

1 (3.45 pm)

2 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP

3 THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon and welcome, and welcome  
4 everyone.

5 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Good afternoon.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: In our final session this afternoon, we are  
7 hearing from the Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP in two roles,  
8 his role as Minister of State for the armed forces  
9 from June 2007 to June 2009 and as Secretary of State  
10 for Defence from June 2009 until the end of the campaign  
11 in Iraq.

12 Now, welcome to our witness. We want to focus  
13 primarily during this hearing on a number of  
14 personnel-related issues, many of which remain of  
15 concern to the families of service personnel who died in  
16 Iraq or to those who were seriously injured there, and  
17 we will, in addition, be taking evidence from your  
18 predecessor as minister for the armed forces,  
19 Adam Ingram, next week, and from senior military  
20 officers with responsibility for personnel and medical  
21 issues.

22 Now, I say on every occasion, we recognise that  
23 witnesses give evidence based on their recollection of  
24 events and we, of course, check what we hear against the  
25 papers to which we have access and which we are still

1 receiving.

2 I remind each witness on each occasion that they  
3 will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence  
4 to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair  
5 and accurate.

6 Could you start, Mr Ainsworth, by giving us  
7 a description of the role of the Minister of State for  
8 the armed forces and what it entailed?

9 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Well, good afternoon, Sir John.  
10 Ladies and gentlemen.

11 Fundamentally, the role of the minister for the  
12 armed forces, to my eyes, in any case, is the Deputy  
13 Secretary of State and he does what the Secretary of  
14 State wants him to do. Therefore, the role will change  
15 with the personnel.

16 When Des Browne was the Secretary of State and I was  
17 the armed forces minister, Des wanted policy lead on  
18 both Iraq and Afghanistan and, therefore, I had policy  
19 lead on all of our other operations in various parts of  
20 the world, you know, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, you know, the  
21 Royal Navy, everywhere, and I also -- it is not as  
22 clearly defined as people might imagine. Most of the  
23 lead for welfare issues is with the Parliamentary  
24 Undersecretary and the last thing that you want to do is  
25 to take over, you know, that man's tasks and effectively

1 disenfranchise him.

2 But I did have, as I think you alluded to in the  
3 letter you sent me, if not in your introduction now, two  
4 specific tasks. One was a time-limited piece of work  
5 and that was the production of the service personnel  
6 command paper, and the other one was our policy on  
7 inquests and inquiries and boards of inquiries and there  
8 are a lot of welfare issues as well as, you know,  
9 structural issues on dealing with risk and safety of our  
10 armed forces that flow from that area of policy.

11 I tend to major on both of those and continued to  
12 take a strong interest in them after I became Secretary  
13 of State myself.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Just as we leave that -- and I'll  
15 turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman in a moment -- Iraq would  
16 have been constantly in your vision, as it were, in the  
17 role you had, whether it be operational or whether it be  
18 issues on which you had a specific remit or wished to  
19 take an interest. Was it a preoccupation or was it, if  
20 you like, one of many focuses for your attention through  
21 that time.

22 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: A preoccupation before I was armed  
23 forces minister, you mean?

24 THE CHAIRMAN: No, as armed forces minister.

25 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Erm --

1 THE CHAIRMAN: I'm just trying to get a sense of how large  
2 it loomed in your --

3 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: The balance changed over the  
4 period. I mean, by the time I became Secretary of  
5 State, we were out of Iraq. When I first became  
6 Minister of State, I flew to Iraq within a few days of  
7 being appointed and landed at the airbase at Basra and  
8 three people were killed in their bed spaces as my  
9 helicopter arrived, and so, you know, it obviously makes  
10 you know, a huge impression on you when you arrive in  
11 those circumstances, with the level of threat that there  
12 was then.

13 But that diminished over time, most particularly  
14 after Charge of the Knights, and you know, we were able  
15 to, you know, effect, you know, a transference of, you  
16 know, to the Iraqi forces, and obviously Afghanistan was  
17 growing in terms of, you know, its importance, you know,  
18 to us.

19 By the time John Hutton became Secretary of State  
20 and to some extent had a different state attitude  
21 towards the distribution of responsibilities and,  
22 therefore, I did get a little more involved in policy,  
23 but by the time John became Secretary of State, there  
24 was feeling, for good reason, that we were on the last  
25 leg in Iraq and Afghanistan was, by that time, you

1 know -- you know, the main effort.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'll turn to  
3 Sir Lawrence Freedman now.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Later in the hearing we want to come  
5 on to the military covenant, but for the moment I would  
6 just like to focus on the very practical and emotional  
7 support provided for armed forces personnel and their  
8 families while the personnel are on tour. We have  
9 spoken quite a bit to families and military personnel  
10 and have had, to be fair, pretty mixed reports.

11 Could you briefly describe what you did when you  
12 were minister about the welfare of military personnel  
13 while on tour?

14 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Well, I mean, obviously there were  
15 various initiatives that were taking place before I was  
16 ever a minister, so this is an ongoing process. The  
17 most particular area with regards to welfare that I got  
18 involved with was a particular piece of work that I was  
19 keen to do, I got the opportunity to do, that was the  
20 service personnel command paper.

21 Now, that was, you know, the opportunity, as I saw  
22 it, to -- not do what we were supposed to do as MoD for  
23 our service personnel, but to get for the first time at  
24 every single area of government and deal with the things  
25 that had never been given the importance that they had

1           been given before. There are lots of ways in which  
2           government accidentally, local government and central  
3           government, discriminates against our armed forces  
4           because of the juxtaposition of the way that services  
5           are delivered and the way that we make them work and the  
6           way that we keep moving them around. We don't move them  
7           around as much as we used to. We used to do the arms  
8           plot and make them move systematically, but that creates  
9           problems for them.

10           So in services personnel command paper what I wanted  
11           to try to do was sweep up as many of those complaints as  
12           there were, analyse them, see whether or not there was  
13           a reality to them and have them dealt with as a one-off  
14           process, but set up an ongoing process. So this was not  
15           just "Let's deal with the issues as they are today,  
16           because the issues will be different tomorrow".

17           So by involving the armed forces family federations  
18           by involving the charities, the British Legion, in  
19           a control group -- I can't remember what we called it  
20           now, I have lost the phraseology -- a reference group,  
21           you know, we would have then an ongoing monitoring of  
22           these issues as they changed over time and so the  
23           command paper contains two fundamental principles. One  
24           is that there should be no discrimination arising to you  
25           as a result of your service in the armed forces.

1           But secondly -- and this was a little bit more  
2           controversial with some people -- that in some areas  
3           special treatment was appropriate as a return for  
4           sacrifice, mostly in regards to the injured. So those  
5           were the two embracing principles.

6           Then there are about 40-odd different things we  
7           tried to address as a one-off and then we tried to set  
8           up a system so that this didn't just lie on a shelf. So  
9           there was an annual monitoring of progress and  
10          a five-yearly review and that wasn't done within  
11          government, but that was done with, as I said, the  
12          British Legion, the Army Family Association, the Navy  
13          Family Association, the RAF Family Association, so that  
14          they could help us to bring broad eyes, you know, to the  
15          issue.

16       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This, as you say, covers a lot of  
17       ground, that paper, and I think there are issues that we  
18       will want to cover systematically during this hearing.

19               Perhaps rather minor things, though, can matter to  
20       troops and also to their families; for example, getting  
21       phone calls, being able to make phone calls, email  
22       contact and so on. How much were you aware of that sort  
23       of issue as something that could be addressed? Perhaps  
24       it didn't need sort of a big Whitehall effort, but was  
25       more a matter --

1 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: That was our own responsibility,  
2 it was in the MoD. You know, the welfare package had --  
3 had been improved over time. I mean, as I understand  
4 it, there was no such thing as an e-bluey, as they call  
5 them, back at the start of our operations in Iraq. So  
6 people's ability to communicate with family back home  
7 must have been, you know, tremendously limited.

8 So all of the time there was an attempt to put in,  
9 most particularly, the ability to communicate and to get  
10 that addressed, and one of the things that caused a lot  
11 of people concern was that you could never give any kind  
12 of equality of treatment in that regard and nothing was  
13 ever very simple to do.

14 So, for instance, when we tried to make wifi  
15 available in the main bases in both Afghanistan and  
16 Iraq, to stop the queues at Internet cabins and -- you  
17 know, because people always wanted to contact family at  
18 particular times of day, and there were very real  
19 problems with that. The Iraqi licensing authorities  
20 were practically non-developed, there were security  
21 issues, there was broadband availability. You know,  
22 a lot of difficulties that led us, you know, to not be  
23 able to introduce that kind of announcement in the  
24 timescales that we expected and hoped that we would be  
25 able to do.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: From the perspective of the families  
2 as well, was there more you were able to do at this sort  
3 of basic level of communications, staying in touch with  
4 your loved ones?

5 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Particularly with regards to the  
6 army, there was -- I mean, the army have -- and this  
7 affects a lot of areas in policy. The army have a huge  
8 desire to do the majority of this work through the  
9 regiment and they do not want it taken away and done at  
10 some kind of, you know, central, you know, mechanism  
11 because they see the regiment as the family and we  
12 enhanced their ability to provide welfare.

13 I was never certain that in some areas that didn't  
14 lead to unequal treatment and not necessarily the  
15 better, but I was -- I never saw the issues as important  
16 enough that we should, you know, break that system.  
17 I saw the value in that, you know, regimental family  
18 connection being important enough to preserve.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have certainly met people who  
20 fell outside the regimental system in some respects,  
21 some reservists, for example, who might well have felt  
22 that was not quite capturing their need.

23 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Yes, I'm sure, and I'm sure that  
24 a lot of regiments are better; better founded and better  
25 able and do a better job. So you would find regulars

1 being treated possibly differently from other regulars.

2 The reserves, there was a review done before I was  
3 a minister, just to try to make certain that there  
4 weren't some aspects of reserve service that were not  
5 falling behind. The principle was that reservists  
6 should be treated the same.

7 You know, you can never do that in every aspect  
8 because they haven't got that, you know, wrap-around  
9 when they come home that regulars have got. They go  
10 back into the community. They are isolated from other  
11 service personnel, so you have got to watch that, and we  
12 pull in, for instance, a system of mental health  
13 assessment because there is some evidence that the  
14 incidence of mental health problems were greater among  
15 reserves than they were among the regular forces.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would you say the same again in  
17 terms of the ability to provide support to families as  
18 well?

19 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: In what -- I mean --

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The regiment --

21 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: That is so broad.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The regiment can provide quite a lot  
23 of support to families too. Whereas people who are not  
24 living within military communities within the UK may  
25 find it harder -- their families may find it harder as

1 well.

2 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I think you have got to look at  
3 the individual instances, because I think that there are  
4 some provisions that are absolutely ideal for the  
5 provision, you know, through the regimental system, but  
6 then there are others where that's not -- I mean, when  
7 you have a bereaved family -- I mean, we had to do,  
8 I think, considerable work to try to make sure that --  
9 I mean, we simply weren't getting it right, to tell you  
10 the truth, and there was a need for, you know,  
11 improvement there. Again and again, we were letting  
12 people down, I think.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we will be coming to some  
14 more detailed questions on that soon. Can I ask you  
15 perhaps two much smaller questions, but they are points  
16 that have nonetheless been made to us by some veterans  
17 of the Iraq campaign. One was the reliability of  
18 transport between Iraq and the UK and the impact this  
19 had on periods of leave. Were you aware of that?

20 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Yes, hugely. We monitored the  
21 delays, I visited Brize Norton on a couple of occasions.  
22 There were periods when we made -- there was  
23 a particular period when we made an astonishing  
24 improvement from a very bad situation, which was in  
25 the -- is in the public domain in terms of the lengths

1 of delays that we were imposing on people.

2 Then, because of, you know, pressures, that would  
3 slip back from time to time. But by an additional  
4 aircraft -- you know, increasing the size of the fleet  
5 on the C17s, getting contract aircraft in, trying to  
6 improve the reliability on the troop transport -- they  
7 are quite an elderly fleet, yet need defensive aid  
8 suites, sophisticated defensive aid suites in order to  
9 fly into a threatened environment -- you know, was  
10 difficult, and we -- and the RAF, I know, put a lot of  
11 increased effort into trying to get that, you know, to  
12 a better place, but it was a constant concern.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you face any resistance in terms  
14 of trying to improve that? Because the morale problem  
15 seemed to be quite severe that this was causing.

16 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: You think that the delays at  
17 Brize Norton were the cause of morale problems?

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The delays in people getting home  
19 for leave were a cause of morale problems.

20 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Delays in people getting home  
21 from...?

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Iraq.

23 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: The biggest single issue that was  
24 ever raised with me was the issues of rest and  
25 recuperation rather than delays at the end of tours.

1 I mean, we quite deliberately introduced a system of  
2 delay and decompression at the end of tours, and that  
3 had resistance from some members of the armed forces who  
4 understandably wanted to get back to their families, and  
5 I think it has got a proven track record. If you stop  
6 people, you give them a period of reflection, a period  
7 of recuperation, a period to let their hair down  
8 together before they go home to, you know, their wives  
9 and families, you know, in most cases, you know, still  
10 completely and absolutely tense from, you know, an  
11 operational theatre, has got huge benefits. So we were  
12 deliberately delaying people going home.

13 What was often raised with me was the lack of  
14 understanding of -- and a desire for certainty on rest  
15 and recuperation. You know, people -- when somebody was  
16 going home mid-tour, for a short period of time, then  
17 there is an obvious desire for them to arrive when you  
18 expect them to arrive and stay for as long as they have  
19 expected to stay.

20 But I mean, the operational strain of providing rest  
21 and recuperation to a large proportion of the deployed  
22 force -- I mean it was not something that the armed  
23 forces would ever contemplate, that they could guarantee  
24 R&R, because I mean, you know, almost -- you deploy with  
25 a full brigade and you start cycling rest and

1           recuperation within a month or so of getting into the  
2           theatre, and then, for the whole of the middle of your  
3           tour, you have got a proportion of your force that is  
4           away, at home, either travelling or travelling back.

5           Commanders needed certainty about how many people  
6           they had got, how they could run operations on the  
7           ground. So they had to say, "Your R&R starts from when  
8           you leave the base and ends when you get back to the  
9           base" and, you know, sorry, that creates uncertainty and  
10          it was a very difficult issue.

11         SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks. Another issue --

12         RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I mean, now one of the things that  
13           we are potentially -- I mean we ought to be looking at,  
14           is shorter tours and no R&R, but you need to deploy as  
15           other than as a brigade in order to do that, and the  
16           army don't like -- they like to train as a brigade,  
17           deploy as a brigade. There is a debate that's going on.

18         SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The issue of tour lengths is clearly  
19           very important and that's an issue that has been raised  
20           with us, with the civilians, as well as the military.

21         RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Yes.

22         SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Another issue which was raised with  
23           us by veterans, was shortages of basic personal  
24           equipment. Somebody told us that the American military  
25           would refer to the British as "the borrowers" because

1           they were after basic supplies like food and toilet  
2           paper on occasion.

3                   Were you aware of those issues of shortages of  
4           personal equipment? Had they been rectified by the time  
5           you became Minister of State?

6   RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: They had been, and everybody who  
7           I questioned in the theatre -- and one deliberately  
8           created opportunities to question lower ranks in the  
9           absence of officers to try to understand that you were  
10          getting ground truth -- there had been by the time that  
11          I was armed forces minister a considerable improvement.  
12          I'm not saying that everything is perfect. Everything  
13          will never be perfect in an operational theatre, but  
14          everybody recognised that there had been a big  
15          improvement.

16                   But, again, our understanding back here and the  
17          understanding of the soldier is somewhat different. If  
18          he is at a main operating base that has been established  
19          for some time, he expects -- and I think he is entitled  
20          to expect -- to see improvement over time. So to see  
21          his canteen facilities, his sleeping arrangements and  
22          everything else being constantly worked on to see what  
23          can be provided, if he is out on the front line and --  
24          I mean, in my time, we were rapidly embedding some of  
25          our people with Iraqi forces in what we would now come

1 to know as forward operating bases. I'm not sure that  
2 that was the terminology that we were using, you know,  
3 at the time.

4 Some of them were pretty ill-founded. But you  
5 actually found that -- I mean, people were -- I mean  
6 people were happy with those circumstances. I mean,  
7 they knew that, when they had been deployed in order to  
8 do a job in a high-threatening environment on the front  
9 line at short notice, things would be pretty spartan and  
10 that was what they had to put up with, but they expected  
11 to see improvement over time, both in the FOBs -- sorry,  
12 the forward operating bases and back at the main bases  
13 as well.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you felt that this was a constant  
15 requirement for MoD to keep on --

16 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: It was --

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- improving things?

18 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Yes, absolutely, and listening to  
19 people and trying to respond to issues, you know, as  
20 they arose.

21 You know, there can be no perfection. As I said,  
22 I think people are entitled to see improvements over  
23 time. So if -- you know, having been in the COB for --  
24 sorry, in the Basra Air Station for some time, people  
25 went out there with an expectation that there would be

1 some improvement and some of them were on second  
2 deployments and they would not expect things to be as  
3 they were when they were there in, say, 2004, when they  
4 went back in 2007.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just a final issue I want to raise,  
6 which is an issue that was raised in the command paper  
7 that you mentioned, and it is also relevant to a recent  
8 announcement by the current government that operational  
9 allowances and the government has announced that they  
10 are going to be doubled and that's outwith this  
11 Inquiry's terms of reference, but I'm interested in the  
12 degree to which pay issues impacted on recruitment and  
13 retention and why you felt that they needed to be  
14 addressed.

15 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Well, I mean, the entire package  
16 impacts on recruitment and retention and I mean, people  
17 join the armed forces to serve. They are pretty unique  
18 people in many cases, but they expect to be, you know,  
19 properly, you know, remunerated, and they expect  
20 different conditions to be taken into account. So the  
21 operational allowance was introduced to try to, you  
22 know, recognise the -- you know, the hardship of that  
23 tour.

24 I mean, I'm not -- I mean, there's a lot more than  
25 that that affects recruitment and, I mean, we were, when

1 I first went into the MoD, struggling on recruitment.  
2 We were well below strength, particularly in the army.  
3 I think the other services were also affected, though.  
4 But that was in part because we had a very buoyant  
5 economy at the time and jobs were not hard to come  
6 about. So it was not an easy recruiting environment.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you given advice that this  
8 question of operational allowances could make a serious  
9 difference to recruitment or did you just see it as one  
10 amongst many other factors?

11 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: We gave evidence to -- and  
12 encouraged the Armed Forces Independent Pay Review Body  
13 to look at different ways of addressing the various  
14 shortfalls in the remuneration package as a whole.

15 So the actual pay always came from them, but we gave  
16 evidence to them and tried to encourage them in  
17 different directions. There was one particular year  
18 when we encouraged them to give a particularly large pay  
19 rise to the lower ranks. I think it was 9 per cent that  
20 they got, and then that effectively gave us rippling  
21 problems through because of differentials and, you know,  
22 that we then had to have deal with as a consequence of  
23 that but, you know, there was a real desire in that  
24 particular year to see, you know, the lowest, the  
25 most -- the lowest paid and the most junior members of

1 the armed forces, you know, get some uplift in their  
2 salaries.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: I'll turn to Sir Roderic now. Roderic?

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to discuss treatment of the  
6 injured and also the post-tour medical support, which is  
7 another area that gets focus in the command paper you  
8 talked about.

9 In February 2008, the House of Commons  
10 Defence Committee described the critical care for  
11 servicemen and women seriously injured on operations as  
12 "second to none".

13 Does that imply that, by this stage, lessons had  
14 been learned from the early years of the Iraq experience  
15 and this area had been raised to a very high level of  
16 quality and, in your time as a defence minister, were  
17 changes introduced specifically as a result of the  
18 injuries suffered by servicemen on operations, including  
19 particularly Operation Telic?

20 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I mean, medical science is  
21 progressing all the time and so there are improvements  
22 all the time. During my time as a minister I don't  
23 think there were any legitimate complaints about the  
24 clinical care. There was a lot of controversy about it.  
25 There was a lot of criticism of Selly Oak Hospital in

1 particular. That got into the newspapers. It came to  
2 a bit of a crisis at one point, where I think it was  
3 affecting the morale of the staff at Selly Oak and I do  
4 not believe that that criticism was in any way justified  
5 in terms of the clinical care.

6 What I think we had to improve over time, and we did  
7 improve over time, was the welfare package that wrapped  
8 around that, both in terms of the way that we dealt with  
9 families and the way that we dealt with the injured in  
10 terms of the ethos. You know, there is no doubt that  
11 armed forces personnel will receive -- there is a -- you  
12 know, there is a view in this country that you can  
13 re-establish military hospitals and you will get better  
14 care for military personnel if you do.

15 If you do that, I think all the expert advice will  
16 tell you that the clinical care of military people will  
17 suffer as a result, that they need to be in the best  
18 state-of-the-art NHS facilities with all of the  
19 consultancies and all of the specialities available to  
20 them, and so they are best where they are.

21 But, if you are putting young men in environments  
22 where they are alongside civilians, then that can create  
23 other difficulties. So getting the management right of  
24 the military wards, so you are not wasting resources but  
25 you are providing them with, you know, a caring

1 environment that properly reflects, you know, where they  
2 have come from and who they are.

3 You know, we really had to work on that and I think  
4 that was problematical for a period of time.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The view that one should re-establish  
6 military hospitals, was that something that was being  
7 represented to you -- was it pressure on you from within  
8 the armed forces? When you say it is within this  
9 country, is it inside the military or outside the  
10 military?

11 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: No, it was in politics. It was  
12 being raised in the House, it was being raised in the  
13 newspapers. You know, it was not appropriate to put our  
14 armed forces personnel into Selly Oak Hospital, we  
15 should have them in a totally separate facility where  
16 they are properly looked after and it is outrageous that  
17 you don't. That was the Daily Mail's point of view.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Your argument was that they were getting  
19 the highest possible level, the highest available level  
20 of treatment in civilian hospitals properly equipped  
21 under the NHS?

22 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Not only within -- I mean, unless  
23 you put the kind of -- because of the complexity of the  
24 injuries and the way that they bounce through between  
25 different specialities, unless you have a health

1 community of the size of somewhere like Birmingham -- so  
2 you have got all the specialities, you have got the  
3 burns unit down the road, you have got trauma here, you  
4 have got all of the different specialities -- you are  
5 not going to be able to treat people properly and so you  
6 know, a small community -- say my own, you know,  
7 Coventry, would not be able to provide, you know, the  
8 kind of level of care that a health community the size  
9 of Birmingham is able to do.

10 So you not only need the hospital facilities, but  
11 you need everything else around it, in order to provide  
12 that clinical care. Selly Oak was the right place from  
13 a clinical point of view, but the management of that,  
14 you know, had to be worked on and people, you know,  
15 did -- you know, if you were a young soldier and you had  
16 come back from -- you know, and you are badly injured  
17 and you wake up, you know, and you are with, you know,  
18 civilians, who are generally -- civilians who are in  
19 hospital of a different age to yourself, they are there  
20 for different reasons, you know, to you, you know, then  
21 there are issues that arise there.

22 I think we have got that right now. We have got,  
23 you know, military staff, properly embedded with  
24 civilian staff, you know, working together and  
25 understanding these issues a lot better than they did in

1 the early days.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said earlier that one of the two  
3 underlying principles of the White Paper was that in  
4 some areas special treatment would need to be accorded  
5 as a return for sacrifice and especially with regard to  
6 the injured.

7 Now, when you are treating civilians and military  
8 side by side in a civilian hospital, this presumably can  
9 lead to some tensions and some lack of understanding on  
10 the civilian side of the equation if they see somebody  
11 else, for the very strong reason you give, getting what  
12 they regard as special treatment or better treatment.

13 Did you get any of those tensions or not?

14 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I mean, I'm not sure whether that  
15 was an issue, you know, out in the hospital. But it  
16 certainly was an issue in terms of principles.

17 I mean, a young man loses his leg, let's say, in the  
18 service of his country in Iraq or Afghanistan, and we  
19 take him and we fix him and we take him to Selly Oak and  
20 we provide him with the very best prosthetic limb so  
21 that he is able to do the things that he used to do  
22 because he is a fit, young serviceman and that's how he  
23 sees himself. I think that, having done that, he is  
24 entitled to continue to receive that for the rest of his  
25 life.

1           I don't think that, when he is 50, we should say,  
2           "Now that you are 50, you can have something less".  
3           Having given him that level of service, you know, he  
4           having, you know, been injured in the service of his  
5           country, no one should then degrade that over time, and  
6           so it is in areas like this, where potentially, you  
7           know, we were getting the very best -- hopefully, the  
8           very best, and all the time searching for the very  
9           best -- for young, fit men, so that they can run, you  
10          know, when you actually talk to them, they weren't as  
11          concerned about how they were being treated now as there  
12          was a worry that, in time, as they got older, and they  
13          are still dealing with their injuries and, you know, the  
14          media moves on and the operation ceases, you know, we  
15          will stop caring for them. We, the nation, will stop  
16          caring for them.

17                 That is one of the issues that I wanted to try to  
18          deal with in the service personnel command paper.

19   SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you left the job, were there still  
20          some areas still, given all of these things are very  
21          expensive and you can't do everything at once and within  
22          the limits of a budget, where you wanted to see  
23          improvements but you hadn't had time to bring them in or  
24          the resources to bring them in?

25   RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: We had the Prime Minister's stamp

1 on the service personnel command paper. We were able to  
2 use that as we went round different departments and say  
3 "This is the government's intent". I never had  
4 a problem from politicians, but I had to go to  
5 politicians obviously to sort out problems that you  
6 would hope that you didn't.

7 I had problems from different departments, but  
8 that's understandable. You know, they had to be dealt  
9 with. Why -- you know, if you are an official in, let's  
10 say, the Department for Health, why should you allow  
11 some other department to start setting your priorities  
12 and, you know, deciding how you spend your budget and  
13 officials -- government tends to work in silos and, you  
14 know -- and -- and apply themselves to the priorities of  
15 their own departments. So you have to go political in  
16 order to get those things sorted out.

17 We had -- I mean, there are some great people in the  
18 Ministry of Defence but, surprisingly, we had some  
19 resistance from some officials in the  
20 Ministry of Defence. I mean, I can remember  
21 a particular official amusing me no end when he told me,  
22 "You cannot, Minister, double the upfront compensation  
23 payment". It was not Sir Humphrey who was talking to  
24 me. He told me in terms that I couldn't do it. But  
25 I think he had worked on the scheme for quite some time

1 and was pretty dedicated to it, and he knew some of the  
2 other consequences of doubling the upfront payment, but  
3 potentially it would cause disparities with other  
4 people, but my attitude was "So what? I can't defend  
5 the level of upfront payment as it exists today and you  
6 do not have to, and you are not injured and we are going  
7 to double it", and we did.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So doubling the payments was an ambitious  
9 idea of the minister, challenging, but you were able to  
10 do it?

11 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I mean, that's one of -- I mean,  
12 I'm just -- I mean, government -- I mean government  
13 exists to some extent to -- or government systems exist  
14 to provide stability, they don't like change. When  
15 a minister says "This is going to change", then, you  
16 know, there is friction. I suppose you just have to  
17 overcome it.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just pick up two other points from  
19 what you said earlier? You mentioned the mental health  
20 issues earlier and particularly with regard to  
21 reservists. Can you tell us a little bit about the  
22 trauma risk management process, how it was introduced?

23 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I couldn't tell you in detail. It  
24 was the Parliamentary Undersecretary's area of  
25 responsibility. I know that there are so many different

1 opinions as to the causes and the consequences and all  
2 of the different aspects of mental health in our armed  
3 forces and you can talk to as many people as you like  
4 and you will get a lot of different views.

5 I know people who I have got a lot of respect for  
6 who believe that mental health is hugely affected by  
7 tour lengths and they cite the difference between the  
8 American armed forces, who do longer tour lengths than  
9 our people and have a higher incidence of mental health,  
10 but I equally know that we have a mental health problem  
11 in our Falklands veterans, and the Falklands campaign  
12 took about three weeks.

13 So you have got to have people like the  
14 Surgeon General constantly looking at what is best  
15 practice and trying to see that you are putting in  
16 systems that are dealing with best practice and you have  
17 got to listen to the experts' advice in areas like that.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You talked about also working with the  
19 agencies, the charitable sector, the British Legion and  
20 so on. How did it co-ordinate and work on that so that  
21 you didn't have things that fell through the cracks  
22 between the ministry and the regiments, the forces and  
23 charitable or voluntary organisations?

24 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I think things always do fall  
25 through the cracks and you have got to mitigate that

1 in -- as best you can. I saw working with the charities  
2 and the agencies as a tour, to help us to fill in some  
3 of those gaps and fill them in appropriately.

4 So, for instance, in the area of dealing with and  
5 helping the bereaved, I don't think that that was some  
6 of the improvements that we made we could ever have made  
7 on our own, and we certainly couldn't have put in  
8 a system that would have helped on our own.

9 So we had to have the help and advice of the Legion,  
10 the War Widows' Association. We used those  
11 organisations to do analyses of how we actually treated  
12 people and get some of the complaints back. We  
13 organised a forum. It was somewhere off Pall Mall --  
14 I can't remember exactly where the venue was now -- and  
15 we used those organisations to do it, where we brought  
16 in people who had been bereaved, who were only too happy  
17 to help us because one of the main motivations of  
18 bereaved families is often to make sure that you learn  
19 lessons from the loss, you know, of their loved one.

20 But we used them to, you know to, pick up all the  
21 challenges that we got and try to improve the service.  
22 Now, as a result of that, we then got the British Legion  
23 to actually run a service for us, which -- I can't  
24 remember the title of it now, but it is like  
25 a Citizens' Advice Bureau for -- you know, for bereaved

1 families.

2 Now, we could never do that as MoD. I don't think  
3 we could ever establish the trust with the individuals.  
4 You needed that kind of bit of independence, that bit  
5 of, you know, arm's length, that getting the  
6 British Legion to do it for you gives you. So you know,  
7 we then employed them to run some of the improvements  
8 that flowed from some of the analyses that we had done  
9 of where we were not doing a perfect job.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: I'll turn to Sir Martin Gilbert now. Martin?

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to focus a little longer  
13 on the question of the bereaved families, if I could.

14 By the time you became Minister of State many of the  
15 initial problems experienced by bereaved families on  
16 Operation Telic, for example, notification of a next of  
17 kin, families being forced to leave service  
18 accommodation and, also, the lengthy delays over  
19 inquests, had been addressed and improved.

20 But even with these improvements, the trauma of  
21 losing a loved one in action remains significant and,  
22 given the number of different investigations and  
23 inquiries that follow a death, it can also be a very  
24 confusing one for the families and this is a point that  
25 a number of bereaved families have made to us when we

1 spoke to them very early in our Inquiry. Was this  
2 a problem that you were able to address?

3 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Some of those improvements had  
4 been made. I mean, we had made alterations to tenure of  
5 service family accommodation long before I was minister.  
6 But delays of inquests was still a huge problem and it  
7 was, to my mind, a very real problem, because this was  
8 just preventing people from dealing with a bereavement  
9 and elongating their loss unnecessarily.

10 So we looked at the whole system. I met both of the  
11 main coroners, the Oxford coroner and the Wiltshire  
12 coroner. I don't think -- at ministerial level, I don't  
13 think we had sat down with them before and there was  
14 a bit of, you know, these people are supposed to be  
15 independent and we shouldn't be interfering with what  
16 they are doing. Well, that doesn't stop you from  
17 talking to them and understanding how the system is  
18 working for them from their point of view.

19 What we tried -- we set up what we called the  
20 Defence Inquests Unit, to work with coroners to make  
21 sure that we were properly serving coroners and, yes,  
22 you know, not -- to appropriately, accepting their  
23 independence, chase up, you know, delays. You know, you  
24 can get on the phone to a coroner and you can say "This  
25 inquest has not taken place for some time now. Is it

1           our fault? Are we the cause of this?" If it is there  
2           on his desk and it is not being dealt with, at least it  
3           has been brought to his attention.

4           You know, we can make sure that we have not deployed  
5           somebody who is effectively causing a delay himself.  
6           I mean, the Defence Inquest Unit I think was key to --  
7           to dealing with the delays and getting a more  
8           professional approach.

9           But my motives were more than just helping the  
10          bereaved, they were about the MoD getting better at  
11          learning some of the lessons that flowed from inquests  
12          as well, because, you know, some of our systems were,  
13          from time to time, exposed pretty badly by coroners'  
14          inquests and, you know, they were a mine of information  
15          for, you know, what was not working properly if you were  
16          prepared to really embrace the findings of those.

17          Not all of them. You know, sometimes, when  
18          a coroner is looking at, you know, a decision that  
19          a soldier took three years previously, on a battlefield,  
20          you know, it doesn't tell you a lot and he is not able  
21          to add much to, you know -- but often, you know, that  
22          can expose some issues that are hugely valuable.

23       SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you able to put a specific system  
24          in place to draw these lessons?

25       RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I think what we -- when I first

1           became a minister I was -- there was a debate that was  
2           going on -- and I think there was change that was  
3           already taken, but there was a tension within the MoD as  
4           to how far you go with managing some of the risks that  
5           our armed forces personnel take on.

6           That tension was between people mostly in the armed  
7           forces themselves, probably even exclusively in the  
8           armed forces, but not all of them, who felt that, if you  
9           went too far, you would lose military capability. You  
10          know, we have armed forces, to use a phrase that one of  
11          my colleagues used to use, who go out in the dark --  
12          yes -- who are not frightened of taking risk, who know  
13          that risk is intrinsic to what they have to do. They  
14          have to fight, they have to be hard. They have to be  
15          prepared to take on an enemy and, if you change the  
16          culture, you know, potentially, you will detract from  
17          that military capability, and I was worried about doing  
18          that.

19          But as you looked at some of the evidence that came  
20          up, there was a real need to improve and we did need to  
21          change the culture of the MoD. Some of our systems were  
22          not properly picking up risk, they were not property  
23          picking up issues that had been raised. This was  
24          probably most glaringly exposed in the Hercules Inquiry,  
25          where the Wiltshire coroner did a fantastic job, an

1 absolutely fantastic job.

2 But pretty grim reading, and there were a lot of  
3 changes that were being made and were -- his findings  
4 effectively accelerated those, you know, those changes,  
5 to try to improve the way that we learned lessons and  
6 mitigated risk.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We are a lessons learned Inquiry and  
8 also our remit ends with the end of the British presence  
9 in Iraq in July 2009. At that particular point, what  
10 lessons did you feel still remained to be learned?

11 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: On the welfare and --

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: On the inquest and the treatment of the  
13 bereaved and what the MoD could do --

14 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I think you have got to constantly  
15 go back to -- I mean, first of all, you can't separate  
16 Iraq from Afghanistan. The two were happening at the  
17 same time. We are losing people. You know, the loss of  
18 life is inevitable in a theatre of operations and nobody  
19 should ever pretend that that is not so, but you can  
20 minimise it.

21 So the need to learn, you know, must go on. For  
22 instance, you know, the -- Des Browne ordered an Inquiry  
23 off the back of the Nimrod crash, which was in Kandahar  
24 or above Kandahar, where we lost 14 people. You know,  
25 Haddon-Cave did us, I think, a pretty scathing report of

1           some of our systems which meant that we completely  
2           reconfigured aviation safety and set up a specific  
3           military -- what did we call it then -- aviation  
4           authority to mirror the Civil Aviation Authority as  
5           a result of the Haddon-Cave review.

6           So you know, I don't think you can ever close your  
7           mind and, if you do, to the fact that you are far from  
8           perfect, then you are not serving people properly. You  
9           have got to work at it all the time.

10       SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

11       THE CHAIRMAN: Could I turn to Baroness Prashar now?

12       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much. I want to look  
13           at the question of the MoD dealing with the families  
14           because one of the issues that has been raised with us  
15           is the MoD's attitude towards families and, in view of  
16           the families of the service personnel killed in Iraq,  
17           they say that the MoD's attitude is either dismissive or  
18           overly defensive.

19           To what extent do you think this criticism is  
20           justified and were you aware of that view?

21       RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: People deal with bereavement in  
22           different ways and I have met lots of bereaved families.  
23           In some cases, almost no matter what you do, you know,  
24           you cannot, you know, make things better; anger is  
25           a part of bereavement. You just have to accept that and

1           try not to make the situation worse.

2           But there were areas that we were not getting right.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   Such as?

4 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP:  Well, the way that we communicated  
5           with people, sometimes we would appoint a visiting  
6           officer to a particular family and that visiting officer  
7           would get deployed and then they would wind up with  
8           another person, having just got used to the person they  
9           were supposed to have as liaison.

10           There are some horror stories when you dig into, you  
11           know, how people have actually been, you know, dealt  
12           with at an individual level and, I mean, you can never  
13           fully mitigate -- in a big organisation, you can never  
14           fully mitigate those things, and that is why we  
15           organised this event with the War Widows and with the --  
16           the War Widows' Association and with the Royal  
17           British Legion to try to pick the brains of those who  
18           had had to deal with us, you know, to expose our own  
19           failings and then to put systems in place that would, to  
20           some degree, pick them up better.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:  But what priority did you personally  
22           give to dealing with families of those killed in Iraq?  
23           What did you personally do? Was that a personal  
24           priority?

25 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP:  Improving the system was

1 a personal priority. I had to meet a lot of families,  
2 some of them on more than one occasion, and it was  
3 important that you did. I know that Des Browne did, and  
4 he did it when he was Secretary of State almost  
5 systematically.

6 It was important that you didn't just take what you  
7 were being told through the system, but you actually got  
8 ground truth, and you can't do that all the time and  
9 people don't want to do that. There are lots of people  
10 who have lost their loved ones who, the last thing they  
11 want to do is talk to the Secretary of State for Defence  
12 or the armed forces minister. You know, they have got  
13 other things, you know, that -- in dealing with their  
14 bereavement, there are other things that are more  
15 important to them, but by doing that from time to time,  
16 you did get, you know a personal handle on, you know,  
17 the way some of these systems potentially could be  
18 improved.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But to what degree did the concern  
20 over legal action cause the department to keep families  
21 at arm's length? Was it a factor?

22 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: One gets legal advice all of the  
23 time about what one can say and what one can't say and  
24 sometimes the things that you say can cause distress to  
25 people. I mean, I was able on the tireless -- I know

1 this wasn't Iraq, but we lost two people in a submarine  
2 under the ice, to give an unequivocal apology, and there  
3 were occasions where, because of legal advice, you know,  
4 one was obliged that "You simply can't say that,  
5 Minister. You are opening us up to liabilities, you  
6 know, that, you know, that are not properly justified  
7 and you have to hone your words and you have to be  
8 careful".

9 Now, that can cause distress, you know, people can  
10 recognise, you know, when language is being used and  
11 when language is not being used. They are not stupid,  
12 and it can cause pain, but -- and you have to test the  
13 advice that you have got. Why, you know? Is this  
14 a real threat? You know -- why can't I just apologise  
15 for this? You know, if there is clear blame, you know,  
16 can we accept it? Can't we accept it? Why can't we  
17 accept it? But you have to take legal advice, otherwise  
18 you are opening up the public purse to, you know,  
19 liabilities that, you know, you had not properly ought  
20 to do.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But some families said to us that  
22 there was sort of a deliberate attempt to deny access to  
23 facts about the circumstances that led to the death of  
24 loved ones, particularly in cases of friendly fire  
25 incidents.

1 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I didn't -- I haven't personally  
2 dealt with any friendly fire incidents at any depth, but  
3 I do know that they are a very real problem to us. You  
4 know, where we do not own the information, and we are  
5 reliant on another nation, you know, to share its  
6 information with us, then that other nation gives us  
7 that information with certain conditions and you can  
8 either have it or not have it.

9 But, "Yes, we are prepared to share this information  
10 with you but ..." and, you know, that does cause  
11 distress. I mean, we have liaised with the American  
12 authorities, we have tried to improve their preparedness  
13 to cooperate with our coroner, you know, for example,  
14 and I think there has been some improvement, but  
15 I couldn't quantify it. I think there is certainly an  
16 improvement in their preparedness to give evidence and  
17 appear before coroners.

18 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You said earlier that you were  
19 giving advice and you were trying to get the system  
20 right. So what consideration did you -- I mean, how did  
21 you try to address the way the department appeared to  
22 the families? What advice were you given and any steps  
23 you personally took to deal with some of these concerns?

24 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: We looked internally at how we  
25 were managing these things. We issued booklets to

1 people, we issued DVDs to people because this is an  
2 enormously complex testimony that they are confronted  
3 with. They have lost a son or a husband or whatever  
4 and, all of a sudden, they have got this appalling legal  
5 kind of process, a coroner and all the rest of it coming  
6 at them. So we tried to give them as much guidance as  
7 we could and, as I said, we went out to others to try to  
8 help us do that and, as a result of that we set up --  
9 I can't remember the name of it, the Royal  
10 British Legion runs it for us.

11 The way that I think of it is as  
12 a Citizens' Advice Bureau, you know, for the bereaved.  
13 It is there to, you know, to help and it's at arm's  
14 length from the MoD. They can go there for advice.  
15 They will be given as much information as they want.  
16 They have got somebody there to chase issues up for them  
17 that they have a degree of confidence in that they are  
18 independent of us. Because, understandably, you know,  
19 some bereaved families see us as the enemy and so they  
20 are not prepared to take things direct from us that they  
21 are prepared to take from an independent organisation.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

23 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Can I turn to

24 Sir Lawrence Freedman now. Lawrence?

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You took up office as Secretary of

1 State in June 2009 just shortly before the end of  
2 Operation Telic. One of the immediate challenges you  
3 would have faced was the expiry of the December 2008  
4 Memorandum of Understanding with the Iraqis, which  
5 expired the month after you took office. What did you  
6 understand then and how were you briefed on the UK's  
7 purpose in seeking a continued UK military presence in  
8 Iraq?

9 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: By the time I took over, all of  
10 the principles were agreed and I was aware of some of  
11 them from my times as armed forces minister, although  
12 I had not been involved in the top level discussions.

13 The only problem remained was that, through the  
14 Iraqi political system, we couldn't get clearance  
15 through the Council of Ministers and then subsequently  
16 through the Council of Representatives and they went  
17 into recess and they were in quorate and, meanwhile, we  
18 were running out of time. So principles had been  
19 agreed. Both nations at the strategic level knew what  
20 they wanted, you know, to agree to. It was just,  
21 know --

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What particularly did we want? What  
23 was your understanding of what we wanted?

24 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: We wanted an ongoing relationship  
25 with the Iraqis that assisted them,

1 a military-to-military relationship, which we chose to  
2 run through the NATO training mission, and we have still  
3 got, I think, about 50 people involved in that now. So  
4 we have people embedded in their academy where,  
5 hopefully, we are continuing to give them advice and  
6 build, you know, good relations between our two  
7 countries, and we also agreed to continue to take on  
8 a job that we had been doing throughout my period as  
9 a minister and that was training up the Iraqi Navy, such  
10 as it was -- within a fairly tight geographical area,  
11 but nonetheless 90 per cent of Iraq's wealth goes out  
12 through two oil terminals in disputed waters.

13 So we have, I think, about 100 people still in  
14 An Qasr. They certainly were there throughout my period  
15 of time trying to train the Iraqi Navy so they could  
16 properly control their own territorial waters and those  
17 very important facilities and we still have Naval ships  
18 with their agreement at the top end of the Gulf.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Given, as you have indicated, the  
20 negotiations were quite difficult at times because of  
21 reactions within the Iraqi political system, did you  
22 ever wonder whether this was that important, whether it  
23 was really worthwhile pushing for it?

24 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Oh, hugely important. I mean --  
25 if you just take the training of the Navy, the

1 importance of the Iraqi Navy, you have got Kuwait that  
2 isn't exactly the most trusting -- in the most trusting  
3 of relationships with their neighbours.

4 Those need to be -- I mean, it is massively in our  
5 interests that we have stability in this area, and so,  
6 you know, being able to, you know, give the Iraqis the  
7 security that they can effectively control their own  
8 resources, they can control their own territorial  
9 waters, they can live at peace, therefore, with their  
10 neighbours, there is no need for them to get into  
11 a dispute with their own neighbours and they can become  
12 a part of, you know, an improving architecture, an  
13 improving political architecture in the Middle East is  
14 hugely important and hugely in our interests.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You think that the British military  
16 presence will be a significant factor in ensuring these  
17 obviously very important objectives?

18 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I don't know: it depends on policy  
19 going forward, both in Iraq and in this country.  
20 I mean, we have -- I think that it is not widely  
21 understood the benefits of military-to-military  
22 cooperation between some countries. There are some  
23 countries where it is far easier to work  
24 military-to-military than it is to work  
25 civilian-to-civilian, and it reinforces our

1 relationships. So I would hope that we would maintain  
2 a good relationship.

3 I think there are opportunities there. I think that  
4 people often find us easier to work with than, let's  
5 say, the Americans because the Americans have got a lot  
6 more capability but they are an awful lot bigger and,  
7 you know, mice don't work well with elephants. So there  
8 are opportunities for us there to just reinforce our  
9 relationships and help Iraq to continue to improve.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Lastly, given that there were these  
11 difficulties in getting the Iraqis to agree to that, how  
12 were these actually resolved?

13 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I think -- I mean, they came back  
14 from recess and they approved process. I can't  
15 remember, you know, the exact detail, but that we  
16 were -- you know, we had UN Security Council Resolutions  
17 which were running out of time, as I recall, and there  
18 was a political bureaucratic process that was taking,  
19 you know, a lot longer than was comfortable, but it came  
20 right in the end.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to invite you in a moment,  
23 Mr Ainsworth, to offer any further reflections that you  
24 want to, but there are just two questions I would like  
25 to raise.

1           One is important for our getting the narrative of  
2           the Inquiry right from the beginning right and I need to  
3           ask you about Mr Blair's comment back in December on the  
4           Fern Britton show, when he said in effect:

5           "I believe it would still have been right to remove  
6           Saddam, even if I had known that Iraq did not have  
7           weapons of mass destruction."

8   RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: That is a surprise that you ask me  
9           that, Chairman.

10   THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, quite. You were asked on the  
11           Politics Show and you were asked if you were surprised.  
12           Do you want to comment any further or not?

13   RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: What I was trying to say was we  
14           took a decision at the time, confronted with a set of  
15           facts that we believed at the time, but, you know --  
16           I wasn't, you know, trying to say that, "Look, if the  
17           circumstances were different, then we could have taken  
18           a different decision". Who can say? People love to  
19           delve into hindsight. It doesn't exist. You know, you  
20           can only deal with your knowledge at the time.

21   THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The other question is much more  
22           general, but this is a lessons learned Inquiry, and it  
23           is the comment we had from a very committed junior  
24           officer in one of our informal sessions, who had served  
25           in Iraq and he commented that he thought that, as

1 a nation, but particularly as an army, we are quite slow  
2 to hold up our hands and admit we got something wrong.  
3 I'm not quoting him, but it is what he said. As  
4 a result, he thought:

5 "We invest more time and effort defending the  
6 indefensible rather than focusing on finding a solution  
7 to the problem."

8 We have taken a lot of evidence about the reaction  
9 to the Iraq experience, not least with dealing with the  
10 insurgencies, how the Americans reacted and how we  
11 reacted. Do you think what he said was in any way  
12 a fair comment on the British army as a learning  
13 organisation?

14 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I think there is a degree of truth  
15 in that. I think we do some things here extremely well,  
16 but I can remember being enormously impressed, although  
17 it took a massive crisis -- and people have to remember  
18 that -- at the way in which the Americans analysed their  
19 failings on counter-insurgency and brought in a huge  
20 change to their methodology. But when we tried to hold  
21 that up -- as it is being held up -- as an example of  
22 another nation being able to learn in that way, we just  
23 need to remember how big the crisis was.

24 I mean, the presidency was in total crisis, Iraq,  
25 you know, was in danger of failure and -- but the

1 Americans were pretty impressive then at the way they  
2 completely, you know, changed their entire methodology,  
3 did it in a pretty public way and went back and did the  
4 job, you know, differently.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Thank you. Any further or final  
6 reflections you would like to offer before we close this  
7 afternoon?

8 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: No, I don't think so. Good luck.

9 THE CHAIRMAN: In that case --

10 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: I look forward to your report.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Can I thank you very much for your evidence,  
12 Mr Ainsworth. I'm just going to read out a very short  
13 announcement:

14 "This afternoon the Prime Minister has made  
15 a statement announcing, I understand, an Inquiry into  
16 whether Britain was implicated in the improper treatment  
17 of detainees in the aftermath of 9/11. As I have said  
18 before, the Iraq Inquiry would not wish to prejudice  
19 other Inquiries or legal proceedings. We shall,  
20 therefore, wish carefully to consider the  
21 Prime Minister's statement and whether there are any  
22 implications for our potential lines of Inquiry."

23 With that, I'll close today's session. Thank you.

24 RT HON BOB AINSWORTH MP: Thank you.

25 (4.55 pm)

1 (The Inquiry adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)

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