effect -- we did, in effect, between 2006
6 and 2009, manage two medium-scale operations
7 concurrently for three years and that has tested all our
8 enablers, not least air transport.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It does raise questions about the
10 overall resourcing of the department to take on two
11 missions that go against the assumptions of the
12 Strategic Defence Review.

13 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It does, but remember that the defence
14 planning assumptions are only that, they are
15 assumptions, they are the working assumptions that came
16 out of the Strategic Defence Review, on the basis of
17 which our capabilities were planned and programmes were
18 constructed. It doesn't mean to say that they can't be
19 exceeded and, indeed, as I said earlier, I think it is
20 greatly to the credit, both of the armed forces, as
21 deployed, and the department that supports them, that
22 over as protracted a period as that, we did, in fact,
23 manage to support two operations of that scale.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If we could now --

25 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I just take a quick supplementary

1 before we move on? It is looking at the longer-term
2 impact of UOR acquisition.

3 If you take the totality of UORs, none of which
4 applications were refused, as the Prime Minister has
5 told us, throughout the Iraq campaign, is it possible to
6 say how much of a future strain that will place on
7 defence expenditure, on the defence budget? As things
8 can no longer be supported out of the Reserve, they have
9 become part of the equipment holdings of the military.

10 SIR BILL JEFFREY: That certainly has to feature in our
11 planning. There is no doubt that, over these few years,
12 because of the scale in which we have operated, many
13 hundreds of new vehicles acquired in very short order
14 indeed by the standards of these things, we have
15 a substantial fleet of more modern armoured vehicles
16 than was the case before and it will need supporting.
17 It also has an impact back into our armoured vehicle
18 plans themselves, and that is one of the reasons why the
19 priority at the moment in the successor to the FRES
20 programme is around the support, the reconnaissance
21 variant of the new vehicle.

22 So I agree with the underlying thrust of your
23 question, Sir John, which is that we will undoubtedly
24 need to factor into our thinking through the defence
25 review, the existence of a fleet of more satisfactory

1 for their current purpose armoured vehicles which will
2 need supporting.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: I can't resist mentioning the phrase the
4 Green Goddesses, which we lived with for a very long
5 time, but back to Sir Lawrence. I think the armoured
6 vehicles is just the transition point.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. So you have mentioned FRES,
8 and this is normally talked of using words like
9 "shambles", "fiasco", given in evidence to us.

10 Why do you think this programme has been so
11 disappointing and what impact do you think this has had
12 on operations in Iraq in the failure to deliver FRES on
13 schedule?

14 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Strictly speaking, it has probably had no
15 impact on operations in Iraq, because, when the first
16 programme was taken through its initial gate decision in
17 2004, the plan then was to introduce the first vehicles
18 in 2009, but I would not deny that the programme itself
19 has been badly managed for a number of different
20 reasons. I think, for a number of years, there were
21 doubts about its specification. I think it was
22 over-ambitiously designed, because the plan was to
23 produce an entirely connected fleet of armoured vehicles
24 for all purposes, and I think in relation to the utility
25 variant, the procurement approach that we took, which

1 eventually did not succeed, was probably
2 overcomplicated. So I'm not -- I confidently expect to
3 be answering to the Public Accounts Committee at some
4 point on the totality of that programme.

5 Where we now are, partly because of the influx of
6 new vehicles through the UORs process, is on a more
7 focused approach which gives priority both to a support
8 variant and, in particular, to the Scout -- so-called
9 Scout reconnaissance armoured vehicle, which we are well
10 advanced with discussions with industry on how best to
11 provide.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just looking at the issue of Snatch
13 Land Rovers, which was discussed with the Prime Minister
14 last Friday, he referred to the request in 2006 for
15 additional funding for Bulldog and Mastiff programmes.
16 2006 was really when the problem was becoming rather
17 painfully apparent with the improvements in Iraqi -- in
18 the explosive devices that were being used against our
19 forces.

20 Could this problem not have been addressed earlier,
21 the need for something better than the Snatch Land Rover
22 been asked for earlier than 2006?

23 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Well, I don't want to fall back on my own
24 period of office, as it were, but I first came into this
25 office in November 2005. At that point, and early in

1 2006, we were certainly very concerned about the
2 position on protected vehicles. One of the problems
3 about the Snatch Land Rover is that there is an
4 inevitable trade-off between weight and degree of
5 protection, and it has not been as simple as finding
6 a replacement for Snatch, because there was no
7 better-protected replacement on the market. It is only
8 now, as announced by the Prime Minister a few days ago,
9 that we are managing to develop a better-protected light
10 vehicle for the future.

11 So the response in the early part of 2006 -- and
12 I remember very clearly Des Browne, when he was
13 Defence Secretary, pushing us hard on that, and I hope we
14 didn't need pushing -- was principally around the
15 development of better electronically -- electronic
16 protection measures, some of which were agreed
17 in November 2005, but also the range of vehicles, which
18 might not be as agile, certainly not as agile as Snatch
19 which are in the gap, in terms of weight, between light
20 patrol vehicles and heavy tanks, such as Bulldogs, such
21 as Mastiff.

22 The effort throughout 2006 was certainly to generate
23 as many of these as quickly as we could and the
24 statement Des Browne made in the middle of July led to
25 a great deal of effort in the latter part of 2006 with

1 industry to deploy as many as we could. I certainly
2 recall, when I visited theatre in early 2007, being told
3 in Basra that Mastiffs and Bulldogs were being deployed
4 in large numbers by that stage.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: As you indicated, these are quite
6 heavy. So they don't have the off-road flexibility.

7 SIR BILL JEFFREY: They are quite heavy, but they were the
8 only alternative at the time. The other approach was to
9 up-armour, to the extent that we could, the Snatch
10 Land Rover itself, and we deployed something known as
11 Snatch Vixen a better-protected version, over that
12 period as well.

13 But the fundamental problem is that, for some
14 purposes, military commanders will always argue that
15 a highly mobile lightweight vehicle of that sort is
16 important and, indeed, operationally critical in some
17 cases, and there are quite strict limits to the extent
18 to which one is protected.

19 I know, and I feel for them, that that is little
20 comfort to those who lost loved ones in Snatch Land
21 Rovers. It is ghastly. I feel that very strongly. On
22 the other hand, what there was not over that period, was
23 a silver bullet solution in which a better-protected
24 version of Snatch could have been deployed very quickly.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Again, there is always a question of

1 going back to when the potential issue of vulnerability
2 of Snatch to improvised explosive devices was seen,
3 which I think was much earlier in the decade. But even
4 going to late 2005, we are now four and a half years on,
5 why has it taken so long, do you think, to be able to
6 find a more long-term durable solution to this problem?

7 SIR BILL JEFFREY: On my part, I think the answer to that
8 question has to be speculative to a certain extent
9 because I was not among those present.

10 I think one does have to bear in mind that, in the
11 early days in Basra, the position, in security terms,
12 was much calmer than it became, and I think -- this
13 Inquiry now knows a great deal more about these early
14 stages than I do, but there is no doubt that the threat
15 in Basra was of a significantly lower order than
16 elsewhere in the country, and around Baghdad in
17 particular, and my recollection, not least from reading
18 the transcripts of evidence of GOCs over the earlier
19 period when I wasn't in post, is that there was a time
20 when it wasn't completely senseless, in order to engage
21 with the population, to use lightweight vehicles to
22 patrol.

23 Exactly when that tipped into the position of much
24 greater threat and, indeed, greater casualties, I'm not
25 myself in a position to say. What I do know is that,

1 when I appeared on the scene in November 2005, we were
2 seized of the issue and we worked on it intensively in
3 the early part of 2006.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But it is now 2010, and no doubt
5 coincidentally the Prime Minister has announced an
6 order. Can we just clarify, because this issue has been
7 raised, exactly what the order is for? 200, I think,
8 have been mentioned, but others have said they were
9 expecting 400.

10 SIR BILL JEFFREY: We aren't yet at the stage of contract.
11 What we have done is to launch a UOR procurement for
12 about 200 light-protected patrol vehicles to replace
13 Snatch in Afghanistan. There is a concept vehicle
14 evaluation of two vehicles, which British industry has
15 developed in the last few months, specifically tailored
16 to our requirement, and we expect to be able to award
17 a contract in the summer.

18 The reason the Prime Minister's announcement was
19 confined to these 200 was because we are able to acquire
20 these through an Urgent Operational Requirement as
21 a call on the Reserve. It certainly doesn't mean that
22 we won't acquire more as our invitation to tender
23 originally --

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: They haven't actually been ordered
25 yet? This is for later in the year?

1 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is a stage in the process.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is a stage in the process.

3 SIR BILL JEFFREY: But our current plan is that we should be
4 able to award a contract in the summer.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just a couple of final questions:

6 you will be aware of the recent report from the
7 Defence Committee about the equipment programme, and it
8 raises the issue of recuperation. Obviously, we have
9 gone through an awful lot of equipment in both of these
10 major operations, and they express concern that the MoD
11 didn't seem to have robust data on the actual cost of
12 recuperating from these sorts of material losses.

13 Do you expect to get that sort of information soon
14 and are you confident that you will be able to get this
15 money back from the Reserve?

16 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I take seriously the Defence Committee's
17 points about data. We certainly have invested and are
18 investing a great deal of effort in identifying the
19 particular areas on which we will need to concentrate
20 recuperation. It is partly an issue about vehicles, but
21 it is also very much to do with training.

22 As we eventually begin to scale down from this
23 intensive period of activity, we will have some very
24 experienced service personnel, but a great deal of what
25 the military would normally regard as essential training

1 will have to be revisited. So there are significant
2 resource implications. There are discussions going on
3 with the Treasury about exactly to what extent meeting
4 these is a legitimate call on the Reserve, but it is not
5 yet a settled picture.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When would you hope to get a better
7 picture?

8 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I would hope later this year, but
9 I ought, perhaps, just to check that answer and ensure
10 that I'm not misleading the Committee.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this is obviously going to be
12 quite an important feature of future defence programmes,
13 the extent to which you are able to recuperate drawing
14 on the reserves rather than have to take it out of
15 existing budget?

16 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is, and I think one thing I have been
17 struck by throughout my time in this job is the -- my
18 senior military colleagues' emphasis on what they tend
19 to call the seed corn issue. We can and must do what is
20 demanded of us operationally and I think our frontline
21 troops, indeed I would argue our support staff, military
22 and civilian as well, have done a brilliant job in doing
23 as much as they have, but as soon as the pressure eases
24 off, we have to start rebuilding the seed corn and
25 restoring the capability for next time.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That leads to my final question
2 really, which is an invitation to any other lessons that
3 you have drawn from the -- not just about managing the
4 equipment programme, which is a constant issue with
5 defence policy, but managing an equipment programme in
6 the context of ongoing operations with particular needs.

7 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think -- I mean, I'll take it as an
8 invitation to reflect on lessons on equipment
9 specifically. I won't go wider. What it bears in on me
10 is the importance in the defence review that is coming
11 to make as good judgments as we can about the balance of
12 investment and it is an imperfect science -- art,
13 possibly -- and I suspect over the many years defence
14 reviews have never quite got it right. We are managing
15 uncertainty over quite long periods. We are thinking
16 about the different scenarios in which defence
17 capability might have to be deployed, but the judgments
18 we make, just as those made by our predecessors, are
19 important for the very reason that, when arms might end
20 up being deployed, you want to have the best equipment
21 available.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: I'll turn to Baroness Prashar. Usha?

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We can move now from funding and
25 equipment to deployment of civilian personnel.

1 Can you explain their role and contribution to the
2 campaign in Iraq, please?

3 SIR BILL JEFFREY: MoD civilians?

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That's right.

5 SIR BILL JEFFREY: They have a wide variety of roles and I'm
6 glad to have an opportunity to say something about it
7 because, correctly in my judgment, it is the military
8 role that tends to catch most attention. At any one
9 time we will have 100 or so MoD civil servants operating
10 in theatre. They do everything, from advising ministries
11 of defence -- in Afghanistan we had -- we have staff
12 advising the minister and his people, we had staff in
13 Baghdad as well -- to providing political advice for
14 generals and general civilian support for senior
15 military officers, but also a wide range of financial
16 responsibilities, administrative reporting of one sort
17 or another, and indeed settling claims.

18 I mean, one of the -- as I visited theatre over the
19 last few years, one of the most interesting jobs that
20 our civil servants do are to settle claims by local
21 people who feel that their interests have been impacted
22 adversely in one way or another, and that is certainly
23 not what people tend to join the Civil Service expecting
24 to do, but they do it magnificently in my experience.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did the MoD as an organisation have

1 enough civilian capacity and capability to cope both in
2 Iraq and in Afghanistan?

3 SIR BILL JEFFREY: If you are still talking,

4 Baroness Prashar, about deployed civilians in theatre --

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

6 SIR BILL JEFFREY: -- I think we have turned out -- I

7 wouldn't say it was planned that way because crucially
8 this depends on volunteers and we have had very
9 significant numbers of our staff who have been willing
10 to volunteer for these duties, including a number who
11 have found it invigorating, enjoyed it and have gone
12 back more than once.

13 Just recently -- and I think we have probably found
14 that after all these years of making these
15 contributions -- a little harder always to find people
16 we need, and we are working on that. But as a matter of
17 fact, these are not huge numbers by comparison to the
18 size of a department as a whole and it is something that
19 we managed and I think it is something that has been
20 done very well.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My question really was about the
22 capacity and capability to go both into Afghanistan and
23 Iraq. Did you feel that you had the capacity to do
24 that?

25 SIR BILL JEFFREY: We did manage in both theatres over the

1 period when we were involved in both.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How did you ensure that?

3 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Through the process I have described, of
4 seeking volunteers, working ahead of time to identify
5 people to fill the posts and, as I say, exploiting in
6 some cases, after a suitable recuperation period, the
7 interest and willingness of people to go back for
8 a second tour.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you able to secure volunteers
10 with the relevant skills, who were willing to work in
11 Iraq?

12 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Yes. I think one has to remember that
13 the Ministry of Defence civilians are doing versions of
14 what they might have done back in the UK. They are
15 providing -- it is not uncommon in the defence world for
16 there to be middle-ranking civil servants who provide
17 support for very senior military officers, for example.
18 Likewise, many of them were doing equivalents of
19 financial jobs that they would have done back in the UK.
20 Some of our deployed civilians were in fact MoD police
21 officers, who were doing different but similar versions
22 of the same thing.

23 So this is not quite like the
24 development/aid/reconstruction side of the picture,
25 where there is a real question about whether one has the

1 adequate numbers of the right -- of the properly skilled
2 and trained people to do it.

3 The MoD civilians -- what we have been doing is
4 finding a small proportion of our staff who are willing,
5 in very difficult conditions, to do a version of what
6 they do in the department all the time.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you ever provide any incentives
8 for them of ...?

9 SIR BILL JEFFREY: There are incentive payments. I do not
10 have the details in my head, but they do earn more than
11 they would if they were working normally within the
12 department.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How did the tour lengths compare
14 with those in theatre, with the military personnel? Was
15 there some synergy or not?

16 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It tends to be six months. I mean, in
17 one or two cases --

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Is it about the same as the military
19 personnel.

20 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It does, yes. But we have, just as the
21 military have, started -- we have been looking for some
22 time in fact at particular roles where there is a strong
23 case for continuity. I'm now thinking particularly of
24 those whom we embed within the Ministry of Defence,
25 either in Baghdad for a while or in Kabul now, where

1 relationships matter and, just as with the military,
2 there is an argument for deployments that exceed the
3 minimum six months.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But would you say over the time you
5 have been with the MoD that the deployment of civilian
6 staff was planned, thought through, or was something
7 that you had to respond to as the situation arose?

8 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I would say it has been increasingly
9 planned. I think we started just doing it and
10 responding to needs as they arose and -- but what we
11 have -- partly in order to improve the quality of the
12 support that we provide for those who are in theatre,
13 what we have done over the last few years is to build
14 more of a structure and more of a planning framework
15 around identifying people, posting them and then
16 supporting them and training them before they deploy and
17 then supporting them once they are in theatre.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what you are saying is that
19 wasn't the case initially but it has improved over the
20 period of time?

21 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Broadly, yes.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How did the MoD's arrangements
23 compare to those in place for DFID and FCO staff in
24 Iraq? I mean, have you been looking at the way the
25 civilian deployment compares with the other departments?

1 SIR BILL JEFFREY: They are similar. The terms and
2 conditions are not identical. One issue which I know
3 you have heard from my DFID opposite number and which
4 she and Peter Ricketts and I have devoted some attention
5 to is the apparently different approach to health and
6 safety and duty of care, where for a while we
7 contemplated identical conditions and then concluded
8 that we could achieve the effect we needed by
9 maintaining the position that the MoD civilians, where
10 they operate under military control, are the
11 responsibility of the senior military officer, and the
12 DFID and FCO staff operate according to shared
13 departmental guidance.

14 But that -- my sense -- and I think it is shared by
15 Minouche Shafik and Peter Ricketts -- is that that is much
16 less of an issue that it appeared to be for a while.
17 What we are all convinced of is that, although it is
18 immensely important to support these operations with
19 civilian effort to the maximum extent we can, we ought
20 not to take undue risks with our people because they are
21 volunteers and they didn't join on quite the same terms
22 as the military did.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can you describe to me what steps,
24 what arrangements, have been put in place to make sure
25 that arrangements for civilians are joined up between

1 departments?

2 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Well, it starts with -- I mean, can
3 I just check that I'm answering the question that you
4 are putting? But at one level, as I think you have
5 heard from both of my DFID and Foreign Office opposite
6 numbers, we, as Permanent Secretaries, have been meeting
7 regularly, not just to discuss this issue, but a number
8 of others, because all three of us feel that we need,
9 first of all, to give the clearest signal to our staff
10 that we expect a collaborative approach and the closest
11 of working between the departments.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When did that start?

13 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I took post in November 2005,
14 Peter Ricketts took over in mid 2006, and we had a very
15 early discussion in which I said I thought we needed
16 a closer, more systematic working relationship, and
17 Peter warmly agreed and we have done it since then, and
18 as I think the Inquiry has heard, that has included four
19 or five visits together to theatre, where we can talk as
20 we go about how cooperation among the departments is
21 working out in practice and consider as we go issues of
22 the kind we have been discussing.

23 So at that level there is a desire to bring the
24 three departments' civilian efforts as close together as
25 we can. There has also, as the Inquiry will have heard,

1 been a move towards the creation of our single
2 deployable civilian cadre for stabilisation purposes
3 under the expanded and enhanced Stabilisation Unit, and
4 the creation of that joint capability for the future is
5 something in which the three permanent secretaries have
6 been very closely involved.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think the creation of the
8 Stabilisation Unit has addressed these problems or there
9 is more to be done?

10 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think it has helped and I think it will
11 help a great deal more as we follow through the changes
12 that were agreed on of the order of six months or so
13 ago. My own view -- and I was planning, if the Inquiry
14 gave me an opportunity, to revert to this issue at the
15 end -- is that one of the areas which we have learned
16 a great deal over these years is about how best to
17 integrate civilian effort and integrate that civilian
18 effort with the military.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was going to be my next
20 question.

21 SIR BILL JEFFREY: We certainly see the civilian cadre
22 idea -- 1,000 people, a proportion of whom will be civil
23 servants but not by any means all, with the right
24 skills, ready to be deployed, not just for these
25 purposes but in other parts of the world as well -- as

1 a substantial step forward.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We have heard from previous
3 witnesses about lack of unity of purpose, unity of
4 command, you know, between the civilian and the military
5 operations. You said you had begun to work on that, and
6 what steps have you taken to date?

7 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think what is very interesting as one
8 reads the evidence that this Inquiry has taken is the
9 way in which that issue has developed over time. It is
10 very clear that in the early days there were quite
11 significant issues and differences among military --
12 between military commanders and civilian people in
13 theatre and indeed at departmental level. There were
14 differences of emphasis. My sense is that over this
15 period we have together evolved a working model, and we
16 saw it -- Peter Ricketts and Minouche Shafik and I saw it
17 in the spring of 2009 in Baghdad, where we -- in
18 General Salmon we met a GOC who was working extremely
19 closely with a senior DFID official and with the
20 Consul General. We saw it in Lashkar Gar, where the
21 model on which, after a great deal of effort, because
22 this stuff is not easy, over time we have developed
23 joint military and civilian, is beginning to deliver a
24 much more integrated effect than was the case before.

25 I think myself that one of the things that has

1 helped here has been the willingness of DFID, as
2 a department, to change the way in which it thinks about
3 this. The most recent development White Paper states
4 very clearly that security and development are closely
5 related issues, and I feel that the important thing
6 actually is that the experience that the
7 three departments have built up over the last few years
8 should be built on and should not be lost for the next
9 time, because we really have made progress.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We heard about DFID's changes, but
11 what about the MoD's own thinking, because there are
12 different cultures between different departments, and we
13 were told about that.

14 SIR BILL JEFFREY: There are different cultures but the
15 military have always been the first to say that these
16 very difficult stabilisation challenges cannot be dealt
17 with successfully by an application of military force
18 alone. I mean, they are the first to say that to have
19 any chance of success, civilian effort, both among the
20 allies and on the part of the host government, is the
21 essential ingredient. And certainly my experience in
22 the last two or three years has been that there are some
23 extremely productive relationships between senior
24 military figures in theatre and senior civilians, and
25 these are the things we ought to build on and develop.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But what steps are being taken to
2 build on these? I mean, you talked about what you
3 experienced on the ground in Iraq when you all visited
4 together. Is this translating into training, recruiting
5 supporting staff in terms of sustaining the changes?

6 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It is. I attended, a month or so ago --
7 I gave a -- I took a session at a training event that
8 had been arranged for people who are to be part of what
9 I have described as the more deployable civilian cadre,
10 and what I found encouraging about it was that they came
11 from lots of different backgrounds. Some were people
12 with an aid background, some with a defence background,
13 some were indeed ex-military. And the remarkable thing
14 was that they were all speaking the same language. The
15 mutual incomprehension I suspect was there in the early
16 days has -- if we get this right -- and I don't think it
17 is there yet by any means -- there is a good chance that
18 we can put that behind us, and I took a great deal of
19 encouragement from the fact that there is a community of
20 people who are and will be involved in stabilisation
21 efforts from all three backgrounds -- diplomatic,
22 development and military and defence -- who are -- who
23 have a similar frame of reference in a way that simply
24 wasn't the case before.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My final question really is, I mean,

1 what lessons has the MoD itself learned about deployment
2 of civilians during the Iraq campaign? Have you
3 reflected on that?

4 SIR BILL JEFFREY: That we do need to plan it, and I think
5 we are doing so better than we were, that we can't
6 taking people's willingness for granted and need to
7 support them as well as we can while they are in
8 theatre.

9 I think there is also an issue about ensuring, which
10 is not easy in a large department, that those who have
11 had that experience are given credit for it when they
12 return. Our system for posting people tends to involve
13 the advertisement of jobs, and one thing I'm keen to
14 encourage within the department is the view that those
15 of our civilian colleagues who have seen time in theatre
16 actually develop their -- tend to develop their skills
17 very substantially because they become more
18 self-reliant, they are left more on their own, and
19 therefore are people who ought to be taken very
20 seriously for other jobs within the department, and
21 that's one of the things that I certainly feel that we
22 should take forward as a lesson.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think the question of what is
24 called a comprehensive approach now kind of embedded in
25 the thinking of people? And do they understand what

1 that means in practice?

2 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think it is. I think that no
3 two situations are the same, but the general proposition
4 that underlies the comprehensive approach, which is
5 that -- the one I expounded earlier, that these
6 exceptionally challenging, complex situations in
7 countries like Iraq and Afghanistan can only be resolved
8 by the concerted application of military and civilian
9 effort together. That is well understood.

10 It is noticeable, for example, in Afghanistan that,
11 although attention naturally focused on
12 General McChrystal's recommendations about troop
13 numbers, the real story was that his report was very
14 consistent with the thinking that I have just been
15 describing and with the comprehensive approach.

16 So I think it is -- that way of thinking is one
17 which is shared among our principal allies increasingly
18 and -- but it is not easy to realise in practice
19 because, particularly on the civilian side, mustering
20 sufficient people with the right skills is quite
21 challenging.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Rod? Over to you.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I just want to ask a question about the
25 way that the MoD has provided help to the families of

1 people who have been killed in the conflict in Iraq --
2 and of course this applies to Afghanistan -- and also to
3 service personnel who have suffered very serious injury.

4 Some of these issues have been raised with us by
5 families in meetings we have had with them. One of the
6 concerns, but only one of a number, that has been raised
7 has been about the access for families to information
8 being presented at inquests or MoD investigations,
9 boards of inquiry, where sometimes they have discovered
10 that they haven't been given the full information.

11 That's part of a much wider question of, as I say,
12 how the ministry provides an appropriately high level of
13 support to families and to those injured, seriously
14 injured, so injured that they can't go back to their
15 jobs.

16 Is this something where you have seen changes as
17 a result of what was learned in Iraq in the years before
18 you became Permanent Secretary and is it an area where
19 you would still like to see further improvements?

20 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I don't think we can ever be completely
21 satisfied with what we do in this area because it is so
22 important and the families deserve not just sympathy but
23 respect, and I take very seriously what they are saying
24 to this Inquiry and otherwise.

25 We certainly aim to have -- and a great deal depends

1 on the structures that exist within the services
2 themselves -- to have closer and supportive contact in
3 army terms, at the regimental level and the battalion
4 level in some cases, and that, I think, is always going
5 to be the most important support mechanism.

6 But the issues that have been around with inquests
7 have been challenging for us, I would freely admit that.
8 We have tried within the department -- and this goes
9 back a year or so now -- to pull together in a single
10 senior post responsible for our interest in inquests
11 in particular and as part of that to build the
12 capability to have a more supportive and effective
13 relationship with families around the period of the
14 inquest.

15 So that's one bit of it and I would not claim that
16 that's exactly as it should be.

17 The other, as you said, is support for those who are
18 very seriously injured, and there -- I, as it happens,
19 had to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee
20 last week on a National Audit Office report on medical
21 services, which was as good an NAO report as I have
22 seen, both in relation to the quality of care in theatre
23 but also in relation to the clinical care in Birmingham
24 at Selly Oak and most particularly the rehabilitative
25 care at Headley Court, and there, I think, there are

1 a number of very dedicated people, to whom we should all
2 be grateful, and there is definitely -- and I observed
3 it at Headley Court, although some time ago now -- part
4 of the working model is that there should be the closest
5 and most supportive relationships with the families of
6 those who have sometimes suffered the most horrendous
7 injuries and that they should be involved throughout in
8 the process of recovery, and there are arrangements for
9 accommodating families at Headley Court and some similar
10 arrangements at Selly Oak as well.

11 It is a big issue for us and I would never claim
12 that we have got it right but what I would, through you,
13 assure the families of is that we take it exceptionally
14 seriously.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I believe that, as a tragic consequence
16 of these two conflicts, the pressure on these resources
17 at Selly Oak and Headley Court has been enormous. Are
18 there constraints at this point? Is there sufficient
19 capacity there? Can you assure us that there are no
20 financial constraints, preventing us from, if necessary,
21 increasing the capacity to meet the demand?

22 SIR BILL JEFFREY: They are two different cases. Selly Oak
23 is managed by the University of Birmingham hospital
24 trust as part of the NHS, and indeed one of our quite
25 difficult issues early on was to ensure that the

1 atmosphere was suitably military in the wards where our
2 people were held, and it was an issue in which we had
3 a lot of discussion and dialogue with the hospital
4 trust.

5 But, in terms of capacity, the advantage of working
6 closely with the Health Service is not only that we get
7 access to the best clinical standards that the Health
8 Service has to offer, but we are a very small demander
9 in a much larger system. Even within that hospital
10 trust, our people are 1 per cent of those whom the trust
11 is dealing, and the consequence is that if the
12 facilities at Selly Oak did prove insufficient for the
13 purpose -- and we keep that very closely under review --
14 there are options within the immediate hospital trust
15 area to expand, and there is also an understanding
16 nationwide with the National Health Service, which we
17 took advantage of at the time of the Iraq invasion, as
18 it happens, to look much more widely and on
19 a contingency planning basis to be able to deploy into
20 a wider range of NHS hospitals.

21 So there is a plan there and I can give the Inquiry
22 as much assurance as I could on that.

23 On Headley Court the -- there is a plan to increase
24 ward capacity and to create more spaces. It has already
25 been increased in scale and we are aiming to do more,

1 and again I think -- certainly -- and I say this on the
2 basis of having spoken in some detail to my colleagues
3 on the health side of the military -- there is a great
4 deal of thought given to this question of what would
5 happen if casualty rates increased greatly. I think we
6 are in a reasonably good position.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. I think we are coming to the
8 end of this session and, as with other witnesses,
9 Sir Bill, I want to offer you the opportunity to give us
10 any further reflections or lessons you think are to be
11 learned. You have dealt already with -- just now with
12 the issues of after care, you have dealt with civilians
13 and equipment. There may be other things.

14 Just before coming to that, can I just ask one
15 thing? You have mentioned several times now the
16 commitment by all the major parties to a Strategic
17 Defence Review after the general election. Are you
18 confident that that will be wide enough in scope, in
19 terms of addressing Britain's future place in the world,
20 not only in that strictly military sense, but in the
21 wider sense of relationships, international
22 relationships, et cetera?

23 SIR BILL JEFFREY: At one level the answer to that question
24 has to depend on the intentions of an incoming
25 government, but everything I'm hearing about the

1 positions of all three parties suggest that it will be.
2 We certainly have, in the Green Paper that the Secretary
3 of State published a few weeks ago, had a first
4 assessment, with a lot of Foreign Office involvement, of
5 the international context and the -- as you say,
6 Britain's place in the world.

7 I'm sure that an incoming government will want to
8 revisit that. One hears, if it were the Conservatives,
9 they would want to go even wider and to look also at
10 wider questions of national security.

11 But I certainly think it is important that our
12 starting point should be a cool assessment of what we
13 expect -- what this country expects of its military over
14 the next 10/20/30 years.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. So, remaining reflections and
16 lessons to learn?

17 SIR BILL JEFFREY: Well, I mentioned one, which is
18 interdepartmental cooperation. I mean, at the very
19 beginning you asked me about my own role in this and
20 I think -- I have felt throughout that one role was to
21 be a significant link with the other parts of Whitehall
22 who are involved in this, and I feel that we have had
23 a measure of success. There are ministers over that
24 period have worked closely together as well. But the
25 test is whether interdepartmental co-ordination has

1 improved on the ground as well.

2 The lesson I would learn is that it is important and
3 that we mustn't institutionally forget the experience
4 that we have gained over these years because
5 I personally think it has been valuable experience.

6 As far as the campaign itself is concerned, I share
7 the view that has been expressed to you by the Chief of
8 the Defence Staff in particular that the strategy that
9 was pursued in southern Iraq latterly was the right one.
10 I think, starting from where we were in late 2005, as a
11 matter of fact, whatever the history -- and my view on
12 the early stages is no more valuable to this Inquiry
13 than anybody else's.

14 As a matter of fact, starting in 2005, our deployed
15 forces, and indeed those in the department who support
16 them, have a good deal to be proud of because we have
17 been operating with the intensity that we have discussed
18 in this session.

19 The other two points I would make are, first of all,
20 that I agree with those of your witnesses who have said
21 that one of the lessons that we must take from this in
22 the next defence review is that any assumption in the
23 last defence review that we could be quickly in and out
24 with a high-end intervention, leaving others to mop up
25 afterwards, if I can put it colloquially -- this

1 experience tends to prove that to be a misconceived
2 assumption, and we need to factor that into our thinking
3 and into our planning assumptions on the next round.

4 The other more general reflection, I think, is that,
5 where there is ambivalence within the general population
6 about intense military engagements of this sort, the
7 business of defence, of managing such engagements, of
8 deploying the armed forces, just becomes that much
9 harder actually. I don't know what conclusion to draw
10 from that but I suspect this has been a harder period
11 than it would have been in other circumstances.

12 But, overall, I, like others, feel that the armed
13 forces in particular have a great deal to be proud of
14 through these events. They have suffered losses and be
15 of no doubt those of us in positions like mine take
16 these losses extraordinarily seriously.

17 But the net result, I felt, when my colleagues and
18 I visited Basra near the end, was that, although there
19 is a great deal still to do, conditions are immeasurably
20 better than they were before, and we can share a good
21 deal of the credit for that.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are there any final questions my
23 colleagues want to raise?

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This ambivalence that you mentioned:
25 would it be fair to say that this is a question of the

1 perceived legitimacy of an action?

2 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think it has something to do with that,
3 but I was reflecting, more simplistically, on the fact
4 that, to put it no higher -- and I think this has
5 improved in the last few years -- our troops at one
6 point, I'm sure, were returning from Iraq in particular
7 into their communities and encountering people in the
8 local pub who were either indifferent to what they had
9 been doing or actively hostile to it, and that creates
10 the opposite of the sense we need if we are to give our
11 armed forces the support they deserve.

12 So I wasn't in any sense reflecting directly on the
13 question that this Inquiry has been examining around the
14 legitimacy of the original invasion.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Or why the ambivalence existed. You were
16 noting that it did exist.

17 SIR BILL JEFFREY: It did exist.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, and obviously we will be looking at
19 the question of why.

20 Do you think the situation has improved with regard
21 to the way that members of our armed forces are received
22 in the community, when they come back?

23 SIR BILL JEFFREY: I think it has. It is hard to detect
24 when it started, but I think that there is more
25 understanding on the part of the public of what they are

1 achieving and how much credit they are due.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: That, I think, with this session, completes
4 the Inquiry's initial round of public hearings. Thank
5 you to our witness and to those of you who have been
6 present this morning.

7 As I said in my remarks on 8 February, these
8 hearings are an essential element in the Inquiry's work
9 and we are going to spend the next few months to address
10 other aspects of our task. We are trawling the
11 thousands of documents that we hold and comparing them
12 with the evidence we have already heard from different
13 perspectives and this will illuminate where we have an
14 emerging picture and where there are still gaps and it
15 is this work that will determine whom we invite to give
16 further evidence in the next round of public hearings in
17 the summer.

18 The Iraq Inquiry intend to remain out of the public
19 eye over the period of the election. Because we are
20 independent and non-political, we have been clear from
21 the outset that we have to remain outside party
22 politics, and we have asked the political parties to
23 respect that position. I would like to repeat that
24 request today, as the election campaign comes closer.

25 As ever, I would like to thank all of those who,

1 through their hard work each day, have helped to ensure
2 the smooth running of our public sessions. So thank
3 you.

4 With that and that real appreciation, I close this
5 whole round of public hearings. Thank you.

6 (12.18 pm)

7 (The Inquiry adjourned)

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