

Monday, 8 February 2010

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(11.30 am)

GENERAL SIR JOHN MCCOLL

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning.

GEN SIR JOHN MCCOLL: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome everyone. For our session this morning, we are moving back into the narrative phase of our hearings and we are hearing testimony from General Sir John McColl, who was senior British military representative in Iraq based in Baghdad from April to October 2004.

Sir Lawrence Freedman is unable to be with us for this morning's hearing. I have two other things to say, which I say on every occasion. We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based in part, at least, on their recollection of events, and we, of course, cross-check what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

I remind every witness that they will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

With those preliminaries, I will ask Baroness Prashar to begin the questions.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you, Chairperson. Sir John, you took over from General Figgures in April 2004, but

1 I understand, when you arrived there, the role had  
2 changed somewhat, the structure, can you explain what  
3 the changes were?

4 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think the changes were mainly in  
5 relation to the particular appointment that my  
6 predecessor and I held, rather than the military  
7 structure overall. The change was that I was being sent  
8 there as the deputy commander to Combined Joint Task  
9 Force 7, as it was called then, whereas my predecessor  
10 I think had had specific responsibilities in relation to  
11 the civilian capacities within the emerging  
12 Iraqi Government.

13 So he had responsibilities for monitoring,  
14 development, economic ministries, that kind of  
15 portfolio, as I understand it, whereas my  
16 responsibilities were central and covered a broad  
17 spectrum in relation to security in particular.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So your focus was mainly on  
19 security?

20 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, it was.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, the fact that you were of  
22 a more senior rank than your predecessor, does that in  
23 any way reflect the increasing influence of the UK?

24 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Well, I went there with a directive  
25 from the Chief of the Defence Staff and one of the

1 requirements within that directive was to exert  
2 UK influence on the conduct of the campaign, and in  
3 particular on the headquarters within which I was  
4 working. So, yes, I think it did reflect a desire on  
5 behalf of the UK to increase its influence on the way in  
6 which the campaign was being --

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In the time that you were there, did  
8 that influence increase? How did it actually work in  
9 practice?

10 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: It is difficult for me to say really,  
11 because I wasn't there previously and I wasn't there  
12 afterwards. I can talk about the influence that we had  
13 on the campaign during the time I was there.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That would be very helpful.

15 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Well, I think it is important to  
16 remember that, in terms of the size and shape of the UK  
17 military contribution, we were -- I think the figure  
18 was about 4.9 per cent of the overall force, and I'm not  
19 quite sure what the figure is in terms of the resources  
20 we were devoting to development, but I suspect it was  
21 probably around the same figure. I think actually it  
22 was slightly less than that. So in pure proportionate  
23 terms it was a fairly limited contribution.

24 However, within the military structure, which is the  
25 area that I was particularly interested in, we had

1 a number of staff officers in key places in the  
2 headquarters -- I will cite one: a colonel,  
3 Colonel Andrew Sharpe, who was responsible for the  
4 review of the campaign strategy for General Casey, when  
5 General Casey arrived to assume his responsibilities in  
6 the handover from Combined Joint Task Force 7 to the  
7 Multi-National Force at the end of June. So that was  
8 one area.

9 As part of that reorganisation, there was  
10 a requirement to develop an engagement strategy with the  
11 Iraqi Government, and, indeed, the Iraqi military,  
12 and -- a very complex piece of work, and a brigadier,  
13 Brigadier Paul Newton was responsible for that. There  
14 was a campaign strategy review process and that was run  
15 by a colonel, Colonel Sandy Storrie.

16 So I'm trying to paint a picture here of the level  
17 of influence which was exerted, not necessarily by me,  
18 but by the British presence throughout the command  
19 structure, and, of course, similarly, we had the  
20 Deputy Commander, General Andrew Graham, in the corps,  
21 and then our own division down in the south.

22 So I think that the influence that was exerted was  
23 disproportionate really, in relation to our  
24 contribution, but it varied, depending upon the quality  
25 of the input that you gave. There was nothing mandated

1 or given about it, it was a question of the contribution  
2 made by the personalities that I have described, and  
3 others, and my view was that that influence was  
4 significant.

5 I would also comment that the issue of influence was  
6 a subject of discussion within Whitehall at the time,  
7 and it was a discussion topic that I found particularly  
8 unhelpful; to talk about influence, implied that we  
9 should be exerting it and be exerting undue influence,  
10 and often, I found that was on the basis that some felt  
11 that they had particular wisdom to offer. That wasn't  
12 always the case. It was a question of making sure that  
13 the personnel you deployed to the theatre were of  
14 sufficient quality to be able to exert the influence you  
15 wanted.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In the context of reporting lines,  
17 whom were you reporting to?

18 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: My reporting lines were twofold.  
19 There was the UK reporting line, which was primarily to  
20 CDS through DCDS (C), and then there was to CJO, but,  
21 based in Baghdad, most of my reporting was back to the  
22 Ministry of Defence and to -- and therefore to DCDS (C),  
23 not to CJO. I think the divisional commander down in  
24 the southeast would have primarily reported to CJO,  
25 although I did deal with him.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did that work well in practice  
2 having two reporting lines?

3 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I didn't have any difficulty with it  
4 at all, no, I think it did work well. They were neatly  
5 divided between what I would describe as the strategic  
6 issues and the operational and tactical issues, and  
7 I think it worked as well as could be expected under the  
8 circumstances.

9 I think that in many ways I saw one of my roles to  
10 be to ensure that the UK perspective was countrywide and  
11 campaign-wide, whereas in Whitehall -- whereas the CJO's  
12 perspective necessarily was focused in the southeast.  
13 That is understandable. We lost over 170 valuable lives  
14 there, tragically, and it is therefore understandable  
15 that the focus should be down in the south.

16 Nevertheless, there was a requirement to be  
17 conscious of the wider campaign. I saw that as my  
18 responsibility. So that was one level of reporting  
19 which is back to the UK, and then, of course, I had my  
20 coalition responsibilities to my in-theatre boss.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That was my next question. How was  
22 your effort balanced between Baghdad and Basra? Because  
23 you saw it as a kind of countrywide.

24 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: My focus was very firmly in Baghdad.  
25 My -- and I think that I fulfilled the interests of

1 the UK best by being a fully fledged coalition officer  
2 rather than just being a lobbyist for the UK, and  
3 I tried to, in all my decision-making, in all my advice,  
4 both backwards to the UK and up my own chain of command  
5 to the Commanding Generals of the two CJFTs -- CJTF 7 and  
6 MNFI -- I tried to ensure that I represented what I felt  
7 was best for the campaign, rather than simply what was  
8 best for the UK, and I think that served the UK's  
9 interests best by doing so.

10 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My last question is, I think when  
11 you arrived we were still a joint occupying power under  
12 the Security Council Resolution. How did that impact on  
13 your work, if at all?

14 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: We were conscious of it and the  
15 responsibilities that we held as a result of that were  
16 clear, and, in fact, the training that UK commanders  
17 received before they deployed went through those  
18 responsibilities. So I think we were clear.

19 In terms of impacting on the day-to-day operations,  
20 very much so, because, at that stage, clearly the  
21 ability of the Iraqi institutions to deliver security --  
22 deliver the administration of the state were all in  
23 disarray, and, therefore, there was a definite  
24 requirement for the CPA, as it was, up until the end  
25 of June, to step up and fulfil that void. So, yes, it

1 did impact on what we were doing very clearly.

2 However, I think it is fair to say that we were the  
3 joint occupying powers with the US. That would imply  
4 some kind of 50/50 responsibility. That clearly was not  
5 the case.

6 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It wasn't the case?

7 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: No, the reality was that the majority  
8 of that void was filled by the United States.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think that was the reason why  
10 there was concern in Whitehall about exerting influence?  
11 Because we had a 50/50 responsibility, we were joint,  
12 and yet, we didn't exert the influence. Do you think  
13 that was the reason why Whitehall was concerned?

14 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I'm sure that may well have been part  
15 of it, and I think it is also true to say that our --  
16 the investment of our political capital was  
17 significantly greater than the capital of the resources  
18 that we physically had on the ground or the financial  
19 resources which would go to the problem. So they had  
20 a legitimate interest in ensuring that those  
21 responsibilities were delivered to the best of our  
22 ability.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: I think, Martin, you would like to pick up  
25 the questions.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Much has been said in previous hearings  
2 of the lack of planning for the aftermath. You arrived  
3 more than a year after the start of the military  
4 campaign. When you arrived, was there a clear campaign  
5 plan?

6 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: There was a clear plan, yes. Delivery  
7 was very much the problem on that plan and that applied  
8 to the full spectrum of economic and developmental  
9 activities and the political and governance activities,  
10 and it also, of course, affected the security campaign.  
11 But there clearly was a plan.

12 I have to say that I think the military plan that we  
13 had at that time was very much reflected -- what might  
14 be described as the combat phase of the operation. The  
15 campaign spoke in terms of full spectrum operations,  
16 rather than speaking in terms of CoIn --  
17 counter-insurgency operations -- and it wasn't really  
18 until the arrival of General Casey and  
19 Ambassador Negroponte, with the handover of the CPA,  
20 that the focus turned fully on to the delivery of  
21 a properly balanced CoIn operation with all the  
22 co-ordination that you would expect.

23 So there certainly was a plan, delivery was  
24 a problem, but that plan evolved as the circumstance  
25 evolved.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How were you able to make your input to  
2 the evolution?

3 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Well, in my capacity as the deputy  
4 commander and as part of the command group, clearly as  
5 policy evolved and as the revised campaign plan evolved,  
6 I was able to -- I was clearly involved in that  
7 discussion. I was able to influence it in a way that  
8 I thought was appropriate and, as I have said, the  
9 actual writing of the plan was done by -- was led by  
10 a British officer and clearly, as Andrew Sharpe  
11 developed the plan, I was able to discuss with him how  
12 it would be moving forward.

13 Having said that, when it was written, it was very  
14 firmly General Casey's plan, and quite rightly so, but  
15 we were able to influence its production, and he and  
16 I had long discussions about the way in which the  
17 campaign might be reshaped to make it into a properly  
18 balanced CoIn operation.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can you give us some idea of the  
20 specific way in which we did this?

21 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: The general discussion was the degree  
22 to which you could lower the profile of the force, in  
23 which you could encourage the ownership of the campaign  
24 by the Iraqis. Whilst you were dealing with an  
25 extremely volatile and dangerous campaign, which was

1 very violent, and, therefore, as it was violent, it  
2 encouraged violence in return, and as, of course, you  
3 were struggling with the emergence of the Iraqi security  
4 forces. So balancing off all of these different factors  
5 and the way in which we might develop the campaign,  
6 bearing in mind that particularly the Iraqi security  
7 forces had to be handled very carefully if we weren't to  
8 commit them prematurely.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to turn now to the first  
10 attempts to tackle the insurgency in Fallujah and also  
11 to deal with the Sadrist problems in Najaf.

12 Can you tell us generally how these operations  
13 impacted on the security situation?

14 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: You are talking about the first --  
15 what, in my time, I would have called the first  
16 Fallujah, which is in April, just as I was arriving.

17 Well, clearly, the build-up of that occurred  
18 actually before I got there, in that we had had the  
19 brutal murders of the Blackwater personnel, which really  
20 had instigated it, and I think the discussion that  
21 preceded it was to balance off the requirement to regain  
22 the initiative and to balance the use of direct military  
23 force with the political imperative to ensure that we  
24 kept the Iraqi people with us as far as possible.

25 There was a debate within headquarters as to how we

1 should proceed, a debate which I shared with London, and  
2 there were those within the American camp who wanted to  
3 move early and seize the initiative, which involved the  
4 early use of kinetic force, and those who wanted to move  
5 more slowly. Certainly, in terms of my advice at the  
6 time, it was to move cautiously, to try and ensure that,  
7 as far as we could, we carried the politics with us and  
8 prepared the political conditions to support whatever  
9 military activity took place.

10 So I was providing counsel in that respect.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: As the insurgencies continued and in  
12 many ways spiralled out of control, and then, of course,  
13 there was the Abu Ghraib scandal, what advice were you  
14 giving with regard to how to deal with these -- the  
15 intensification of the violence and the combined  
16 Sunni/Shia insurgencies?

17 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: The -- that advice, I think -- there  
18 were specific operations and each operation or each  
19 circumstance, be it Samarra or North Babil, or -- they  
20 were specific operations which resulted in specific  
21 advice.

22 However, in terms of -- the general advice in  
23 relation to dealing with the campaign was delivered  
24 through the formulation of the new campaign plan that  
25 I have described earlier, which clearly was a long-term

1 activity. The preparation of it began in May. It went  
2 through June and July, and I think it was eventually  
3 signed off at the end of July or even the beginning  
4 of August. So that was a long-term discussion, an  
5 iterative discussion, and it was really through the  
6 formulation of that that I provided my advice.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When the Sadrist uprising began to  
8 spread to MND (South East), to our area of operation,  
9 was there a difference in emphasis in how to deal with  
10 that and to deal with the other insurgencies?

11 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, there was, but -- and I think the  
12 approach was one which was rather more measured and  
13 certainly was not so kinetic in its approach, but  
14 I think it would be unwise to draw too many comparisons.

15 In my discussions back with London, I tried to --  
16 I tried to make a point that the circumstance with which  
17 the United States predominantly were faced in the Sunni  
18 triangle in the centre were very, very different to the  
19 circumstance in the south, and a number of different  
20 factors were brought to bear.

21 For example, the disbandment of the army and the  
22 de-Ba'athification had an effect in the south, but it  
23 had far more of an effect on the centre. The history was  
24 different, obviously the ethnicity of the people was  
25 very different. So there were all sorts of different

1 factors there, which meant that the intensity of the  
2 insurgency in the centre was of an entirely different  
3 proportion to that in the south.

4 I mean, despite the fact that the Americans had,  
5 I think it was, 130,000 and we had something like 12,000  
6 troops on the ground, their casualties were, I think I'm  
7 right in saying, four times those, proportionately, than  
8 ours, and that was the level of difference in the level  
9 of violence that they were dealing with.

10 So drawing direct comparisons between the way in  
11 which it was dealt with in the south and the way in  
12 which it was dealt with in the centre, and, indeed, in  
13 the north, can be misleading, and I saw one of my roles  
14 was to ensure that there was a rather clearer  
15 understanding of that back in Whitehall.

16 The use of terms like "The MND (South East) should be  
17 an exemplar" -- that kind of language, when you are  
18 sitting, as my American friends were in the Sunni  
19 triangle, dealing with a hugely violent uprising -- not  
20 very helpful frankly.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So there was not a difference of  
22 approach, there was a difference of circumstances?

23 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: There was a difference of  
24 circumstances. To be absolutely clear, the UK forces in  
25 MND (South East) were doing an absolutely first-class

1 and fantastic job, but the circumstances were different,  
2 and, therefore, it was not helpful to draw too many  
3 comparisons between the two, and comparisons at that  
4 time were being drawn, and unwisely so, in my view.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I appreciate that insight. The former  
6 Prime Minister spoke to us a few days ago about external  
7 influences in Iraq, and 2004 is when we begin to see the  
8 rise of Al-Qaeda Iraq. To what extent had this been  
9 anticipated and how significant was it in your time with  
10 regard to the overall campaign?

11 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think the regional influences were  
12 always perceived as being important. I think that  
13 during the period that I was there, we began to  
14 understand just how influential they were, and I think  
15 that the energies that had been unleashed by the combat  
16 phase were really just beginning to emerge. Indeed, the  
17 threat, which was really a threefold threat, the Sunni  
18 rejectionists, the Shia militia, the Al-Qaeda and their  
19 associates, those three threats were beginning to  
20 crystallise during that period and the full scope of  
21 that threat began to emerge, and, therefore -- you  
22 talked about the developing strategy and how did that --  
23 how did that come about. Well, it was developing in  
24 parallel with the emergence of the threat and the  
25 circumstance we found ourselves in.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Finally from me, how did the Iranian  
2 influence impact on this? Was that a factor when you  
3 were there?

4 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, it was, and it was a theme  
5 throughout six months. I think at the beginning there  
6 was a feeling that it might have been slightly  
7 overstated. By the time we finished, we realised that  
8 that probably was the case and in particular areas there  
9 was a problem, I think that was particularly emerging in  
10 the south.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: General McColl, I would like to ask a few  
13 questions about the changing constitutional and  
14 political context during your time. Clearly, as it  
15 involved a critical set of relationships that were  
16 changing, could we start by asking: how did the  
17 political situation look on the ground when you arrived?

18 They adopted the interim constitution, but it was  
19 going to take several months before Ayad Allawi's  
20 government took power. That must have led to a somewhat  
21 shaky situation of uncertainty about where power was and  
22 where it was being exercised. Was that a difficult  
23 context at that particular point, from April through  
24 to, say, June?

25 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, it was, and it was difficult for

1 a number of reasons. The first reason was that the  
2 relationship between the CPA and the Iraqi governing  
3 council was difficult, and I think that was partially  
4 because the CPA was being driven very hard to produce  
5 results, and quick results.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

7 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: That drive came from Washington and  
8 particularly from the DoD, and, as a consequence of  
9 that, those demands, the way in which they dealt, the  
10 CPA dealt, with their Iraqi counterparts, interlocutors,  
11 was not, I think, as sensitive and as patient as it  
12 might be, because they needed to get things done.

13 The circumstance that we found ourselves in lent  
14 itself to a rather more measured approach, a sensitive  
15 approach, a deeper understanding of the cultural  
16 aspects, in particular, that we were dealing with, and  
17 that was difficult to marry with the requirements that  
18 were flowing out of Washington.

19 Having said that, there were -- and I would like to  
20 record this -- within the CPA, there were a lot of very  
21 hard-working, very committed people doing their absolute  
22 best in very trying circumstances. However, they had  
23 that pressure coming from Washington, and, of course,  
24 within the IGC, they had a group of people who had  
25 differing agendas, differing levels of commitment and

1 a different understanding of their responsibilities.

2 So in terms of moving things forward and getting  
3 things done, that was a very difficult circumstance in  
4 which to work, and against all of that, of course, you  
5 had a situation -- a security situation, which started  
6 as difficult and got increasingly volatile as you went  
7 forward. So the circumstances, all in all, did not lend  
8 themselves to a harmonious and coherent working  
9 relationship.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: Is it too much of a generalisation to ask if  
11 the Iraqi political community, particularly after the  
12 adoption of the interim constitution, became  
13 progressively more assertive as their prospect of  
14 actually exercising sovereign power grew nearer and  
15 their political competition among themselves grew more  
16 intense? Was that a gradual shift or was it simply an  
17 event that took place when they took power?

18 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: No, it was a gradual shift,  
19 definitely, and it was a very welcome shift. We wanted  
20 to see the Iraqis assuming responsibility, taking  
21 responsibility and taking ownership for the decisions  
22 that were being made.

23 Of course, it didn't always sit easily with -- at  
24 that stage, it was still Combined Joint Task Force 7,  
25 because, of course, this was a military who had come in

1 during the combat phase. They had been used to be  
2 working without any counterparts. They had operated on  
3 their own, a very responsive, very agile, and enormously  
4 powerful military machine, and now they were being  
5 required to work with an emerging Iraqi security force,  
6 both the army and the police, and, to a lesser extent,  
7 the MoI and MoD as well, all of whom were struggling to  
8 get to their feet, and some of the people who had been  
9 appointed had clearly not necessarily had the experience  
10 of the appointments they were being forced into.

11 So all of this threw sand into the wheels of the  
12 well-oiled military machine, so, yes, there was  
13 a difficulty there as well.

14 Having said that, I would just like to make  
15 a distinction between what occurred up until the end  
16 of June and what happened afterwards --

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

18 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: -- because what happened afterwards  
19 was a very different experience.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to come to that in a moment,  
21 please. There was one aspect that I would like to ask  
22 about. It goes back to events quite a long time before  
23 you took up post, but going back to the two CPA orders  
24 that have been many discussed and we have heard much  
25 about; deep de-Ba'athification and, in effect, total

1           disbandment of the Iraqi army. Those took place a year  
2           before you arrived. Tony Blair has later implied to us  
3           that the Americans had been persuaded over that year to  
4           rein back from the rather untrammelled initial decisions  
5           that had been taken under Ambassador Bremer.

6           Did you see signs of that through your time, that  
7           there was a more adaptable approach to  
8           de-Ba'athification as well as the effort to reform  
9           a national army?

10       GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Certainly, in terms of  
11       de-Ba'athification, the de-Ba'athification regulations  
12       required implementation clearly and the implementation  
13       was put in the hands of a group of people --

14       THE CHAIRMAN: Including Mr Chalabi?

15       GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Indeed. Who did not interpret those  
16       regulations, in my view, with great sensitivity, and it  
17       became apparent very early on that there was going to  
18       have to be some adaption of the implementation if we  
19       were going to get people who really had simply been  
20       caught up in a really deeply unsavoury regime, rather  
21       than being part of that regime, and get them back doing  
22       the jobs, professional jobs, that were required to be  
23       done to get the country moving, and I did see that  
24       happening. It wasn't easy and it took a considerable  
25       amount of negotiation with our Iraqi counterparts, but

1           it definitely happened during the period that I was  
2           there and it was a welcome development. It was  
3           unfortunate that we should have to go through that, in  
4           my view.

5           So far as the Iraqi army was concerned, a very  
6           similar process took place in which we tried, as far as  
7           we could, to employ professional Iraqi army officers,  
8           where we found that we could do so, and they did not --  
9           and they were not debarred. I think, over time, we  
10          realised that there had to be some means of re-employing  
11          those whom we had cast on to the street, and, indeed, of  
12          course, the people that were cast on to the street were  
13          trained military personnel and exactly the kind of  
14          people that we did not want to be reined against us.

15        THE CHAIRMAN: Just as a tail piece to that observation, we  
16          have heard throughout the period up to 2009, and,  
17          indeed, looking ahead to our future relationship on  
18          a bilateral basis with Iraq and, indeed, its military.

19          Can you offer some assessment of the quality and  
20          experience of the available military leadership from the  
21          Iraqi army after disbandment was abandoned and  
22          reformation was taking place? We have heard, for  
23          example, a lot of complimentary evidence about  
24          General Mohan in the south at a later point.

25        GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think that, if I'm being honest,

1 they were mixed. There were some who did a remarkable  
2 job in very trying circumstances and at significant  
3 threat to their own personal and family safety, and  
4 I can't speak highly enough about them.

5 Having said that, there were others who, frankly,  
6 did not have the experience for the jobs they were put  
7 into. I think the problem was not just the individuals  
8 at the top, it was really the depth in these sort of --  
9 what we might describe as the middle management and the  
10 lower management. That was where we required the  
11 expertise and that's where we didn't have it.

12 We were trying to develop a large army, and  
13 that's -- you can't grow that kind of expertise  
14 overnight. So I think those were the areas where we  
15 particularly found ourselves short.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I would like to close  
17 with one question, which you have already described,  
18 that there was, as it were, not a drift, but a gradual  
19 evolution towards the transfer of sovereignty at the end  
20 of June, but, had the transfer took place and sovereign  
21 power rested with the interim government, did that mark  
22 a step change in the relationships that you had to  
23 manage and the coalition had to manage with the Iraqi  
24 authorities?

25 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, it did, it marked a step change

1 in a whole host of areas. I think the first one was the  
2 fact that the US primary point of responsibility moved  
3 from DoD to state, and that coloured a lot of the  
4 relationships. I know you are talking about in-country  
5 but it coloured those relationships, and it coloured the  
6 way in which people approached the tasks that they were  
7 given. So I think that was the first thing.

8 The Iraqis certainly became more muscular and more  
9 demanding in their ownership, but, as you said earlier,  
10 that wasn't an instant -- they didn't on the first  
11 day -- that was a gradual process, but it was  
12 significant.

13 The -- I think in terms of my own particular  
14 responsibilities, the things that changed were the  
15 introduction of -- on the civilian side, of  
16 Ambassador Negroponte, and, on the military side,  
17 General Casey, because, up until that point, there had  
18 been a clear division of responsibilities between, on  
19 the one side, the CPA running politics and governance  
20 and economics and development, break, and security, and  
21 they met, oddly enough, not in Baghdad, but in  
22 Washington, those two lines, for arbitration and  
23 discussion, whereas Ambassador Negroponte and  
24 General Casey arrived and made it very clear from the  
25 outset that they were determined that they would be

1 entirely interwoven in our approach.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry to interrupt you, but what I think we  
3 are hearing is a combination of change of personalities  
4 at the same time as a constitutional, political change,  
5 with the benign effect, as it were, of forcing a coming  
6 together right at the top of the whole coalition  
7 operation in Washington of the main sets of interests,  
8 political, military?

9 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, I would agree with that. It was  
10 a number of changes right down the chain of command,  
11 which produced a complete change in the atmosphere and  
12 the working relationship.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: There is one question we have touched on with  
14 other witnesses and that's the tension within the now  
15 sovereign Iraqi interim government, between the great  
16 desire to take on full authority and responsibility and  
17 exercise political power and responsibility, but  
18 equally, the fact that capacity-building, in terms of  
19 their instruments to wield that power, was still very  
20 unfinished. I just wondered how that went across the  
21 divide from CPA to interim government.

22 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: The -- at around the time that the CPM  
23 changed, the organisation that was responsible for  
24 delivering the Iraqi security forces also changed its  
25 name and it became MNSTC-I. I take it you are familiar

1 with all these acronyms.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Some of them.

3 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Well -- and it was prior to that, but  
4 I think it was about in the May time,  
5 General David Petraeus arrived and began to change the  
6 momentum within the training delivery organisation. So  
7 just as the CPA handed over and as the Iraqis took  
8 control, so some of these plans were coming, not to  
9 fruition in terms of delivery on the ground, but  
10 fruition in terms of the development of the plan, and so  
11 there was a coherent mechanism for trying to match up  
12 these very demanding requirements for the generation of  
13 the Iraqi security forces, and those demands were not  
14 just coming from the Iraqis, they were very clearly  
15 coming from Washington and also from London, and that  
16 was a justifiable demand and there was a justifiable  
17 urgency to that because there was a requirement to get  
18 the Iraqis out in front and to get them to own the  
19 campaign.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Putting great pressure on those in the new  
21 Iraqi administration to deliver?

22 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, a pressure on the Ministry of the  
23 Interior and the Ministry of Defence from central  
24 government and also a pressure upon those within the  
25 coalition, who were responsible for helping them deliver

1 it.

2 There was also a tension here, which I think was  
3 a recognition of the immaturity of the relationship  
4 between the various ministers, and you would quite often  
5 find yourselves, having agreed with a minister that, for  
6 example, the operation in Samarra had to be delayed by  
7 a month, and he would then go off to a meeting with the  
8 Prime Minister and you would discover that it was  
9 happening tomorrow, because there was a requirement --  
10 there was a willingness to support the leadership,  
11 probably, and not to deliver it bad news.

12 So we quite often found ourselves having to deal  
13 with that kind of rather fractured relationship.  
14 Whereas a more mature decision-making mechanism might  
15 have produced a more measured committal of those  
16 resources. You have heard the expression "rush to  
17 failure", in terms of the Iraqi security forces, and  
18 there were a number of occasions -- I mean, you  
19 mentioned the occasions in the south -- and there were  
20 certainly other occasions where we did exactly that.

21 In retrospect, it would have been better to take  
22 a more measured approach but pressures at the time were  
23 such that we thought -- we, collectively -- and that's  
24 the Iraqis and the coalition -- thought we were doing  
25 the right thing.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Just as a last point from me, you talked  
2 about the gradual evolution leading up to the taking of  
3 power by the interim government, then you reminded us of  
4 the civil rush to failure, the need for the new  
5 Iraqi Government to take command and control the  
6 situation beyond, perhaps, the existing level of  
7 capability.

8 Right through to the mid/late autumn, when you left,  
9 were lessons being learned by them, by the  
10 Iraqi Government, either at the instance of the  
11 coalition or inside by their own experience over the  
12 months?

13 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Very definitely, and using the term  
14 "rush to failure", that isn't a description of the whole  
15 period, it is a description of particular events during  
16 that period. There were other times when things were  
17 very well handled and very measured; for example, the  
18 second Najaf, where there was a long discussion about  
19 the process by which we introduced the coalition forces  
20 and there was a requirement to reinforce the coalition  
21 from outside the particular Multi-National Division that  
22 was responsible for it.

23 There was also a requirement to ensure that,  
24 particularly when we were dealing with the holy shrines,  
25 we ensured that there was very much an Iraqi lead and

1 all that the coalition did was provide some sort of  
2 perimeter security. All of that, which sounds rather  
3 straightforward when you say it rather quickly like  
4 that, was extremely difficult to co-ordinate in terms of  
5 the relationship to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior,  
6 Ministry of Defence, the local leadership, and, indeed,  
7 the coalition.

8 So by then we had learned that we needed to sequence  
9 these things correctly, and, indeed, when it came round  
10 to the second Fallujah in my time, which was happening  
11 right at the end of my time, that was actually the key  
12 question, which was the timing of -- there was an  
13 absolute agreement that there was a requirement to try  
14 and lance the boil that Fallujah had become, but the  
15 question is: how could we, first of all, ensure the  
16 political circumstance was right, but then also ensure  
17 that we had Iraqi security forces that were mature  
18 enough, not only to conduct the operation but then  
19 sustain the security situation once they were in there?

20 So we did learn, and I think we probably learned  
21 rather more quickly than I have implied in some of my  
22 earlier comments.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I would like to turn to  
24 Sir Roderic Lyne and particularly the US angle.

25 Sir Roderic?

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir John, you have set out a very clear  
2 distinction between the period up to the end of the CPA  
3 and what came beyond that, and I would like just to  
4 start with that, and, really, with the situation that  
5 you found on your arrival.

6 You arrived about 11 months after the combat phase  
7 had been officially declared to have been at an end, and  
8 it emerges from what you have said so far that a lot had  
9 gone wrong in those 11 months. The CPA had handled the  
10 interim Iraqi authorities, the IDC, insensitively,  
11 decisions had been taken on de-Ba'athification and  
12 disbandment which later had to be corrected to a degree  
13 and, as you said, the coalition had been slow to move  
14 from combat phase into counter-insurgency.

15 So had we, in this first year after the combat --  
16 had the coalition missed the prime opportunity to  
17 stabilise the situation in Iraq and become the author of  
18 its own subsequent difficulties?

19 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think that's rather difficult for me  
20 to answer, having not been there during that period.  
21 I think what is undoubtedly true is that the strength of  
22 the -- the strength of the insurgency was greater than  
23 that which we anticipated. The three-pronged insurgents  
24 that I have outlined, the Al-Qaeda, the Sadrist militia  
25 and the Sunni rejectionists, the strength with which

1 they came forward, I think, produced a circumstance  
2 within which even the most well co-ordinated and  
3 thought-through plan would have had difficulty in  
4 delivering traction.

5 Having said that, I do think that there were  
6 fundamental issues, particularly associated with the  
7 military -- in military/political interface, ie between  
8 Combined Joint Task Force 7 and the CPA, which certainly  
9 could have been addressed earlier, and, had they done  
10 so, it would have enabled us to deliver a -- what, in  
11 retrospect, we call the comprehensive approach in  
12 dealing with these kinds of problems in a far better  
13 way, better co-ordinated and delivering greater traction  
14 on the ground.

15 So, yes, I do think that the preceding 11 months  
16 certainly delivered a set of circumstances which could  
17 have been eased had we done things differently  
18 previously, yes. I think that's fair.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said that you were sent out with  
20 a mandate to try to exercise influence over the way the  
21 campaign was planned. You then set to work on what  
22 eventually became General Casey's very different  
23 approach to this. So you did inherit a situation that  
24 needed to be changed, and, of course, a characteristic  
25 of what had happened in that year was, not only that we

1 had underestimated the insurgency, but we had gone in  
2 with -- the coalition had gone in with relatively low  
3 troop numbers for the size of the country that had to be  
4 stabilised, and with, as has become clear from a lot of  
5 previous witnesses, very deficient planning for the  
6 post-combat phase.

7 So to that extent, the difficulties that you  
8 inherited do appear to have been ones that could at  
9 least have been mitigated, if not entirely avoided.

10 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: That's a conclusion you draw. My task  
11 at the time was to deal with the circumstance with which  
12 I was confronted, and I have described how I found it  
13 and I have described the measures that I tried to take  
14 to address it in terms of -- in campaign terms.

15 In terms of the degree to which what happened in the  
16 previous 11 months did or did not add to those  
17 difficulties, I think you would need to turn to others  
18 to get the best advice on that.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have gathered a lot of evidence from  
20 others.

21 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Sure.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: One of the things that others have said  
23 is that, fairly early on, the coalition forces, in the  
24 eyes of the Iraqis, changed from being liberators into  
25 being occupiers, and, therefore, began to become the

1 target. By the time you arrived, did you feel that the  
2 forces were more the target than seen as liberators?

3 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, is the short answer. There is no  
4 doubt that the -- a large proportion of the Iraqis  
5 regarded -- incorrectly regarded the Multi-National  
6 Force as an occupying force by the time -- certainly by  
7 the mid-point in the time that I was there, it changed,  
8 but it changed quite quickly. But certainly by the  
9 mid-point, I think that was true.

10 Having said that, of course, there is no way that  
11 you could have got up and left at that point. You say,  
12 "Were we part of the problem?" Yes, we were a part of  
13 the problem, but we had a responsibility then to leave  
14 behind us a framework that would deliver security which  
15 would allow the other lines of operation, the political  
16 and the economic, to gain traction.

17 So there was a requirement for us to deal with those  
18 circumstances and deliver a framework which would allow  
19 them -- allow particularly the politics and the  
20 commission to gain traction. So while we were very  
21 definitely regarded as an occupying force, and in that  
22 respect I think had become, to a degree, part of the  
23 problem, we were also the solution.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. Then things began to go in  
25 a slightly different direction after the end

1 of June 2004, with the new Iraqi interim government  
2 taking control from the CPA. You said that you were  
3 involved in a strategy of engagement with the  
4 Iraqi Government. You weren't dealing with some of the  
5 civilian issues that your predecessor had been dealing  
6 with, you were primarily focused on security. That  
7 presumably meant security going beyond the armed forces.  
8 Did it embrace policing and justice as well?

9 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: It was primarily focused on the  
10 Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior  
11 and, therefore, included the police and the army, yes.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How much were you drawn into the  
13 relationship between the military forces and the IIG,  
14 yourself, the military command and the IIG?

15 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Do you mean the Iraqi military  
16 command?

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean the coalition command.

18 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Well, very much so. I was involved in  
19 relationships with the Minister of the Interior. By  
20 that I mean the Minister of the Interior and the  
21 Ministry of Defence, and I spent a lot of my time  
22 talking to them, and, indeed, to the leadership in both  
23 the police and the army about the way in which their  
24 forces were developing, and, indeed, the way in which  
25 their forces were being committed.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you feel that Whitehall at this point  
2 sufficiently understood how long and how difficult it  
3 was going to be to train up Iraqi security forces and  
4 Iraqi police to the point at which we could hand over to  
5 them?

6 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think, as I said earlier, there was  
7 a great deal of pressure emanating from both Washington  
8 and London and internally from the Iraqis to get the  
9 Iraqi police and army trained up and committed as early  
10 as possible. I do think that there was a requirement  
11 placed upon us in theatre to explain just how difficult  
12 that was and what some of the realities of the time  
13 limitations were.

14 I don't think it was appreciated in London, I don't  
15 think it was appreciated in Washington, nor was it  
16 appreciated at some of the higher political levels in  
17 Iraq either, and there was a requirement for all of us  
18 professional military people to explain that to our  
19 political masters, as you would expect. That was our  
20 job.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were London and Washington essentially  
22 pulling in the same direction or different directions?

23 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Generally speaking, I think they were  
24 pulling in very much the same direction, in terms of the  
25 priorities within the campaign. I think they were very

1 similar. I think there may have been differences of  
2 geographical emphasis, but in terms of overall  
3 priorities, I think they were very similar.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How much did you feel, if at all, was  
5 public opinion, acting on the political systems in  
6 Britain and the United States, affecting the sort of  
7 instructions that you were receiving and, indeed, the  
8 American commanders in the coalition?

9 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think that in terms of the urgency  
10 behind the requirement to put an Iraqi face on the  
11 operations, the development of an Iraqi security force  
12 that was capable of taking on a significant proportion  
13 of the load, I think all of that resulted from the  
14 internal domestic political pressure, or at least had  
15 an impact on it.

16 In terms of the -- in terms of skewing what we were  
17 being told, in terms of changing those priorities,  
18 I didn't perceive that as being the case, no.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Initial public support for war had by  
20 this stage diminished. It was becoming, by the autumn  
21 of 2004, a much more unpopular issue in both Britain and  
22 America, and some of your fellow commanders who have  
23 given evidence have said that a particular difficulty  
24 for them was the way it was being reported by the media  
25 and the impact this was having on public opinion.

1           Did you feel that the British public were being  
2           given an inaccurate impression of the situation as you  
3           saw it and that that was making life difficult for our  
4           decision-makers?

5       GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I certainly felt that -- it wasn't  
6           inaccurate so much as incomplete. They were being given  
7           a very clear description of the difficulties that were  
8           going on in the country, a very clear description of the  
9           way in which the incidents -- security incidents --  
10          a number of the security incidents was increasing.

11          What they weren't getting was the full spectrum  
12          which demonstrated what was being done about it, and the  
13          courageous way in which the men and women of our armed  
14          forces were going about their business and the product  
15          of that, which was not only in a security environment,  
16          which did allow economic development to take place and  
17          politics to gain a foothold, but also resulted in the  
18          development of the Iraqi security force, and that,  
19          indeed, they were stepping up to the plate to take more  
20          responsibility. So it wasn't, I don't think, so much  
21          that it was deliberately misleading, but it was  
22          incomplete.

23          In theatre, we made efforts to try and balance that  
24          by the briefings that we gave. I think one of the  
25          particular requirements around that time was to try and

1 enable the Iraqis to tell their own story. Particularly  
2 trying to get at the internal Iraqi impression of an  
3 occupying force, and to give them the mechanisms within  
4 their own government of dealing with the media.

5 That wasn't the case when I arrived, and during the  
6 course of the six months I was there, that capacity and  
7 that capability -- actually mentored and led and funded to  
8 a large part by DFID -- did get off its knees and began to  
9 take hold of the campaign in media terms. I think that  
10 was helpful.

11 I notice that some ask what effect that has on the  
12 morale of the force that you are dealing with, and  
13 I think that's an interesting question. I would agree  
14 with a couple of people -- a couple of witnesses you had  
15 earlier, which was that I don't think that it directly  
16 affected the morale of the force because I think the  
17 British army has an internal robustness and strength  
18 which feeds upon itself. That was certainly the case  
19 during the period of time that I was there.

20 However, if it goes on for any length of time, the  
21 longer it goes on, it has a corrosive effect and I think  
22 it probably affects the respect with which the role of  
23 the forces is viewed by the domestic population, and  
24 I think that can, over time, affect the morale of the  
25 force, but I didn't detect that that was the case during

1 the period of time that I was there or indeed whilst we  
2 were in Iraq, and that says a lot, I think, for the  
3 internal strength of the armed forces.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would you draw any lessons from this  
5 experience, perhaps also thinking of your experience in  
6 Afghanistan, about the importance of getting strategic  
7 communications right in this kind of conflict in the age  
8 we now live in?

9 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Well, I think the lesson that it is  
10 important is obviously clear, as is the difficulty of  
11 doing it, and it requires -- it requires investment in  
12 terms of the mechanisms. It requires clarity of the  
13 message you are trying to get across and it also  
14 requires a good story to tell.

15 Now, in this particular circumstance, I think we had  
16 a good story to tell in terms of the work that was being  
17 done by the armed forces and the capacity that was being  
18 developed. Even more the case in Afghanistan. There is  
19 some really, really good news to be had in Afghanistan,  
20 and we just need to try and expose it as much as we can  
21 to encourage our media to take advantage of it.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: While you were there, there was an  
23 American presidential election. Did you feel that that  
24 was having an effect on the decision-making of your  
25 American partners?

1 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I mentioned earlier some of the  
2 pressures that we felt in terms of delivering results  
3 and making progress and there was certainly an element  
4 of that, I think. But I wouldn't like to say that  
5 I felt that it was disproportionate.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to conclude with some questions  
8 about wider United Kingdom force deployments within Iraq  
9 in your time, and there were a number of requests, as  
10 I understand it, from the coalition, de facto from the  
11 Americans, to take on responsibility for particular  
12 operations outside MND (South East).

13 I think until late 2004, when we agreed to backfill  
14 for US troops in North Babil, we didn't actually agree  
15 to any of those. Were you having to manage and, as it  
16 were, facilitate the resolution of requests like that  
17 from your position as SBMRI in Iraq?

18 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Yes, I was. I dealt with a number of  
19 requests for reinforcement and for the movement of  
20 resources -- to expand the UK area of responsibility was  
21 one, I remember the deployment of the ARCC was another.  
22 So I dealt with that. I also dealt with the deployment  
23 to North Babil, and on each occasion I tried to ensure  
24 that my military advice weighed up the advantages and  
25 disadvantages of so doing across the theatre as opposed

1 to just from a UK perspective, so people back in  
2 Whitehall could understand why it was that the request  
3 was being made and how it was important, I thought, that  
4 the force, the full 140,000 or 150,000 should be fought  
5 as a unified force and not as individual contingents of  
6 31 nations, I think it was.

7 If we tried to fight as just 31 individual  
8 contingents, it would have been impossible. So we had  
9 to fight as a coherent force and we had to prioritise  
10 right across the theatre. So it was important to me to  
11 ensure that the UK understood the theatre perspective,  
12 and I also felt that it was important that the UK  
13 understood that, should it take any of these  
14 responsibilities on, then what that might mean, not only  
15 for the short-term, but also, subsequently, for the  
16 longer-term, because, clearly, had they taken on  
17 responsibility, for example, with the deployment of the  
18 ARCC, then they would have taken on responsibility for not  
19 only MND (South East) but also Centre South with the  
20 potential additional requirement for resources that that  
21 might bring.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Is there a distinction for us to understand  
23 between temporary support for particular operations as  
24 in North Babil, as opposed to a general extension of  
25 either territorial or other responsibility?

1 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think so. The North Babil  
2 deployment was very clearly limited both in time and in  
3 space. That was understood from the outset. There were  
4 risks associated with it and I was very conscious of  
5 those risks. There were British soldiers involved, but  
6 it had to be set within the context of the risks to the  
7 rest of the force and the very important operation it  
8 was going on to try and ensure the security for what was  
9 perceived as being the centre of gravity for the  
10 operation, particularly for the elections, which was  
11 Baghdad.

12 So that particular deployment was limited in time  
13 and space and everybody understood it. Had we taken on  
14 responsibility for Centre South, then that would have  
15 been an enduring responsibility, and we would, of  
16 course, have been subject to the rather restrictive ROE  
17 and operational practices of the forces within centre  
18 south, and, therefore, there was an implied task to  
19 underwrite those limited capacities, with, potentially,  
20 UK capability. So it was a very different -- it was  
21 a very different undertaking to that to the North Babil  
22 one.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: I think it was General Sir Bill Rollo who  
24 told us that, in his opinion, you favoured the  
25 deployment of North Babil from the coalition

1 perspective, and I'm relying on memory here and it may  
2 be faulty, but I think there was an opportunity that the  
3 Black Watch and other units were engaged in a handover,  
4 and it meant that we didn't have to deplete forces in  
5 the south-east to make them available for a limited time  
6 in the north.

7 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: That's exactly right. Specifically,  
8 it meant that the reserve that was in MND (South East) could  
9 be retained whilst the Black Watch were deployed to  
10 North Babil. So from a narrow UK perspective, it was  
11 supportable. From the wider coalition perspective, our  
12 resources were being drawn from the north, and from  
13 other divisions, to support this operation in Fallujah,  
14 and, given the level of operational engagement in the  
15 south, compared to that across the rest of the theatre,  
16 it was an entirely reasonable request on behalf of  
17 Lieutenant General Metz, who was the corps commander,  
18 and, from a military perspective, I thought the judgment  
19 was sound that they should go.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: You will be aware, I know, that the  
21 kidnappers of Margaret Hassan, linked the deployment of  
22 the Black Watch to their kidnapping and, indeed, later  
23 her murder, and the video appeal she made, I think, came  
24 after you had left, but it did, among other things, such  
25 as withdrawal from Iraq, but it also registered a wish

1 that the Black Watch should not be sent to Baghdad,  
2 although it had already been announced that they  
3 would -- to North Babil, I should say.

4 I just wondered, were there any discussions with or  
5 any advice from Foreign Office colleagues, either in  
6 Baghdad, or, indeed, in London, about the potential  
7 wider ramifications of extending the British military  
8 presence out of the southeast into a very different  
9 area?

10 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: First of all, I would like to say that  
11 I am deeply sorry for the tragic death, and whenever one  
12 undertakes a military deployment of this nature,  
13 particularly when you do it in the full glare of the  
14 media, it is always -- it can always be subject to that  
15 kind of intimidation you have just described, but  
16 I don't think it would be reasonable that that kind of  
17 intimidation should dictate the conduct of the campaign.  
18 The campaign would become completely unworkable were  
19 that to be the case.

20 In terms of the advice of the Foreign Office, in  
21 terms of the wider implication, certainly the  
22 Foreign Office were aware the decision was being  
23 discussed and my recollection is that they did not  
24 object to it, certainly not in theatre in my discussions  
25 with the Ambassador.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, thank you. Just one more -- I think  
2 probably a pair of questions really. First of all, the  
3 military command in London, both PJHQ and MoD, did they  
4 have a general policy towards extending or not extending  
5 our operations in Iraq, even for limited operational  
6 purposes, or was it simply a reflection of your own  
7 judgment from Baghdad, that it was a coalition balance  
8 to strike?

9 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: There was a policy, which was that it  
10 would be possible to deploy forces outside  
11 MND (South East) on an individual basis, based upon the  
12 circumstances and with the authority of -- CDS's  
13 authority, as far as I was concerned. So effectively,  
14 each request was dealt with on its own merits. So, as  
15 far as I was aware, that was the policy.

16 The reality of that was that of the number of  
17 requests that came in from the coalition, and I think  
18 there were three or four in my time, only one of those  
19 was agreed to.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: The other dimension of that, I suppose, is  
21 the political stance in London, given that so much of  
22 the whole Iraq operation was not only going up and down  
23 military chains of command and diplomatic ones, but  
24 across the Atlantic, Washington to London, Pentagon  
25 State to Foreign Office, MoD, and between leaders, heads

1 of government.

2 What was your sense of the political attitude in  
3 London towards wider deployments or additional  
4 deployments? Was --

5 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: You mean outside the  
6 Ministry of Defence?

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. If you like, government in London. Did  
8 it communicate any sense of a wish either to maximise  
9 further cooperation across the whole coalition area or  
10 to limit the commitments so far as possible?

11 GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: I think that the -- if I can  
12 characterise the Foreign Office position on this,  
13 I think within resources they would wish to see our  
14 influence maximised. Now, in terms of specific  
15 decisions I think it was very much a Ministry of Defence  
16 decision as to whether or not they would advise  
17 particular deployments based upon the resources that  
18 were available.

19 But in terms of the Foreign Office position, I think  
20 they would always tend to be rather more expansive,  
21 perhaps, than the Ministry of Defence, in my experience  
22 in Iraq, because they had the broader requirement to  
23 exert influence across the breadth of the campaign.

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. I'm refraining from touching on the  
25 word "exemplary" for our operations in the southeast at

1           this point.

2   GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Thank you.

3   THE CHAIRMAN: I think that brings to a conclusion the  
4           questions that we had in mind to ask you,  
5           General McColl, but are there any further questions  
6           which Sir Martin or Sir Roderic want to put?

7           In that case, Sir Roderic has already referred to  
8           the great amount of operational experience you have had,  
9           and not only in Iraq but in many other theatres now,  
10          including Afghanistan. So, given that this is a lessons  
11          learned Inquiry, are there wider reflections, or indeed  
12          lessons, from the Iraq experience that you now would  
13          like to offer or make?

14   GEN SIR JOHN McCOLL: Thank you for the opportunity and  
15          I will keep my remarks brief. I will just raise two  
16          really.

17          The first one is on resourcing. Quite clearly, the  
18          resources that we, the UK, have, not just with the  
19          military but across government, to devote to  
20          a particular issue are limited, and, therefore, I think  
21          it is important that, as we approach the various  
22          challenges that we have, that we ensure that we have the  
23          sufficient resources to be able to do whatever we are  
24          doing satisfactorily, and that is important from the  
25          point of view of prosecuting a successful campaign. It

1 is also important from the point of view of supporting  
2 those that we have deployed.

3 As far as Iraq was concerned, clearly, as Iraq was  
4 developing, Afghanistan was also developing, and I think  
5 there was a tension there which affected the resourcing  
6 of those two theatres. I won't say any more than that,  
7 but I do think we should be prioritising and sequencing  
8 rather than conducting perhaps too many operations in  
9 parallel. That's the first observation.

10 The second observation I will make is on  
11 cross-government co-ordination, and you haven't touched  
12 on this or asked me about it, but it was something I did  
13 get involved in, in terms of trying to deliver the UK  
14 effect across the piece, and in the various operations  
15 that I have been involved in, there has been a perennial  
16 tension between the various offices of state committed  
17 to that operation, primarily, the Foreign Office, DFID  
18 and the military.

19 In this particular example -- you talk about  
20 exemplary effect, and I will use that term, but one of  
21 the reasons why we were able to deliver effect,  
22 particularly in economics and development, was because  
23 the resources we were using were resources of the  
24 United States, because we were not able to apply our own  
25 resources in a timely manner in support of those that we

1 had deployed, and that is deeply unsatisfactory.

2 I understand that measures have been taken to try  
3 and rectify that and the co-ordination between the  
4 various government departments has improved. I would  
5 just make the observation that every time we go through  
6 an operation, it is always improved, and it is always  
7 much better now than it was, and every time we go to the  
8 next operation we find it is unsatisfactory.

9 I would make the observation that we have some very  
10 powerful departments of state, each of them with their  
11 own particular area of responsibility, but we have  
12 a relatively weak central co-ordinating function, and if  
13 we are to get these deployments properly co-ordinated on  
14 the ground, it requires a far more muscular central  
15 co-ordinating authority in order to be able to deliver  
16 that. Whether that's a single minister responsible or  
17 a reinforced Cabinet Office, it is not for me to judge  
18 but certainly that is an area that we need to look at  
19 long and hard as a result of this Inquiry.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: General McColl, I think I would like to say  
21 on behalf of the Committee we have found your evidence  
22 both thoughtful and thought-provoking, and we are  
23 grateful for that. I will close this hearing on that  
24 note, and observe that at 2.00 pm this afternoon we  
25 shall be taking further evidence from Jack Straw from

1 his time as Foreign Secretary. With that, I'll declare  
2 this hearing closed. Thank you.

3 (12.40 pm)

4 (The short adjournment)

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