

Wednesday, 16 December 2009

(10.00 am)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR ROBERT FRY

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning. Welcome, everyone. Welcome, General Fry.

The objectives of this session this morning are threefold. First, to examine further the military planning for the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq; second, to understand how military strategy for Iraq was being developed from mid 2003 through to 2006; and third, to understand events in Baghdad from March to September 2006.

Our witness for this session is Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fry, who held successively posts of Deputy Chief of Joint Operations, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Commitments and then was Senior British Military Rep in Iraq for the concluding period.

This morning's sessions can last between two and three hours, and I recall that the Inquiry has access to very many government papers, including the most highly classified for the period we are considering. We are developing a picture of the policy debates and the decision-making process as well as of the events, and these evidence sessions are an important element in informing our thinking and complementing the documentary

1 evidence.

2 It is important that witnesses are open and frank in
3 their evidence while respecting national security and we
4 recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on
5 their recollection of events. We, of course, check what
6 we hear against the papers from the time to which we
7 have access, some of which are still coming in.

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

11 I will turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman to open the
12 questions.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just start by looking at your
14 role as Deputy Chief Joint Operations. You took up this
15 post in May 2002?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Hm-mm.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you just briefly describe the
18 nature of your job and how it fitted in with Iraq
19 planning?

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think the best way to do that is
21 by telling you what my boss did. The Chief of Joint
22 Operations does exactly that. He is responsible for the
23 conduct of all deployed operations --

24 THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, speed for the transcriber, if you
25 would.

1 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Commander of one or more elements of
2 the armed forces. So most of the operations that are
3 taking place at any time outside the United Kingdom fall
4 within the ambit of the Chief of Joint Operations.
5 There are some exceptions to that and those are the
6 operations which are inalienably single service; nuclear
7 deterrent, for example.

8 So that's what he does. The job that I had was
9 previously called Chief of Staff and I think that
10 probably gives a much easier and self-explanatory
11 description of what the responsibilities were, but
12 essentially it was combining all of the staff functions
13 in order to permit the Chief of Joint Operations to
14 conduct the function of command.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the main function of command at
16 this point was largely Afghanistan?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, it was.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So in terms of preparations for an
19 Iraq contingency -- and we are talking about the month
20 just after the Crawford summit when planning was
21 starting to get moving -- what was your role in that?
22 And perhaps describe how the planning function developed
23 at PJHQ.

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: There was, I think, one particular
25 event which -- two particular events, and I can't

1 remember which of them was first. But at a given point
2 during that summer -- and I can't remember the date --
3 we were actually visited by a CentCom briefing team who
4 went through the entire plan that the Americans had made
5 up until that stage.

6 Now, anecdotally we were aware that planning was
7 going on a long time before that. In fact, before
8 taking up the job of Deputy Chief of Joint Operations
9 I had briefly been the maritime component commander in
10 the Gulf. And while I never had access to American
11 planning, it was very clear that things were going on at
12 that stage.

13 I think that what happened during the summer of 2002
14 was that this process moved from something which, at the
15 level of operational planning, was insinuated and
16 operational and began to harden up into specific sets of
17 alternative options.

18 I'm sorry, the other definitive event was a briefing
19 to the Prime Minister. That was some time later, I now
20 recall, but that gave additional clarity to the
21 direction in which things were going.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's take those in turn. What were
23 the options that you were developing? And perhaps you
24 could briefly describe what they looked like.

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think I would describe them in

1 terms of function and geography because there were two
2 separate variables. There were, of course, British
3 forces operating the Gulf region already. Op Resinate
4 was an operation designed for maritime and air
5 interdiction. So those forces were there under any
6 circumstances, and as I recall they were under the CJO's
7 command under any circumstances.

8 So the first way we looked at this was to examine
9 how we could build on what we had and to create discrete
10 packages which were based on those, but which also
11 fulfilled niche capabilities which either the Americans
12 did not have themselves, which wasn't many, or that were
13 particularly valued.

14 Over time the scale of ambition got larger and
15 larger, so at the end of it we were looking at something
16 which involved a full deployed joint force with elements
17 of all three components of land, air and maritime
18 forces, and in addition to that, special forces and
19 logistic forces as well. That was the functional side.

20 Geographically, of course, we are talking about
21 coming from the south and coming from the north, but
22 I think other witnesses have given you some feel for
23 that already.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm interested in taking you through
25 that as well. Just of those three packages, briefly

1 what were the advantages and disadvantages of them?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Oh, level of liability, pretty

3 simple. I think if you started at the bottom end, these

4 were things which would not necessarily commit forces to

5 land engagement, land engagement having really two

6 implications: historically, a higher level of casualties;

7 and secondly, a residual responsibility for looking

8 after the piece of ground upon which you found yourself,

9 neither of which liability comes with air or maritime

10 forces.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were the advantages? Why not

12 just go for a limited liability operation?

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Because the larger the contribution

14 we made, the more influence we felt we would have over

15 American planning and the ability to shape things in the

16 future.

17 I think that you then also begin to see the effect

18 of ground strategic objectives, which were about

19 relationship with America and so on. From the purview

20 of the Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood, you do

21 not initially have visibility of all of those things.

22 You simply are aware of some of the consequences that

23 come out of them.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But in terms of setting up -- and

25 we'll talk, perhaps, about the briefing of the

1 Prime Minister, setting out the options -- then there is
2 an operational question: what is necessary to meet the
3 objectives of the campaign itself, and there it is
4 a question of what do the Americans need. And then
5 there is a question of the political influence or
6 military influence over American decision-making and so
7 on. So how do you prioritise those?

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: What the Americans needed changed
9 during the course of the planning progress and it really
10 all revolves around the northern axis and the southern
11 axis.

12 Because the Americans believed until pretty late in
13 the day that they might have access through Turkey, they
14 did not commit one of their formations, which was the
15 4 Infantry Division, which was actually held afloat in
16 the eastern Mediterranean until very late in the day.

17 What that, therefore, meant was that a major part of
18 the prospective American combat power was not going to
19 be available immediately for operations in the south.
20 Therefore, as that began to clarify, the forces that we
21 could provide began to take on an increasing importance
22 in terms the correlation of forces.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That takes us ahead a little bit.

24 I just want to clarify how these options are developing
25 in the summer of 2002. I think the briefing of the

1 Prime Minister was in July 2002. At that time the
2 Americans are sort of firming up on quite a big
3 campaign. How were these options briefed to the
4 Prime Minister?

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: There was one occasion -- it was in
6 the Ministry of Defence -- there may have been other
7 occasions, this the only one at which I was present, so
8 the only one of which I can give you an account.

9 In the Ministry of Defence, the Chiefs of Staff
10 Committee was in attendance, the Prime Minister and some
11 of his immediate staff were there and I laid out at that
12 stage what was the American plan as we knew it at the
13 time. And there was some broad but non-committal
14 discussion about the level of force that we could
15 provide to fit into that plan. But more than anything
16 else it was to brief him about the way the Americans
17 operationally saw the thing unfolding.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just be clear about this. Are you
19 talking about the July briefing at this point, or the
20 January? You say there was only one you were
21 present at.

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I'm talking about the summer period.

23 There was one in January, I think also in March as well.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But at the moment we are talking about
25 July?

1 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The July one was as I have just
2 described it.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of this idea of
4 a relationship between the size of force that we might
5 produce and the amount of influence that we might get
6 from the United States, was that issue put to the
7 Prime Minister in that sort of way?

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that was an assumption, it
9 was assumed that he would be perfectly in possession of
10 that.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What was the reaction to both the
12 scale of the American plan and the sort of options --

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Remarkably unemotional. The sense
14 I got was I was telling him something which broadly he
15 already knew. He wouldn't have known the detail of the
16 scheme of manoeuvre and so on, but he was perfectly well
17 aware, I think, at that stage that the Americans
18 intended to embark on a very large military enterprise.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And in terms of an evaluation of
20 these three packages that the British were considering,
21 did you get any sense of a preference?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: To be quite honest, I can't remember
23 whether we put it to him at that stage.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You are saying the Americans are
25 planning something rather large at some level, you are

1 starting to think through different alternatives, but
2 these alternatives are only starting to crystallise
3 perhaps by the autumn?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, I think that's right.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: As these options crystallise, then
6 presumably you are starting to think through what are
7 the logistic requirements, what is it that you have to
8 get moving in order to be prepared for whenever the
9 operation may take place.

10 So first of all, what were your assumptions about
11 when the operation actually could happen?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We were given some broad indications
13 by the Americans and the first window, as I recall, was
14 the autumn of 2002 and then the later window was the
15 early spring of 2003, the intention obviously to
16 involve -- avoid fighting through a Mesopotamian summer.
17 So the earliest that I think we ever considered the
18 Americans might go would have been the latter part
19 of 2002.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And it would have been very
21 difficult for us to join in at that time?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We would have joined in with the
23 in-place forces and to that extent that represented the
24 de minimis commitment if we wanted to accept one.

25 But if we wanted to make a larger commitment than

1 that, then clearly we would have needed time to
2 constitute the force, equip the force, train the force,
3 deploy the force, and all that of would have taken, as
4 you imply, a period of time.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have heard that there was some
6 concern that the -- there was a reluctance in government
7 to make the sort of decisions necessary to allow us to
8 be prepared --

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- for even a February/March
11 operation. Were these concerns shared at PJHQ?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, they were. The further you got
13 to the front line the more acute these things felt.

14 I think that they worked in several different ways.
15 I think that there was some debate about going down the
16 Urgent Operational Requirement track to make sure that
17 people had precisely what they required, and I think
18 that has been well recorded. But there is another
19 dimension to this, which is that I think it was entirely
20 legitimate at a diplomatic and a genuinely strategic
21 level not to give the impression that we were absolutely
22 committed to an operation, because where then was the
23 power of coercion, where then was the role of diplomacy
24 in trying to close with the second UN Security Council
25 Resolution?

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of the land option, what
2 indications were you getting from government as to
3 whether they thought this was absolutely necessary or
4 not? I mean, I should say that there are some
5 indications from the files that there is a reluctance to
6 take on the full liability.

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, I think there was. My --
8 I think I need to qualify everything I say from the
9 geographical position that I occupied.

10 Northwood may be less than 20 miles from where we
11 are sitting at the present time, but it can feel like
12 a great distance, and I think it is important for the
13 Committee to understand that the emphasis of the PJHQ is
14 looking downwards into the deployment of forces and the
15 operational execution of whenever tasks were given.

16 And to that extent I never felt at that stage that
17 I had full visibility of the political machinations
18 which were taking place. I was conscious of
19 a reluctance to fully commit and that manifested itself
20 in several ways, one of which was the release of
21 permission to go after Urgent Operational Requirements.
22 Another one was the sense of there was -- there was some
23 clarity required legally. And, of course, it was
24 a very, very big step to take and I think that one can
25 understand ministers trying to reserve their positions

1 for as long as they could.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What sort of legal clarifications

3 are you talking about?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that separate testimony has

5 already recorded this later in the day, but I think that

6 around that time we became -- we became conscious of

7 some of the responsibilities that would have been laid

8 upon us subsequently, and we were keen to make sure that

9 we properly understood what those would be.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you feel you did understand

11 them?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Immediately, no. Later on in the

13 process it became increasingly clear.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So this was a process --

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: All of it was a process of constant

16 gestation.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I look a bit more closely at the

18 question of the northern versus the southern option?

19 Now, you have given us a reason why eventually the

20 southern option seemed to make sense, but take us

21 through why going through Turkey seemed to be a sensible

22 role for us and what size of role we envisaged for

23 British forces.

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that first of all it was

25 a sensible role for somebody. It didn't come out, "Find

1 a role for the British, let's send them to the north".
2 There was a view that it would make eminent military
3 sense to try and create an attack, let's call it on
4 converging axes from north and south avoiding all of the
5 logistic congestion that eventually occurred in Kuwait,
6 avoiding all of the risks that go with sea lines of
7 communication in a congested sea space of the Arabian
8 Gulf, also allowing -- and this is where I think we
9 began to rationalise a British role -- something that
10 would be entirely independently British.

11 This is not a matter of waving the flag, it is
12 a matter of recognising that the intimate coordination
13 of ground manoeuvre is a dangerous thing and it is
14 a difficult thing to coordinate. So as far as possible,
15 if you can separate land forces then that's the best
16 thing to do.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you were interested in the
18 possibility of a stand-alone British operation, but
19 something that would have its own command and be very
20 distinctive from what the Americans were doing?

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, distinctive insofar as it would
22 be geographically displaced, but not distinctive
23 necessarily in any other sense.

24 I also, from a personal level, had a bit of previous
25 about this insofar as I was involved in the operation

1 into Kurdistan in 1991. I mean, others, I think, have
2 recorded that they had reservations about the length of
3 the lines of communication and so on. I felt slightly
4 more sanguine about this, because although the scale
5 would have been significantly different, I think that
6 1991 was almost a proof of concept. There is also the
7 fact that we would have been operating into an area
8 where Kurdish irregulars would have caused all sorts of
9 problems in the Iraqi rear areas.

10 There were also less significant geographical
11 challenges insofar as the options from the south
12 required successive bridging operations. So there was
13 much more freedom of manoeuvre in the north. So
14 I thought that there were a series of tactical
15 advantages which made it look like an attractive
16 prospect.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were we assuming that there would be
18 a two divisional operation there, one British, one
19 American?

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It varied. I think at one stage we
21 were looking at the lead with a British division and an
22 American armoured cavalry regiment. An armoured cavalry
23 regiment is quite a chunky piece of combat power, so
24 that would have represented, of itself, quite a
25 formidable combination.

1 There was then consideration of a relationship
2 between the British forces and 4 Infantry Division. The
3 backdrop to all this, of course, was a pretty fevered
4 diplomatic communication with the Turks and there was
5 a time when it looked as though they might allow all
6 coalition forces in. Then it became clear that they
7 wouldn't allow us this, but there remained a chance that
8 they might let Americans in.

9 So if I was to give you a sense that somehow all of
10 this was unfolding in a disciplined, you know, clean and
11 definable way, I would be misleading you. It was
12 constantly nip and tuck as circumstances changed.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is striking, though, that the
14 northern option lasted in some ways so long as it did,
15 given the political context which you describe, and much
16 of the evidence that we have both heard and seen
17 suggests that from certainly late autumn all the signs
18 were that the Turks were not particularly keen to have
19 us there for reasons, again, as so often in this case,
20 going back to the early part of the twentieth century as
21 well as more recent events. Why did it persist for so
22 long?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think the tactical advantages were
24 manifest. I think if your question is was there
25 anything else -- was there a subplot in all this, if

1 there was, I'm unaware of it.

2 It seemed to me that there was demonstrable military
3 advantage to it at the time, and in retrospect I still
4 think that was the case. In fact, one could claim,
5 I think, that having the 4 Infantry Division uncommitted
6 in the eastern Mediterranean still had a fixing effect
7 on some elements of Iraqi forces, insofar as they didn't
8 know where that formation was going to end up.

9 It also, of course -- and I have mentioned this
10 already -- left a significant gap in the combat power in
11 the south.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Which we then filled.

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Which we then filled.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When did that option start to get
15 developed?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think, as you allude, it didn't
17 look as though Turkey was going to work from, I guess,
18 the late autumn onwards and at that point we began
19 increasingly to harden up the view that we would look to
20 something in the south. It is not a vacuum, but the gap
21 in American combat power represented a military function
22 that needed to be fulfilled, that had a discrete and
23 self-contained look about it. And all those things came
24 together to put some wind behind a divisional scale
25 option in the south.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: From what you say, if the Americans
2 put in another division, which they were well capable of
3 doing, it would have actually been quite hard for us to
4 find a role.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It might have been. It would also
6 have been extremely hard to find any logistic space.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the papers of 2002 indicate that
8 all the time. It has been one of the problems of the
9 southern option.

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Exactly.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it was in a sense because the
12 Americans were trying to keep their own liabilities
13 limited that a gap appeared in which they were quite
14 happy for us to --

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That is partially true. They were
16 trying to limit their own liabilities, but they were
17 also trying to retain operational level choice, and
18 I think those two things -- actually, it was the second
19 of those that was most important and the first of those
20 that then became the consequence of the second.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And if one looks at the discussion
22 of the southern option, again in 2002, the logistic
23 issues loom very large indeed. And if you had taken
24 those papers seriously then, you would have said, "We
25 can't get there until the middle of 2003". How did

1 those logistic issues ease?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: You've had more -- well, I think I
3 could probably have asked for the papers if I'd wanted
4 them. You have probably read those things more recently
5 than I have, so I would need to search my memory to
6 remember the debates of the time.

7 I think we began to look at as many various options
8 as we could, taking up aircraft and shipping from trade,
9 and we began to see that it was likely to be that the
10 operation itself would likely be pushed through into the
11 early part of 2003.

12 So I think we probably had a little bit more time
13 than some of the earlier planning assumptions assumed,
14 and we also then began to put as much capacity into the
15 process as we could make available.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this was not clarified as an
17 option presented to ministers until the start of 2003?

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, because -- we only decided to
19 commit the force very late in the day. I think you can
20 make a division here between making provision to create
21 an option and committing to that option, and we had not
22 done the second of those two things. We were just
23 making the necessary military preparations to ensure
24 that if we were called upon to do so, we had the
25 wherewithal to do it.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And you were comfortable about the
2 UORs for the south?

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We were conscious that there were
4 things that were going to arrive very late in the day.
5 We were conscious of the fact that we might not have
6 everything that we required. One does the best that you
7 can in the circumstances.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come to that in practice
9 quite soon.

10 Before I hand over to Sir Roderic, can I just ask
11 you one other question about what might have been seen
12 to have been a disadvantage to the UK in moving from the
13 north to the south. As you have described it, we would
14 have had quite a leading role in the north. Presumably
15 we would have used the headquarters from NATO; would
16 that have been necessary?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It might have been, but it depended
18 what combination of forces you had.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That would have been British
20 command.

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It could have been.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Whereas in the south we were not
23 going to have as distinctive a British operation?

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Let me sort of paraphrase what
25 I think you are saying. We were not pushing the

1 northern option because there would have been a very
2 large Union Jack flying over the top of it. We were
3 pushing the northern option because it represented
4 a sound military course of action. The fact that it
5 would have had a certain degree of national
6 independence, so far as we were concerned, had tactical
7 advantages because of the absence of a requirement to
8 intimately coordinate as there would have been in the
9 south, but some sort of large national ambition is not
10 the thinking that surrounded operational planning.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Even amongst your army colleagues?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I have got no idea what was taking
13 place in Headquarters Land at the time or, indeed, much
14 of an idea what was going on inside the
15 Ministry of Defence, but I did recall what was going on
16 at PJHQ.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: General Fry, I wonder if we can go back
19 to this visit by a briefing team from CentCom that you
20 mentioned. What assumption did you feel that they were
21 making at that time about a British contribution?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think they were trying to brief us
23 into their intentions, in which there might be
24 a contingent role for us. I don't think at any stage at
25 that point was there any assumption on their part that

1 we would be automatically integrated into what was
2 going on.

3 Having said that, of course, both American and
4 British forces were already involved in the theatre in
5 the -- in what we called Op Resinate. So there was
6 a certain amount of cooperation under any circumstances.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So we were already in the theatre with
8 them. In the first Gulf War we had contributed
9 a division. After this visit we then sent our own
10 representatives to Tampa, including General David Wilson
11 whom we have heard from. They were reporting back to
12 you.

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: They weren't reporting back to me.
14 They were reporting back to the Ministry of Defence.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And job that you subsequently took over?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Indeed.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And we then had a direct link into the
18 American planning process, and in the summer of 2002 the
19 impression was formed among American policy makers in
20 Washington that the British were going to contribute
21 a division. And then that was fed back to London and
22 there was some bemusement because we hadn't yet taken
23 a political decision to do so. How did that assumption
24 arise?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I have no idea.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is curious nobody has an idea about
2 this.

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Had I been in Tampa at the time --

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The man in Tampa said ask CJO, and CJO
5 don't know either.

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We had regular correspondence with
7 them, but the reporting line was not -- I'm not trying
8 to avoid this question. What I'm trying to do is (a) to
9 give you an adequate answer, but (b) to place it clearly
10 in my own mind.

11 I think that what you are implying here is that the
12 single objective truth was universally understood by
13 everybody involved in the process at the time. That is
14 never the case in my recollection. There was probably
15 something planted in one place that then appeared in
16 another place that was cross-referenced in a third.
17 That may well have been an implied assumption that the
18 British would be involved at some stage, but we actually
19 didn't contractually commit ourselves until very late in
20 the day.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I will stick with your implied assumption
22 that the British would be involved at one stage, perhaps
23 at divisional level ground forces. And so that is what
24 was sort of in the American heads at the time that this
25 was going on.

1 And then, as you say, we worked up a number of
2 packages. You use the term "de minimis" to talk about
3 the packages that didn't include a land element, but
4 this perhaps isn't a very fair description of what was
5 called package 2, I think, at one stage, which was to
6 send out a fairly large deployment of aircraft,
7 additional ships, but just not send the land division.
8 That's more than de minimis.

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I used the phrase in terms of
10 building on what was already there; therefore, a force
11 already committed.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That would have involved how many extra
13 aircraft and ships?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't remember, but significant.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So we had the option of doing that, and
16 in the late summer/early autumn, when these options were
17 presented to the Secretary of State for Defence and the
18 Prime Minister, having been worked up in PJHQ, the
19 preference initially of ministers was for package 2.

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Hm-mm.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How do we then get from that to
22 a decision to send -- at a time when the Americans
23 didn't need it because they thought that they were going
24 to be able to come in from the north -- a divisional
25 level ground force as well?

1 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think I have partially answered
2 this already, but I will just go through the strategic
3 conversation between north and south.

4 Because the Americans believed that the north
5 remained an option until very late in the day, they had
6 to earmark a significant amount of combat power against
7 that option. That was the 4 Infantry Division.

8 In doing that, they took that formation out of the
9 forces available in the south, which then meant that
10 there were two American corps: the 5 Corps and the
11 1 Marine Expeditionary Force. And what, increasingly,
12 the American plan began to move to was that they would
13 have to fight almost to exhaustion if the 4 Infantry
14 Division remained at sea, and we would then get
15 a sequenced operation where they would be committed to
16 battle in the first instance and then the second echelon
17 of American forces, the 4 Infantry Division, would then
18 come on in behind.

19 Now, had the Americans committed to the south in the
20 first instance and concentrated all of their force
21 there, then that dilemma would never have arisen. So
22 there was an issue about the extent of combat power.

23 There was also an issue about manoeuvre. The
24 1 Marine Expeditionary Force would take the eastern axis
25 and the two corps would advance in parallel on Baghdad.

1 And what that, in tactical terms, meant that the eastern
2 flank of the first MEF was hanging in the air
3 and there were a whole series of divisions in and around
4 Basra, including -- I think it was the 10 Armoured
5 Division that had the capacity then to attack into the
6 American flank.

7 So there was a growing and very demonstrable
8 requirement for something that could act as a flank
9 guard to American large scale manoeuvre, but also then
10 increasingly there was the implicit task of looking
11 after Basra as well.

12 So in a sense it was a lack of American combat power
13 because of the continuing ambiguity about the northern
14 and southern options that created an opportunity into
15 which British forces subsequently fitted.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: An opportunity? But not a necessity?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As Donald Rumsfeld himself said, rather
19 frankly.

20 So if we had not taken that opportunity, what would
21 we have lost by it? If we decided not to send ground
22 forces.

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: At the time we were having these
24 debates, maybe the war. We were unsure at that stage --

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In that case it was a necessity, not an

1 opportunity. If our contribution was critical to
2 winning the war -- and I think you are the first person
3 to have suggested that to us -- then this is not merely
4 an opportunity, we were needed there.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was only a necessity if we
6 accepted our part in it. I think we would have to do
7 that before it became necessary to us.

8 Let me put it a different way. The American scheme
9 of manoeuvre had the potential of failure within it
10 unless it had some of the things that I have just talked
11 about.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Despite the fact that the opposition was
13 extremely weak?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We knew that -- we know that now, we
15 did not know that necessarily at the time.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What did you know at that time about the
17 opposition?

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We knew what its ORBAT was, we knew
19 where it was, broadly, we knew some of the equipments
20 that it had within it. Remember, we didn't know at this
21 time whether they were going to be using battlefield
22 chemical weapons. All of these things --

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We didn't know that, but what did you
24 know about what had happened to the Iraqi forces in the
25 decade since you had been involved in the first Gulf War

1 in Kurdistan, as you said? What had happened to them in
2 that case?

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: They probably hadn't got any better.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They had got a lot worse, surely.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: But they were also fighting on interior
6 lines and in defence of their homeland.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was the assumption, the intelligence that
8 you were being given, leading you to expect that this
9 large conscript army was going to fight in a very
10 serious way, that it was well equipped, it had the
11 ammunition, it had had new equipment supplied?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Throughout the whole depth of the
13 army, no, that certainly wasn't the assumption. In
14 terms of the Republican Guard, that very much was the
15 assumption. And latterly, once we were committed to
16 battle other things began to emerge that we never saw at
17 all, which was the envelopment of our own rear areas by
18 Iraqi militia forces.

19 So if I was to convey a sense to you that we had
20 a complete and faultless sense of the Iraqi response,
21 I would be misleading you. What we -- in the role in
22 which I was involved at the time, which was the
23 operational planning, we were trying to look at these
24 things in as rigorous and austere military operational
25 terms as possible.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were you satisfied that your American
2 counterparts were also looking at them in the same way?
3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: There were differences in national
4 habit about the way that we approached these things.
5 I don't think -- I think we shared a common
6 understanding about the operational risks that we were
7 taking and the operational advantages which we
8 possessed.
9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But were you satisfied with the
10 assumptions they were making about the numbers of troops
11 that were required, for example?
12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Erm, it was a high risk game.
13 I think that -- I'm not sure whether any of the previous
14 witnesses have recorded the difference between running
15 start and generated start?
16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have heard mention of it, but do go
17 over it again.
18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: These things mean exactly what they
19 say they mean. Generated start was something which was
20 going to build combat power up to a level where it could
21 be committed to battle with a pretty good assumption of
22 subsequent success.
23 Running start was essentially an attack from the
24 line of march, simply deploying forces into Kuwait and
25 the surrounding area and then simply carrying across

1 into a start line into Iraq.

2 Now, under those circumstances there was a certain
3 amount of operational risk, but where the Americans were
4 very confident was that they would be able to create
5 a simultaneous effect of which ground manoeuvre would
6 only be a part, air operations would be another part,
7 information operations would be overlaid over that, and
8 on top of all of those things there would be an awful
9 lot of diplomatic negotiation going on at the same time.

10 Now, the aggregate effect of this cacophony of noise
11 it was assumed would completely dislocate the Iraqi
12 regime.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let me put it another way: if you had
14 been General Franks reporting to Donald Rumsfeld, would
15 you have opted for the numbers of troops that they
16 decided to use in this operation?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: You make it sound as though the
18 number of troops was the deciding factor. There were
19 lots of things --

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I didn't say that.

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I'm trying to draw an implication
22 out of what you have said.

23 There were lots of things playing at the same time.
24 There was the fact that a UN Security Council Resolution
25 was being debated at the same time. It was the fact

1 that we were going from March into April and the whole
2 of summer was stretching ahead of us. It was the fact
3 that at this stage we had a very large number of troops
4 stuck in a highly congested area who would, over time,
5 decrease in military capability and, in the meantime,
6 make an enviable target to indirect attack.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But there was a debate within American
8 military circles about how many military troops you
9 should deploy in an operation of this, and the outgoing
10 Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, General Shinseki, had
11 said in February that of year that you were going to
12 need hundreds of thousands, and in fact Donald Rumsfeld
13 opted for a much smaller -- and he did so
14 controversially, as you say, by risk. Did that accord
15 with our military thinking?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I see the direction which your
17 question is coming from now.

18 I think that General Shinseki did indeed say that,
19 but he didn't necessarily say that they all needed to be
20 on the start line at the beginning of the process. What
21 he meant was that over time, what you would need is
22 a sequential deployment, and that was perfectly within
23 the gift of the American forces and planners to do that.

24 So if your question is did we have the numbers for
25 every subsequent task, the answer is no, but neither did

1 we know at that stage whether the Americans intended to
2 send more or not. So we were only looking at the
3 numbers required for the decisive combat phase.

4 If I go on a stage further, I think that there was
5 a group around Secretary Rumsfeld, and I think probably
6 Donald Rumsfeld himself, who felt that what had happened
7 in Afghanistan was transferable to Iraq, that you would
8 be able to apply -- let me use de minimis again --
9 a certain amount -- a discrete level of military force
10 that would be sufficient to defeat the enemy, that you
11 would perhaps have in place indigenous forces, the
12 Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, maybe the Kurds and the
13 Shia in Iraq, and that you would have some compliant
14 politicians who would then be able to create an interim
15 administration. You could hand the process over to them
16 and then walk away.

17 So I think we are talking about two different things
18 here. What I have been concentrating on is the
19 immediate requirements of the combat phase. Your
20 question implies were we properly configured for
21 whatever came thereafter, and the answer is probably no,
22 and I think I understand why that was.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to go into that in a minute,
24 but just before that what I'm really trying to establish
25 is to what extent our military planners, of whom you

1 were one, were content with the way that the military
2 planning for the coalition operation led by the
3 Americans, the direction it was going, whether we were
4 seeking to influence it and whether we were able to
5 influence it having eventually made a very large
6 commitment to it?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. I think that we were able to
8 influence it at any number of levels. We were able to
9 influence it -- and I think that Brian Burridge did this
10 as the national contingent commander being colocated
11 with forward CentCom headquarters in terms of tactical
12 engagement, targeting, the nitty gritty of operational
13 combat on a regular basis.

14 I think in the early stages of the campaign, not
15 only during the combat phase but in the immediate
16 post-combat phase, we were also able to influence them
17 significantly. Over time, towards the back end of our
18 presence in Iraq, I think we influenced them less and
19 less.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We will, I'm sure, come back to that when
21 we talk about the later period of your service, but let
22 us now, indeed, think about Phase 4, the aftermath, in
23 layman's terms.

24 You said earlier that one of the downsides of
25 deploying a land contribution is that you then become

1 responsible for the territory you take, and we have had
2 others telling us that effectively Phase 4 begins the
3 moment you cross the start line and occupy territory on
4 the other side.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What sort of planning were you making for
7 Phase 4 in PJHQ and were you content with what you saw
8 of the American planning, and were you able to integrate
9 with it?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that one of the first things
11 to get across is that any major military headquarters is
12 responsible for two things simultaneously during an
13 operation: One is the conduct of the current battle;
14 and secondly, is the planning of the subsequent battle.

15 So there was an inherent obligation upon us to think
16 of what came after. So it was never a discretionary --
17 it wasn't something that we chose to do. It was
18 a pretty clear military requirement: This is what you
19 need to do.

20 So we thought quite a bit about what we would do in
21 Phase 4. We found a disappointing degree of traction at
22 two levels: First of all, within our own ministries of
23 state and, of course, it required -- whatever happened
24 thereafter was never going to be solely a military
25 function, it was going to require all of the instruments

1 of the national power to bring about any decisive
2 effect.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So we weren't getting proper coordination
4 in Whitehall on this issue?

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No. And secondly, I think we had
6 a sense of what the Americans were doing, but the more
7 we understood about it, the less we had confidence in it
8 and I think that has been well recorded --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Those are two very important points.

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: -- by Tim Cross.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's take the first of them. Why was
12 Whitehall not pulling together on this?

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I will offer you a personal view on
14 this, which is that we have latterly invented something
15 called the comprehensive approach, which is supposed to
16 be the integration of all national powers in the pursuit
17 of a strategic objective. It does seem to me that that
18 is the strategic birthright of this country. That's
19 what we have always done well. We didn't beat the
20 Germans twice in the twentieth century by outfighting
21 them, but we did outproduce them, we did make better use
22 of intelligence and, above all, we did create far better
23 alliances.

24 So the theme of trying to combine all of the
25 instruments of national power in a single coherent and

1 beneficial outcome is something which I think we have
2 always done well. I think that what happened in 2003
3 was that there was a break in national consensus about
4 the application and utility of force, and I think one of
5 the consequences of that is that we did not have
6 a unified nation, a unified Parliament or even a unified
7 Cabinet. So there were all sorts of inferences that had
8 an centrifugal effect of tending to separate the major
9 functions of government.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Which of these impediments was the most
11 serious from your point of view: the nation, the
12 Parliament or the Cabinet?

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it was the effective
14 mechanisms of government, and I take that directly from
15 the Cabinet.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So they simply weren't working properly?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It seemed to me that they weren't.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On the American side what was happening
19 their Phase 4 planning?

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I don't know. I saw occasionally --
21 Tim Cross I saw reasonably regularly when he came back
22 and forth to the PJHQ. I never saw it close-up and,
23 therefore, I was unable to make a personal judgment
24 about the efficacy of what they were doing or not. But
25 the received wisdom was that it was pretty much -- it

1 was off the pace. But if I go back to --

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: This must have worried you.

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Of course it did.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What did you do about it?

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We tried remonstrate with the

6 Americans to the very best of our ability at every level

7 at which we were available.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Which means what levels?

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Every level that was available. We

10 did directly to the in-theatre forces. I think our

11 representatives in Tampa and Washington did at their

12 appropriate levels, and I assume that the same things

13 were made at a political and diplomatic level.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How did they react to this?

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It will be okay on the night.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I pick up in terms of how all of

18 this was presented. I think you briefed the

19 Prime Minister on 15 January 2003. Let's pull together

20 the various strands here and how they are described to

21 the political leadership.

22 First, what are your recollections of the meeting

23 itself, how it was prepared for, how long it lasted,

24 what sort of issues were raised?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Vague. I mean, I think that at the

1 time most of the events -- the events were a blur at
2 that time because, you know, we were getting closer and
3 closer to the whole thing. In fact I can't recall
4 whether the meeting you are referring to was in
5 Downing Street or in the Ministry of Defence.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it was in the
7 Ministry of Defence.

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Okay.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But it was certainly the point at
10 which decisions were made because the
11 Secretary of State for Defence told Parliament that we
12 were sending the land force a few days later. So it was
13 a critical meeting.

14 Whether or not you are vague about the actual
15 details of that meeting, what I'm concerned about is the
16 way the sort of issues that we have just been discussing
17 were presented to ministers and how they were discussed
18 at the time. Let's start with this question of risk.

19 Now, what you have described to us in terms of
20 talking about the American plan and the British role in
21 it is the caution of a military planner worried about
22 what the enemy might do.

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And, therefore, if we weren't
25 properly prepared, then there might be a high price to

1 pay. Now, in terms of getting our forces ready to cope
2 with that sort of challenge, what were your concerns?
3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: First of all, getting them there,
4 and secondly, getting them there in a way which would
5 allow them to be prepared and configured for battle.
6 And that meant having the appropriate equipment, the
7 appropriate training and the appropriate
8 acclimatisation.
9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you feel you had time to do
10 that?
11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was all a bit of a pinch, but
12 what the Chief of Joint Operations did do was declare
13 the force ready. I can't remember when that was, but it
14 was immediately before we committed them to battle.
15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, we have been told by
16 Brian Burridge and Robin Brims that they were ready to
17 the extent that they were facing the Iraqi army at the
18 time. Now, again, going back to what you have just
19 said, you have given us a prudent assessment of what the
20 Iraqis might be capable of. If the Iraqis had indeed
21 been capable of fighting very hard, were we ready?
22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. But, I mean, with --
23 acknowledging a degree of risk within all that. I mean,
24 you, as a military historian, would know better than
25 anybody that there is nothing certain about the outcome

1 of these sorts of enterprises. What we did was make
2 a series of judgments based on our capability, the
3 Iraqis' capability and all of the other variables that
4 I have introduced into this conversation. The balance
5 of that judgment was that we were ready.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the issues of acclimatisation
7 that we have heard, about problems of tracking within
8 theatre, getting the right body armour to the right
9 soldiers and so on and so forth, so it was a bit of
10 a rush and a bit of a pinch?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, it was a bit of a rush and
12 there were inherent risks involved.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How were those risks described to
14 ministers? Did they understand that if we went in
15 late March, that our forces would not be as ready as,
16 say, the start of April or, indeed, in the autumn?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but that's a truism, isn't it?
18 The longer you are there, in one sense the more ready
19 you are going to be become, in another sense the less
20 ready you are going to become, because maintaining
21 people at a combat edge whilst they are simply sitting
22 in an assembly area is not conducive to military
23 efficiency.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But had you had to time to get them to
25 combat edge? They'd only just arrived before they went

1 into action. Would you normally not have deployed them
2 earlier and have them train on the spot?

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, but they also were coming from
4 high-readiness organisations. They were coming from
5 organisations which had conducted their own generic, not
6 theatre-specific, training and, you know, they were led
7 by professional cadres who were expected to be able to
8 do this.

9 So I don't think -- you look here for something --
10 you have a very long tick list and you only commit
11 people to battle when every last tick is in place.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It depends a bit on who you are up
13 against and we were not expecting the most serious type
14 of resistance.

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I guess that rather proves my point.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there is this judgment, from
17 what you were saying earlier, about how the planning was
18 proceeding and whether our role was necessary or not,
19 and the fact that in the end we were able to take risks
20 because actually they weren't very good.

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: What is the disjunction that you
22 see?

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Because you were describing in terms
24 the role that we would play because of the limits of the
25 force that the Americans were deciding to deploy and the

1 importance of the role protecting the flanks of the
2 Americans as they charged up towards Baghdad, and there
3 could have been quite serious difficulties if the Iraqis
4 did fight hard. So that's how military planners should
5 plan, isn't it?

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Thank you for that accolade.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But in the end, we were taking risks
8 because actually it was the Iraqi forces as they were in
9 2003?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that -- I think I'd sort of
11 try and precis this conversation by saying we were
12 taking a risk, we knew we were taking a risk, but
13 events, at least in the combat phase, showed those --
14 the acceptance of those risks to be justified.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's then move to an area where
16 perhaps a different conclusion might be reached, which
17 is the Phase 4. How were the risks of Phase 4 presented
18 and the general aftermath?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That the final outcome would only
20 really be judged by the success of subsequent operations
21 rather than the combat phase. I think we always knew
22 that and, therefore, implicit in that was that the
23 greatest task and potentially the greatest risk lay
24 after the combat phase and not in the combat phase.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How were those risks described? You

1 have told us your concerns, and other witnesses have
2 told us their concerns, about the state of American
3 planning. In the end this was going to be dependent
4 upon what the Americans did more than what we did. How
5 could you be confident then that the Phase 4 would be
6 managed?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I don't think we had complete
8 confidence. I think we had severe reservations and
9 I think I have already stated, and others have stated --
10 but I think the one that I think hasn't come out of what
11 I said -- and I don't know whether anybody else as
12 recorded it as well -- we didn't entirely understand the
13 energies we were about to release.

14 We went into Iraq and our immediate concern was
15 defeating formed Iraqi military forces. What we didn't
16 fully understand was how the Shia would respond over
17 time. You know, this is a significant -- the majority
18 element of the population that had been kept quiescent
19 for years and years and years, and yet the minute that
20 they had a sense of emancipation led to a level of
21 political ambition on their part which we severely
22 underestimated.

23 We did not fully estimate the sense of alienation
24 that the Sunni population would feel. So I think that
25 at the time we were looking at a Phase 4 that probably

1 severely underestimated the eventual energies that began
2 to dominate the environment.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the position was that you were
4 concerned about the preparations for a Phase 4 that was
5 actually going to be potentially quite mild compared
6 with what actually occurred?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's correct.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And you still weren't even totally
9 confident about that?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's correct.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of the workings of
12 government at this time in preparation for this and the
13 release of energies that you have spoken about -- and we
14 will talk about your own experience with this later
15 on -- what sort of advice were you getting from the rest
16 of government? Were you getting evaluations, were you
17 seeking out independent expertise on what Iraq was
18 likely to be when you got there?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. In all sorts of different
20 senses. Clearly there was -- the advice of the
21 intelligence services, there was diplomatic advice,
22 there was also specific and technical advice on things
23 like oil infrastructure. So we were taking a lot of
24 objective and independent advice about what was -- about
25 what we were likely to find, but what I never felt was

1 that every instrument of national power was behind this
2 at the time.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And I mean, in terms of particular
4 ministries, one whose name keeps coming up in this is
5 DFID. Is that your experience?

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, it was. I think we had DFID
7 representatives who came to the PJHQ who would hardly
8 conceal their moral disdain for what we were about to
9 embark upon. At the same time -- I was not necessarily
10 aware of it at the time, but by subsequent reporting --
11 their Secretary of State seemed to be forming the
12 provisional wing of government. So it is hardly
13 surprising that the thing didn't have a coordinated feel
14 about it.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did you feel in terms of our
16 Foreign Office contacts? We have heard that the Iraqi
17 Planning Group was set up really quite late in the day,
18 February. Did you have much contact with them?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, much more when I came to London
20 subsequently, but a certain amount of time.

21 I felt that the coordination with the Foreign Office
22 was okay, but I think that the Foreign Office at this
23 stage were looking until very late in the day for
24 a diplomatic solution to this whole thing and, indeed,
25 that diplomatic process was part of the coercive effect

1 that we were hoping to have which would actually be
2 successful short of war. So I could understand the
3 position that the Foreign Office was taking at the time.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just, before handing back to
5 Sir Roderic, ask you about this general question of the
6 timing of the campaign?

7 Now, we have heard from Foreign Office witnesses
8 that -- personally they did feel that it would be good
9 to have longer, that Hans Blix was only just getting
10 into his job and that nothing had yet been found and we
11 needed to have a longer time, and that was a general
12 view within the United Nations. So there was certainly
13 on one side of government some pressure for a delay.

14 We have also heard that one of the reasons why that
15 delay was denied was a sense on the American side that
16 we really had to get on with it, partly perhaps for some
17 of the reasons that you have described in terms of how
18 the climate would turn against the troops if they stayed
19 there so long. How were you in between these two
20 pressures?

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think there is a natural military
22 dynamic that once you are there you get on with it, and
23 I think probably the view that I had was influenced by
24 that.

25 You have got a large group of people who are -- we

1 can make relative judgments on readiness, but about as
2 ready as they are going to be. They are in a highly
3 concentrated and congested area, where they are
4 extremely vulnerable to either terrorist attack or
5 direct conventional or unconventional attack of various
6 sorts. And it seemed to me at the time that the balance
7 of leaving them like that was increasingly less in our
8 advantage the longer the time went on.

9 But I think -- you know, it is a bit like railway
10 timetables in 1914, the military will always have this
11 sense, and I suspect that if I'm to be entirely
12 objective with my own view at that time that was how
13 I felt.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You wanted to get on with it?

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I was never going to declare war on
16 Iraq. Once there was a political framework that had
17 made that decision and wanted the military task to be
18 executed.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I appreciate you weren't going to
20 start it by yourself, but in terms of the pressures
21 going back into government, the military weren't saying
22 we're quite happy to wait, we would rather wait and
23 so on. The general view was that we are ready to go,
24 the Americans are ready to go.

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think that was a pressure
2 that weighed upon ministers, on the
3 Secretary of State for Defence, for example?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It might have been. But I think he
5 would also have seen it as something -- well, the
6 military are likely to say that under any circumstances.

7 He would see also have had cautionary voices from
8 the Foreign Office saying we need to run this on, we
9 haven't yet exhausted all the diplomatic opportunities
10 and so on. I think he would have been at the centre of
11 any number of different sets of advice.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just in terms of reflection on what
13 happened, there is an argument that as the decisions
14 were taken to send forces in January -- the American
15 decisions as well and going to full mobilisation -- that
16 that in the end set the timetable for diplomacy, that it
17 set a limit on how far it could go even if the diplomacy
18 seemed to be moving on another track.

19 Is that a fair assessment?

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I see what you are saying. Whether
21 that then set us on an irreversible course, I don't
22 think that's the case. It may have been the case for
23 the Americans, but I think that we reserved our position
24 about finally deciding to be part of live military
25 operations until very late in the day.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Lord Boyce has told us that he was
2 ready with a phone call to his American counterpart just
3 in case Parliament had decided against the war. So it
4 is your view too that in the end, despite all this rush
5 of activity and energy and so on, that if the forces had
6 been told not to move, they wouldn't have moved?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Of course not. They are only going
8 to work with a political mandate.

9 But I think what you see here are two things which
10 sound as though they are in conflict, they are not.
11 They are part of a wider and necessary dialogue. We
12 needed to deploy the military forces there in order to
13 have the coercive muscle in order to give diplomacy
14 a chance. It is no use threatening somebody if all your
15 troops are in barracks, at the same time there was no
16 automaticity, in my mind or anybody else's, about the
17 fact that we were going to be committed to battle. We
18 knew that that was a political position that had been
19 reserved throughout.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you were briefing the Prime Minister
21 on 15 January, at a time when he was still obviously
22 very focused on the diplomatic task, trying to get
23 a second resolution and all of that stuff, and trying to
24 avoid a war, what were you telling him about the
25 timetables for deployment, the time that would be needed

1 to deploy the forces and then their sustainability
2 having got them out there, how long could he leave them
3 there before they had to have a go or no go decision?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Specifically I can't remember, but
5 I don't think that the conversation was couched in those
6 terms. I mean, it wasn't about we have got ten days'
7 supply and we have got this amount of fuel and we have
8 got this much track mileage and so on and so on. It was
9 a conversation that was conducted in very general terms,
10 and the general terms were that we are now -- in January
11 we will be ready by a certain time, you know, February
12 or the beginning of March, that the process of building
13 up the logistics stocks that were required, conducting
14 the in-theatre training that we need is proceeding.

15 I don't recall that conversation ever saying to him,
16 "But we are only good for a month once we are
17 committed". It was conducted in general terms about our
18 ability to do the job on a yes or no basis.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But surely that is an important factor?
20 You can't sustain a large force out in theatre
21 indefinitely, and surely the Prime Minister, who was
22 juggling with trying to make the political timetable
23 mesh with the potential contingency military timetable,
24 it was very important that he should know this.

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but the longer -- diplomacy was

1 going to continue before the commitment to operations.
2 So to that extent -- where this gets really difficult is
3 sustainment in battle, sustainment before is an easier
4 thing to manage. And at no stage in this conversation
5 do I recall going into the intimate detail of the
6 logistic situation. Neither would I in briefing the
7 Prime Minister.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Because we have had, as you know,
9 a number of people who have argued to us that we should
10 have allowed more time for inspections that would have
11 implied leaving our forces in theatre perhaps for
12 several more months having deployed them. Now, from a
13 military point of view, you are saying that would have
14 been feasible?

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It would have been feasible, but it
16 would have created a different set of risks. I think I
17 have recorded those already.

18 I think that I would have made clear the sort of
19 limitation of my own position. It was very much looking
20 into the details of military planning and the confluence
21 of all of these different factors that you have just
22 described is something that I was aware that was going
23 on but I had limited visibility of myself.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: One final question from me before the
25 break. I think my colleagues may want to come in too

1 before we take a gear change into your next period.

2 Just going back to the question of the sort of
3 assumptions that were being made, being briefed to you
4 perhaps about the situation we would face afterwards,
5 what we have heard so far is that a lot of people in the
6 leadership in Washington were expecting to be greeted as
7 liberators, the phrase "sweetness and light" has been
8 used, a very optimistic scenario.

9 We have also heard that a lot of the planning in the
10 British Government was focused very much on the risk --
11 and in the UN -- of a humanitarian crisis, of maybe
12 600,000 internally displaced refugees within Iraq.

13 But we have heard from others that warnings were
14 being given. I mean, one case --
15 Sir Jeremy Greenstock -- cited his Egyptian colleague,
16 now the Egyptian foreign minister, warning that we could
17 expect very, very violent reactions inside Iraq, and
18 that was not alone. There were other sources when you
19 read the papers suggesting that we would quickly be seen
20 as occupiers and as aliens.

21 What was the picture that was being fed to you?

22 Were you getting this pessimistic scenario fed to you in
23 detail particularly from Foreign Office and similar
24 sources of advice?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Anecdotally and opportunistically.

1 I think I would speak to Foreign Office people and they
2 would say this might happen and that might happen, but
3 as part of a formal part of the discussion round
4 government at the present time, I can't remember things
5 as baleful as you have just described having any common
6 currency. But in a sense, we were looking at the wrong
7 sort. Sounds like ...

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Wrong leaves on the line.

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Wrong leaves on the line. But the
10 wrong sort of humanitarian requirement.

11 We thought we would be talking about the immediate
12 outcome of battle -- so displaced people, no water
13 supplies, lots of casualties, these sorts of things that
14 might be a significant challenge but would be
15 non-enduring. What we didn't see was the -- you know,
16 these huge tectonic political events that subsequently
17 took place. And I think that one of the most egregious
18 mistakes of the entire enterprise was not seeing that
19 that would happen.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Two very quick questions. First,
21 you mention that had you also briefed the Prime Minister
22 in March. Presumably this was just before?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I'm sorry, I think it was April. It
24 was during the Basra battle.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And that presumably was because we

1 hadn't been part of the original plan to actually go
2 into Basra, if I'm correct?

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we were explaining what was going
5 on there. Perhaps we can pick that bit up after.

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Can I just make one point to answer
7 Sir Roderic's question a moment ago? When I look back
8 on this, I actually think that what we had here was
9 a failure of doctrine. Military love doctrine, and
10 what happened during the combat phase is that our
11 doctrine worked almost seamlessly, which was -- the acme
12 of manoeuvre is the ability to transition from one
13 operation of war to another, and if you do that
14 successfully, you create tempo and tempo is what defeats
15 the enemy. And during the combat phase that worked
16 almost flawlessly, but what we completely failed to do
17 was to transition from one phase to another.

18 So within a phase our doctrinal preparation worked
19 extremely well. Between phases, it worked extremely
20 badly, and the reason for that is in order to have
21 succeeded, it would have needed to have called upon the
22 full mechanisms of government.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: My really final point on this is
24 that one issue that has come to us is the point at which
25 we understood that we would actually have

1 a responsibility for a particular chunk of Iraq. And
2 when we moved from the north to the south, that was
3 certainly always going to be more of a possibly.

4 At what point did you appreciate -- and how was this
5 communicated -- that there would actually be a British
6 region for which we would have responsibility?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It seemed to me that the minute
8 a British soldier crossed the Iraqi border there was
9 a British region, insofar as there was a British area of
10 operations within which we would have contingent
11 responsibilities.

12 Now, in terms of actually advising and shaping this
13 thing and saying it is going to be this piece of
14 territory rather than that, that evolved over time. And
15 as I recall, we were drawn further north for the reasons
16 of -- we described earlier on, which was the tactical
17 protection of the American advance. There was then
18 a point at which it became, as it became clear we would
19 have a more enduring role than perhaps we originally
20 understood --

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When was that point?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: -- I can't remember, but it would
23 have been post-conflict -- that it began to become
24 sensible to have your military boundaries coterminous
25 with your political boundaries. And, therefore, the

1 northern end of Maysan province naturally became
2 a boundary --

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was post-conflict.

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we couldn't have had a plan for
6 the management of what became --

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: What we couldn't have had is a clear
8 sight of, first of all, the scale of the liability that
9 we possessed, and secondly, the piece of territory for
10 which we would be responsible. But it seems to me to be
11 quite wrong to say that we didn't understand that we had
12 sets of responsibilities.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm sure you understood that, but it
14 is really a question of being able to flesh this out and
15 start to think which cities, which towns, what do we
16 need to know about them. How does the political
17 structure work. That sort of thing would not have been
18 available because we couldn't be sure.

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: If your question is did we have at
20 our fingertips information on the political parties in
21 Basra, you know, who to call when we got there, no, we
22 didn't.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm really talking about even having
24 the framework within which you could start to ask
25 questions like that. It didn't really exist until we

1 were there?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: A nascent framework existed and an

3 inadequate framework existed.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Martin?

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to go back to something

7 you touched on in answer to Sir Roderic earlier.

8 In discussing the three British possible military

9 options, you mentioned, as several previous witnesses

10 have done, the larger the contribution, the more

11 influence on the Americans.

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What I would like to know is during

14 your actual planning in the second half of 2002, in what

15 specific areas was it thought this British influence

16 could apply that made the land forces option more

17 attractive?

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think the answer to that lies in

19 two parts. I think we felt at a tactical level we might

20 be able to influence the Americans in certain ways in

21 which they would go about the conduct of the operation,

22 and to a certain extent that was true. I don't think we

23 ever fundamentally influenced their level of military

24 ambition or necessarily even their scheme of manoeuvre,

25 but I think we did assist and shape their views in some

1 ways. But I think in some senses the full benefit that
2 this should have given to the United Kingdom was never
3 going to be visible to me, because it seems to me that
4 it was the military contribution, which I was part of
5 planning, which bought the influence which should then
6 have been deployed at governmental and diplomatic
7 levels.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So it really was a rather high level
9 influence that you are talking about?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

12 THE CHAIRMAN: Usha?

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You said in response to
14 Sir Roderic Lyne that the DFID could not contain their
15 moral disdain at meetings. Did that mean that they
16 would not engage with you constructively in that plan?
17 You can have moral disdain, but then you have to do
18 a job professionally because this is the way the
19 planning is going on. What was the level of engagement?

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Superficial.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So there was no complete commitment
22 in terms of how they would work with you --

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No, that would be unfair. There
24 were -- I think there was acknowledgment that there was
25 going to be a responsibility, but I don't think that we

1 first, I think.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The war. About a week into the war

3 an American general was quoted as saying this is not the

4 enemy we war-gamed against. Did you have that feeling

5 as well?

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: But only for a relatively brief

7 period, I think. I think that was said at the time when

8 the first part of the invasion had gone pretty slickly,

9 but we suddenly found ourselves confronting sets of

10 Iraqi conventional forces but also feeling that we were

11 going enveloped on our own rear areas by Iraqi

12 irregulars. And subsequently these two things probably

13 looked completely unrelated. At the time it felt like

14 an enemy plan.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There is some evidence that it was

16 an enemy plan. But it also possibly was a foretaste of

17 things to come. Did you clock that up as a possibility?

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. It represented a dimension

19 that we hadn't expected to find at that stage.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were there any other unexpected

21 things in the initial phase of the war?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That was the thing which I think

23 caused us the greatest dislocation at the time. I can't

24 think of anything else that was as large as that.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did you respond and what was the

1 advice going --

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was something that lasted for

3 about a 48-hour period and then more or less

4 simultaneously there began to be a very sharp

5 conventional advance, and at the same time the

6 engagement by the militias became less and less intense.

7 So it was a problem that almost found its own solution.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you take us through the Basra

9 issue? If I'm correct, taking Basra itself was not

10 necessarily a part of our plan?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No, I think that our plan was what

12 I described to you earlier on, which was to guarantee

13 the integrity of American manoeuvre in the advance up to

14 Baghdad.

15 So that was the first requirement. We early on had

16 some success -- I think it was in As Zubayr, which was

17 about 100,000 people just outside Basra, but I think

18 Robin Brims -- and I can't recall what evidence he gave

19 when he gave his testimony -- was very clear that what

20 he didn't want to do was to invest Basra in any

21 conventional -- in any conventional sense. That if we

22 were to have to get into Basra, then we would have to be

23 as --

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: "Invest" may seem a strange term to

25 use, but it is normal military term for going into

1 Basra, effectively?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. But, I mean, we were looking
3 for something which was as nuanced and as subtle within
4 with the limitations of military force as we could
5 make it.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How were you consulted on
7 Robin Brims's plans?

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: To some extent, but I wouldn't
9 expect the PJHQ to be consulted on this. This was very
10 much the business of the field commander.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But you were expected to brief the
12 Prime Minister on this?

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we have talked of, prior to the
15 war, a campaign in which we would be essentially looking
16 after the south and providing some protection to the
17 Americans as they went up north. But now we are talking
18 about a city in the context of concerns prior to the war
19 that this could lead to some terrible urban conflict,
20 conflict itself.

21 So was this an issue that was raised to you by the
22 Prime Minister in terms of the risks that British forces
23 might now be taking?

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No, I think that -- the times I met
25 the Prime Minister were infrequent. It was mainly the

1 Secretary of State for Defence.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Talking about this particular

3 briefing. To be fair to you, your briefings with

4 Secretary of Defence Hoon as well.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, it was a concern that

6 Geoff Hoon mentioned on a number of occasions. I think

7 the way that it eventually played out -- and I think

8 Robin Brims used the phrase "elegant" -- was about as

9 elegant as it could be made to be. What he did,

10 I think, was to test Basra by a number of means.

11 We were using the best intelligence that we had in

12 our own field in intelligence sources to try and get

13 a picture of what was happening inside the city and

14 where the residual elements of Ba'athist power were

15 likely to be. We then tried to very specifically target

16 where we thought they would be geographically, and every

17 now and then Robin would test the defences of Basra by

18 a series of incursions. So, again, trying to create

19 this multifaceted effect on the city itself.

20 I think we did have some success in destroying the

21 key Ba'athist cadres within Basra, and then as part of

22 one of these raids into the city -- and I think this was

23 on 6 or 7 April -- one of 7 Armoured Brigade's battlegroups went

24 into the city and found it was open, and they simply then

25 reinforced success. So the whole thing fell away in

1 a way which we would have hoped for, but couldn't
2 necessarily have expected.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Indeed. So in terms of the briefing
4 of ministers, were they concerned about the risks that
5 we might be taking going into Basra?

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, and the longer it went on --
7 and it was attenuated for a period -- the more they
8 began to fear they might have a Grozny on their hands.
9 But that, in the event, was not the way it turned out.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did you respond to these fears,
11 by saying we wouldn't do anything unless we are pretty
12 confident?

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think the specific briefings we
14 gave at the time were there would be a tipping point in
15 this whole process where the cumulative effect of what
16 the 1 Armoured Division was doing would create
17 sufficient pressure that the residual Iraqi command
18 elements inside Basra would simply collapse. And in the
19 event, that's exactly what happened.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And in this whole story, the war
21 itself often seems to be rather a minor part, but were
22 there any other moments during the conflict where you
23 were concerned, surprised, felt there was a need for
24 a major adjustment of plans, or apart from the taking of
25 Basra, was everything moving more or less as you would

1 have hoped?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Pretty much. I think the slight

3 hiatus around Basra, which lasted about a week, the

4 slight hiatus on the way to Baghdad which I have

5 recorded to you, and always the possibility of a

6 chemical attack, because at this stage this was still at

7 the forefront of our minds.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of the need of the Phase 4,

9 as we have heard, Phase 4 starts -- and you reiterate

10 this -- as soon as somebody has taken a piece of ground.

11 What sort of advice were you getting and to what extent

12 were your plans now formulating in terms of new

13 responsibilities we seemed to be acquiring just because

14 we now had a city on our hands, which we might not have

15 expected to have?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The reporting we were getting was

17 that a series of political contacts had been made, and

18 I think that Robin Brims tried to create a local

19 administration from tribal leaders, commercial leaders

20 and so on pretty soon on getting in there.

21 We then tried to adapt in the first instance

22 military resources to humanitarian support, and I think

23 that was successful within the limitation of military

24 force. But it was quite clear that we were going to

25 need to regear ourselves to something that went

1 significantly beyond simply a military input and
2 required consultation with NGOs, with our own
3 development ministry and so on and so on.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did that proceed?

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Episodically.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Elaborate?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We were still in the process -- it
8 was patchy to begin with, got better over time, but
9 I think during the period we are talking about now it
10 was in the process of getting better but was not yet
11 good.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And yet we were now about to become
13 an occupying power?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's correct.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on that position of being an
16 occupying power, you mentioned before the break quite
17 early on the sense of legal responsibilities and you
18 said these had been clarified. And did that extend into
19 the responsibilities of troops under the Geneva
20 Convention?

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That was a very late clarification.
22 As I recall, we actually reproduced an aide-memoire, or
23 the forces in theatre produced an aide-memoire which
24 laid out very clearly what the contingent
25 responsibilities of an occupying force were, which was

1 then widely disseminated.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this dissemination was quite

3 late in the day?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't remember whether it was

5 before we crossed the border or not, but it was around

6 that time.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But all troops understood what their

8 responsibilities were, to the extent that you could do

9 what you could to ensure that all troops --

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: You have made the reservation that

11 I was about to make.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally, before handing over to

13 Sir Roderic, how concerned were you, given what you had

14 seen in terms of militias and so on, that the numbers of

15 troops that we might have there would be sufficient to

16 cope with what might be a more difficult aftermath if

17 the defeat of the Iraqi conventional forces led perhaps

18 into an immediate insurgency or an eventual insurgency?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that in a sense the way that

20 you describe that is getting ahead of the way we felt at

21 the time it was happening.

22 First of all, the combat phase was not yet over.

23 Secondly, we hadn't found any weapons of mass

24 destruction, and the prime reason for going there in the

25 first instance was to do that rather than acquit our

1 subsequent responsibilities. So I think that I felt my
2 attention being drawn in a number of different
3 directions at that time, of which the Phase 4
4 responsibility was only one.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is an interesting point you have
6 just made and one possibly we should have thought about
7 more.

8 As you say, our role was defined: deal with weapons
9 of mass destruction, both in terms of not getting
10 attacked by them or coping if we were, and seeking them
11 out. Perhaps you could tell us how this was integrated
12 into the plans. Did you have special units designed to
13 do this?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We had certainly special processes:
15 Sensitive site exploitation, SSE -- an American
16 phrase -- which is exactly what it says it is, and as
17 the conventional advance went on there were a series of
18 sites that were pre-identified that were then searched
19 for evidence of WMD.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were your thoughts as very
21 little was found?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I felt that I had embarked upon
23 a war for one reason or one imperative and all of
24 a sudden I had an entirely different imperative, and
25 that was to stick Iraq back together again.

1 The reason that I think I felt -- and I think most
2 soldiers felt -- that we were involved in the conflict
3 in the first instance was around weapons of mass
4 destruction, but once we had invaded Iraq that had
5 translated into a debt to the Iraqi people.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, it takes a long time after
7 this before the ISG decides that there weren't any
8 weapons of mass destruction. Perhaps it is January 2004
9 before David Kay makes his famous announcement that we
10 were all wrong. But you were coming to quite an early
11 conclusion that actually there wasn't much there?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: When he made that declaration it was
13 at the end of an exhaustive process. We were at the
14 beginning of that process, but we would have expected at
15 some stage to have found some of this stuff.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is difficult to give a proportion
17 of the operation that was geared to the actual finding
18 of it, but was 5 per cent, 10 per cent?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was small. I mean -- it was
20 subordinate to decisive manoeuvre. Getting to Baghdad,
21 winning the conventional phase was what it was all about
22 and this was very much a subtext, but an important
23 subtext.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of the sort of logic of the
25 whole thing as it has been described to us, the aim was

1 to disarm Iraq and if you had to do that by regime
2 change, so be it, but it was almost a subsidiary
3 benefit.

4 Now, you are getting in there and you are finding
5 nothing. Presumably you are receiving the reports that
6 nothing has been found. How were you describing this to
7 ministers?

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Exactly as you have just
9 described it. Simply on a flat factual basis.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What response were you getting?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: A sort of flat factual response.
12 What went on then in closed political consultation,
13 I don't know.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this meant, as far as you were
15 concerned, that the focus now had shifted, but that
16 focus would always have been there, whether or not
17 weapons of mass destruction had been found.

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I don't think the focus had shifted.
19 You mean between regime change and weapons of mass
20 destruction?

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just quoting you back.

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it is interesting if you
23 look at the missions at the time. The mission given to
24 the commander at CentCom was, in sequence: topple the
25 Iraqi regime; disarm Iraq of weapons of mass

1 destruction; create the circumstances for the handover
2 to stability. And as I recall the British mission, it
3 had weapons of mass destruction first.

4 Now, I think that in defence of the American
5 position, they would say that until such time as you
6 have got rid of a central coordinating authority, how
7 can you go about disarming them of weapons of mass
8 destruction. So it may be a semantic argument, but if
9 there was a difference in nuance between the two
10 national positions, that was it.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But once you are there and not
12 finding anything, you can't say, "Gosh, this is
13 a terrible mistake, we should all go home"?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's exactly what I meant when
15 I said a moment ago that we swapped one set of
16 responsibilities for another.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, it is an important factor in
18 the whole consideration. Do you think it made
19 a difference to the military perception of their role,
20 that the thing for which they had gone there was not
21 there?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, it did. I mean, I think that
23 if we had found these things immediately, it would have
24 been an instantaneous sense of vindication, and we
25 didn't have that.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Roderic?

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In July 2003, you swapped one set of

4 responsibilities for another.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You moved from PJHQ to be the Deputy

7 Chief of Defence Staff with commitments, and you

8 remained in that post for an unusually long period of

9 time, until --

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The early part of 2006.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The early part of 2006. So you at least

12 have provided some of the continuity that has been

13 lacking on the part of others both at PJHQ, where the

14 CJO turned over a number of times in this period, and

15 the field. Can you describe the role and

16 responsibilities that you fulfilled in this new job?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I actually saw what Tony Pigott said

18 on this and I can't really improve it. What was then

19 called the DCDS commitments is responsible for the

20 military strategic advice to the Chiefs of Staff. What

21 I think was important during the time that I was in the

22 job was the increasing realisation that we would only

23 get something that looked like an acceptable outcome in

24 Iraq by pulling together all of the various dimensions

25 of governmental cooperation.

1 So I think I was probably more involved in
2 discussions across government than perhaps I had been in
3 the case previously.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So within government, within Whitehall,
5 what were these processes, were they beginning to
6 improve?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. I think the two things were
8 happening simultaneously. We were getting better at
9 internal coordination and also the external
10 manifestation of that in terms of the effect we were
11 having on the ground. But at the same time the
12 situation in Iraq was deteriorating, and I think the
13 situation in Iraq was deteriorating faster than our
14 response was improving.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How much were we able anyway to control
16 that from Whitehall? By this stage, weren't the key
17 figures the people on the ground?

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but I think the responsibility
19 of Whitehall at that stage and throughout is to provide
20 the resources that then the people on the ground can use
21 to the best effect.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And how did you relate in this new role
23 to the British military on the ground in Iraq, both the
24 Senior British Military Representative in Baghdad and
25 the GOC of the Multi National --

1 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Much more with the man in Baghdad,
2 because this was the natural functional relationship
3 between the capital in Iraq back to the
4 Ministry of Defence.

5 As far as what became the GOC MND South East was
6 concerned, that was very much a relationship with the
7 Chief of Joint Operations.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So that would have been in your previous
9 job?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I was his deputy. That was very
11 much a military-to-military relationship. What you were
12 expecting from Baghdad was a sense nonetheless of what
13 was going on in military terms, but what was going on in
14 every other dimension that the government might be
15 interested in.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, we have talked to a number of people
17 who have fulfilled that had role, and they have
18 essentially described how they were doing much more of a
19 pol/mil role and they weren't directly commanding
20 British forces as such at all.

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Correct.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You arrive in the new job in July. You
23 have just described the fact that the war had resulted
24 in us finding ourselves in a situation of a completely
25 different kind to the one we thought we were going into.

1 We were now responsible for trying to stick Iraq back
2 together again, as you rightly put it.

3 The CPA, before you arrived in July, has come into
4 being under Ambassador Jerry Bremer, and on 16 May and
5 23 May he has promulgated his first decrees: one about
6 de-Ba'athification, the other about the disbandment of
7 the Iraqi army.

8 By the time you arrive, what had been the
9 consequences of this very sharp change of tack by the
10 coalition authorities, and in particular -- I mean, the
11 army, as we know, had dissolved, it had disbanded
12 itself.

13 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How was the coalition going about putting
15 the army back together again, reconstructing it and
16 getting back people who'd gone out in most cases with
17 weapons or with access to weapons stores and in some
18 cases were now fighting against us, and unpaid, no
19 structure to belong to? What were we doing about this
20 in this period?

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: A number of things. First of all,
22 we were creating a capacity to train the nascent Iraqi
23 army, and that was the MNSTC-I. I can't remember what
24 it stands for, but it was the multinational training
25 organisation to which we embedded people and to which we

1 created a training capacity, both in MND South East and
2 elsewhere. For example, we were heavily involved in the
3 training -- in the officer academy which was just
4 outside Baghdad.

5 So at a purely practical and material level, we were
6 doing that. We were also involved in the development
7 and evolution of policy about the way in which these
8 institutions could be recreated. We were intimately
9 involved in the recreation of an Iraqi Ministry of
10 Defence and we were also involved in some of the
11 initiatives which would tempt people to come back into
12 the army.

13 It is an interesting -- I think that Bremer has been
14 widely castigated for the decisions he took, but as you
15 have just observed, to some extent it was a spontaneous
16 response, the thing did just melt away, and the one
17 advantage that the Iraqi army has had subsequently over
18 the Iraqi police force is that it was created ab initio
19 and thus did not contain some of the flaws that
20 manifested themselves in the Iraqi police force in
21 subsequent years.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did our policy makers in Whitehall
23 realise how long it was going to take to create a new
24 army ab initio? What targets were being set?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't recall. We didn't

1 comprehend the scale of the things that I think we were
2 involved in.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think there were targets, specific
4 numerical targets were being set in that period to train
5 numbers of troops. I can't recall the exact numbers,
6 but I think we were aiming for around three Iraqi
7 divisions initially. That was going to take about
8 a year. Does that sound realistic to you?

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It sounds like the assumptions we
10 made at the time. Retrospectively it doesn't sound
11 realistic.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did we appreciate what a long haul that
13 was going to be?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Go back to something I said earlier,
15 before we invaded we were completely unaware of the
16 scale of the enterprise that we were involved in and the
17 energies that we were going to release.

18 At about that time it was beginning to become
19 apparent to us quite how large a challenge this was. So
20 I think that almost we had a target that was constantly
21 receding in the distance. We made arrangements and we
22 made assumptions that we would be able to address this
23 in certain ways, but as the whole situation became more
24 difficult and more intractable, then the assumptions we
25 made about scale and time began to become extended.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, how quickly did we think we were
2 going to be able to stabilise the situation?

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that at one level we almost
4 thought we could whip in and whip out. That was never
5 explicitly stated. It was almost a natural consequence
6 of the Strategic Defence Review, which said that we
7 would be involved in expeditionary operations of limited
8 duration, but we wouldn't accept enduring commitments.

9 So to some extent all of the intellectual framework
10 that we were basing our policies upon led us to assume
11 that we would be able to get in and get out. That very
12 quickly became -- it very quickly became apparent that
13 that would not be the case.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We were already getting that. By
15 autumn 2003 we had taken out two thirds of our
16 operational forces.

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: But we still had a responsibility
18 there that was getting larger all of the time.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But were the pressures in this early
20 period, at least at the Whitehall end, to continue the
21 drawdown still to get out quickly?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. And people were still thinking we
24 could achieve stabilisation by the end of 2003,
25 normalisation in 2004, that sort of process?

1 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, they were. You would have read
2 the documents. Those were exactly the assumptions that
3 were made.

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And you, from your knowledge of the
5 situation, were content to go along with these
6 assumptions?

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but the further we got into the
8 process, the less achievable they began to look.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What was the focus -- you have said your
10 particular focus was on the Baghdad relationship?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Looking more widely at the
13 Ministry of Defence at this time and the Whitehall
14 planning processes and so on, were they mainly focused
15 on dealing with the coalition operation in Iraq as
16 a whole or on making a success of what many have
17 referred to as the British box, the four provinces in
18 the south-east?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The latter.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said some of the important decisions
21 that were being taken in Whitehall were about resources.
22 Did you feel, in the meetings you attended, that the
23 right decisions were being taken about resources to make
24 a success of the south-east?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No, I didn't. I have used episodic

1 previously and I think that that best captures where we
2 were at that time.

3 The full mechanisms of government in that early
4 stage were not being deployed in order to give the
5 resources that would create an exemplary effect.

6 Exemplary was very much the leitmotif of the time.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just picking that point up, from our
8 previous witnesses, you have a sense of a tension
9 between the view that in the end this all depended upon
10 what happened in Baghdad.

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And that however wonderful and
13 exemplary we were going to be in our box, if -- not us
14 particularly, but the Americans made a mess of Baghdad,
15 then it would be for nought. You then have the other
16 view that perhaps by showing just how it could be done
17 in the south, where it was, for a variety of reasons,
18 much easier, that this exemplary effect would
19 demonstrate to the Americans how they should behave in
20 Baghdad.

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was that ever realistic?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It may not have been -- well, in
24 a sense -- wrong question. But I think what you have
25 just described perfectly captures the debate at the

1 time.

2 I think that we believed we had something to teach
3 the Americans at the time, and I think they also
4 believed we had something to teach them. I think that
5 the transition by the Americans from a war fighting army
6 to a counter-insurgency army was a difficult and
7 protracted process, but I think that the one thing that
8 I would say is that, you know, the American genius for
9 reinvention has seldom illustrated itself better than
10 the way in which they took one army into Iraq in 2003
11 and by 2006/2007, they were employing an army inside
12 Iraq that bore very little resemblance to that early one
13 in terms of the tactical techniques and procedures that
14 they were using.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And we heard about that yesterday.
16 But for the Iraqis it was quite unfortunate to be sort
17 of experimented on this in way. They were the ones who
18 received the pain of the Americans having to learn.

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's correct.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And I think some of the reports of
21 the problems of transition in Baghdad and the loss of
22 Iraqi support by the fact that the American troops were
23 comporting themselves still in full combat mode was one
24 reason why so much was lost then.

25 Were you aware of that as a problem and were you

1 conveying these concerns to the Americans?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. Yes, to both those things. It

3 was something that we were acutely aware of.

4 At the time, we made rather simplistic comparisons

5 between British troop patrolling in soft skin vehicles

6 and berets and American troops in full battle rig and

7 armoured vehicles. That was an unsophisticated

8 response, but it seemed to us to capture the difference

9 between the two at that time.

10 We made that point to them on a regular basis and we

11 also hoped and believed that the effect that we would

12 have in Basra would somehow communicate itself to the

13 way in which they would conduct themselves as well, as

14 you described earlier on.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the American doctrine at the

16 time was very much bound up with force protection?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the main priority was to make

19 sure American troops were not at risk, rather than

20 thinking how their actions created the necessary

21 political effect, social effect, within their sector?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's correct.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of dealing with the

24 consequences of that, were you aware that if the

25 Americans didn't improve the situation quite rapidly --

1 or maybe it was beyond improvement -- that our box would
2 start to look increasingly vulnerable?

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but I think what you were
4 hoping -- not just hoping for. This wasn't just a vain
5 hope. What we were hoping to do was create the
6 circumstances where indigenous Iraqi capacities would
7 begin to emerge. And that's not just in terms of
8 creating an army, it is also in terms of writing
9 a constitution, creating a government and allowing the
10 instruments of national power to begin to express themselves
11 internally within the country.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, we will come to that in one
13 second. Part of that -- something Sir Roderic already
14 mentioned -- is the drawdown of our own forces.

15 Now, this proceeded during 2003 along the lines that
16 had been agreed before the war. Was there ever any
17 suggestion that this might be unwise, that perhaps we
18 should keep our forces at a higher level?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That was a constant dialogue about
20 force levels, and as Sir Roderic mentioned, there was
21 very much an assumption that we would draw down and we
22 did proceed to draw down. But I think over the entire
23 period of our involvement in Iraq, there was a constant
24 internal debate between the commanders on the ground,
25 who quite frequently would look for more forces, and the

1 policy makers in Whitehall who were looking to reduce
2 the level of commitment.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the latter won?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, they did.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was there a concern that this may
6 make the position of our forces more rather than less
7 dangerous?

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: There was a concern that that was
9 the case but I think that -- I mean, this makes it sound
10 like a very adversarial exchange. It wasn't necessarily
11 like that. What we had was a plan to create a measure
12 of stability, and against that measure of stability we
13 should have been able to make certain assumptions about
14 the reduction in force levels.

15 What I think perhaps got out of kilter was the level
16 of stability we achieved and the amount of force that we
17 actually committed to bring that about.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And is there a tension here between
19 the desire to have a limited liability operation and to
20 be exemplary?

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: There is a tension. Of course there
22 is.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would it have been better in terms
24 of influencing the United States if we had been
25 prepared, not to stay in what may seem to be rather

1 a safe box in the south, but actually to have taken an
2 Iraq-wide role, working hand in hand with the Americans.

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, and that was something that was
4 hotly debated at the time and in the immediate aftermath
5 of the invasion. There was a suggestion -- and I think
6 this has been reported to the committee already -- that
7 we might send some troops to Baghdad on the exemplary
8 ticket, that this was something we felt that we knew how
9 to do.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was 3 Para?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, it was, and that we could have
12 a shop window, which would illustrate our capabilities
13 nationally but also maybe act as a live seminar about
14 the way in which these sorts of operations should go.

15 The decision was taken not to do that, and I think
16 that -- I was for that decision at the time. I think
17 that the arguments are balanced. Had we done that, it
18 is possible that we could have had a wider impact but we
19 would then have been creating a small British island
20 inside an increasingly confused situation, where
21 tactical coordination with the surrounding American
22 forces would have presented lots of problems.

23 There was also the level of national liability we
24 were willing to accept and, as you have already implied,
25 the assumption there was a limited liability.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just move on to --

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just before you do, who took the decision

3 not to do that?

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The Chief of the Defence Staff held

5 the view that we should not send our troops to Baghdad,

6 but it was never going to be his final decision; it was

7 something that he would have then discussed with the

8 Secretary of State, and I don't know where it went

9 beyond that.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was the point formally put to ministers?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't recall. When the debate

12 took place, again I found myself at Northwood and so at

13 that end of the conversation and without having full

14 visibility of what went on at this end.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you just pick up this question

16 of the broad heading of security sector reform? We have

17 heard that at the start of September the Prime Minister

18 held a meeting with the two people who probably knew

19 most about the situation on the ground, John Sawers and

20 Jeremy Greenstock, and took the view that the key to it

21 all was in improving the police force.

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was this decision communicated back

24 to you? Indeed, were you part of these discussions?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it was a shared view.

1 I think for a long time we had seen that getting some
2 resolution of the civil issues that existed were going
3 to be best addressed through an effective police force,
4 and to that extent they were probably more important
5 than the army. It was then actually finding the
6 instruments to create an effective police force that
7 became a much more difficult problem.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were those difficulties?

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The fact that we had very little
10 training capacity to offer. Whereas the British armed
11 forces habitually train elsewhere, it is something which
12 everybody recognises as an established role, I don't
13 think that the 42 or 43 English police forces have
14 anything -- English and Welsh police forces have
15 anything like the same assumption about their
16 responsibilities. So finding people was a difficult
17 thing to do.

18 You also had an unreconstructed Iraqi police force,
19 in which there were an awful lot of people who were
20 either involved in criminality or in militia activities.
21 So the base upon which you were building in some cases
22 was profoundly unsound.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was the suggestion that this was
24 therefore a rather unrealistic expectation that much
25 could be done about this in the short-term and though

1 desirable, we probably ought to plan on the assumption
2 that for a while we were going to be dealing with
3 exactly the sort of police force you described?
4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, unrealistic in what sense?
5 That it would be done quickly?
6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, that you could set as an
7 objective: we must sort out the Iraqi police force, as
8 if that was an easy thing to do within the timescales in
9 which we were looking at things?
10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was not an easy thing to do but
11 it was an absolutely necessary thing to do. If there
12 was a single critical path through this entire thing, it
13 was creating a capacity for civil governance, and at
14 a street level that would be exercised by the Iraqi
15 police force.
16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But we have also heard that in a
17 sense this is still work in progress. So, even this
18 long after the start, it is still eluding --
19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's true.
20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A further question, just in terms of
21 the overall effect on British military capacity. We had
22 hoped to get out of Iraq, that the drawdown that took
23 place during 2003 would move so that we would be out of
24 things, hopefully, in 2004, yet now we have what we had
25 hoped to avoid, an enduring commitment.

1 What was the effect on Britain's capacity to take on
2 operations elsewhere?

3 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It obviously limited them and some
4 of the assumptions that we -- we were already breaching
5 the assumptions that we had taken into the conflict,
6 which was the scale of our enduring operations. So at
7 the time when we were involved in Iraq and also
8 beginning to think about how we might take on a more
9 formative role in Afghanistan, that very much focused
10 our attention on those two theatres and it meant, in
11 terms of our contingent ability to respond to anything
12 else that came up, it was increasingly difficult.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the criticisms
14 President Obama made about the Bush administration is
15 that the focus on Iraq meant that they took their eyes
16 off Afghanistan and let the situation deteriorate there.
17 Do you think that would be a criticism of what happened
18 with us as well?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No. I get the general point and
20 I agree with the general point but I think that the
21 level of liability that we had in Afghanistan at that
22 stage in Mazar-e-Sharif was not that significant. It
23 was only when we began to think in terms of how we might
24 take on a different role -- and that eventually
25 crystallised in the deployment to Helmand -- that our

1 role in Afghanistan changed.

2 So I don't think that we were making a contribution

3 on a scale that would have been particularly missed if

4 we had not populated it properly.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But we are starting now to think

6 that we might have to. So, just in terms -- I know

7 Sir Roderic wants to ask some questions on this, but

8 just in terms of the capacity of British forces, could

9 you just give us an indication of what sort of capacity

10 we had at this point, because your job would be to look

11 at precisely this issue?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We were exceeding all the

13 assumptions we made on capacity, and therefore I think

14 that the victims of this eventually were probably the

15 Land ORBAT, who were finding themselves deployed --

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's Order of Battle.

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I am sorry, yes, the land order of

18 battle, the British army who find themselves being

19 deployed on a much more regular basis, with far shorter

20 tour intervals than any of our assumptions previously

21 would have tolerated.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So perhaps you can then tell the

23 impact of the growing view that southern Afghanistan was

24 a place we also ought to be in numbers had on our

25 planning for Iraq?

1 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it pre-disposed us to make
2 certain assumptions about the speed within which we
3 could get out of Iraq, and I think at that time there
4 was a general strategic intent that we should disengage
5 in Iraq, which would be based upon conditions -- we
6 weren't going to do this precipitately but we would make
7 certain assumptions about the speed with which we would
8 bring about the sorts of levels of stability that we
9 wanted to.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When exactly are we talking about
11 now.

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: When?

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, when are we --

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I guess this would have been
15 a debate which started in 2004 and then went on into
16 2005.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Sorry, carry on.

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That we made certain assumptions
19 about the effect we would have in Iraq. That would
20 allow us to draw down our forces. That would then allow
21 us to relocate the emphasis of our military deployments
22 in Afghanistan rather than Iraq.

23 Now, as an overall scheme of manoeuvre, that's the
24 way that it actually turned out, but where we got it
25 entirely wrong was the timings within which it would be

1 possible to do that.

2 So we began to ramp up in Afghanistan before we had
3 disinvested to the level that we had expected in Iraq,
4 which then led to increasing tensions in terms of the
5 availability of forces.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you just describe your role
7 these sort of debates in terms of the job you were
8 holding in the Ministry of Defence?

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. This whole idea about the
10 balance between the two theatres of Iraq and Afghanistan
11 was quintessentially what the DCDS Commitments was
12 about. It was about giving sets of advice to the Chiefs
13 of Staff on the way in which military force should be
14 applied in pursuit of all of these strategic objectives
15 that we as a nation were looking at at the present time.
16 So it was never Iraq in isolation or Afghanistan in
17 isolation, it was always looking at the two in
18 conjunction.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did you weigh the competing
20 demands of these two theatres?

21 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We needed to do a job in Iraq, which
22 needed to be finalised and required whatever level of
23 commitment of force that was, but a sense that in
24 Afghanistan, which had become moribund at the time -- we
25 felt that the campaign in Afghanistan had become

1 moribund -- we could have a transformational effect, in
2 moving from the north to the south, bringing with us
3 a far greater emphasis on the south, bringing with us
4 allies into the south, which would then give the Afghan
5 campaign a far greater sense of focus and purpose.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this is quite an undertaking,
7 when we are already stuck in, stranded almost, in Iraq.

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were the assumptions about how
10 quickly we could get out of Iraq, given that you have
11 got a deteriorating security situation at the time?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: The assumptions were that we would
13 be out far sooner than eventually we were out, and to
14 that extent I think the assessments about the sequencing
15 between the Iraq and the Afghan theatre were flawed.
16 What has happened over time is exactly that transition
17 has taken place but the cost has been a very heavy one
18 upon the land forces, who have had to simultaneously do
19 two campaigns.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can we put some numbers and dates on
21 this, if possible, from, say, the summer of 2004,
22 I guess, when you are starting to look at this,
23 and January 2006, when we made the announcements on
24 Afghanistan? So there is a debate going on through this
25 period. What were the starting assumptions, shall we

1 say, about when we would be able to get out of Iraq?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't remember the dates that we

3 had, but if you have had access to the papers, you will

4 have seen these. But I think something like the end of

5 2006 we began to feel we would be able to draw down

6 significantly and thereby sequence and move out of Iraq

7 into Afghanistan.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But during the course of 2005 you

9 had been given very little encouragement that the

10 security situation was going to improve sufficiently for

11 us to be able to get out.

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's true.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did that effect the debate going

14 on about the commitment to Afghanistan?

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think we probably here have

16 a tension between the level of strategic ambition and

17 the degree of material resource to be able to make it

18 work, and I think that we had a level of strategic

19 ambition within the military and across government to

20 become more significantly involved in Afghanistan, and

21 that was driving an awful lot of what was happening at

22 the present time.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Our Inquiry is obviously into Iraq

24 rather than Afghanistan, but this is also clearly

25 relevant to the Iraq decisions.

1 What sort of assumptions were you making about what
2 we would face in Afghanistan? The reason why the
3 strategic ambition was growing was presumably not only
4 because the operation had become moribund, as you put
5 it, but because the Taliban appeared to be growing in
6 strength.

7 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. Sorry, the question is, what
8 effect --

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Leading on to the question of what
10 is it that -- how demanding did you expect the
11 Afghanistan role to be because if you are balancing
12 these two things, if the Afghanistan role was going to
13 be too demanding, then it would certainly exceed our
14 capacity.

15 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: At the time Afghanistan was pretty
16 thinly populated with military forces, and in some
17 areas -- and Helmand was an example of this -- there was
18 a very, very light footprint, which was primarily
19 American at the time, and we had a less than accurate
20 sense of precisely what Helmand would become in due
21 course, and I think that it was only when we were
22 actually into the course of the operation that the full
23 scale became apparent.

24 Now, if this sounds as though it has a remarkable
25 resemblance to going into Iraq, then you are absolutely

1 right to draw that conclusion.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One might say to into a theatre once
3 and get surprised is unfortunate but, if it happens
4 a second time, is a bit strange.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, that seems like a fair call,
6 but at the time the intelligence that was there actually
7 portrayed Helmand as a reasonably benign place. I think
8 we can see in retrospect that was because we knew we had
9 a less than comprehensive view of precisely what was
10 going on there.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So here we are in a situation where
12 we are stuck in Iraq, we have got a seriously
13 deteriorating situation during 2005. We have heard that
14 the delay in forming the new government meant a loss of
15 momentum in the counter-insurgency operations. We have
16 got problems with Sadrists and the police force and so
17 on in our sector. Our ministers are starting to think
18 that maybe they ought to do something in Afghanistan.

19 Now, there must have been an argument that, "Please
20 wait, we really just can't do this until we are
21 absolutely sure that we can get out of Iraq." Was that
22 argument made?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That argument was made but it was
24 also competing with lots of other arguments. One was
25 the scale of our international responsibilities, or the

1 responsibilities we were willing to accept. Another one
2 was a sense of Afghanistan is going nowhere, we can make
3 a decisive intervention by changing the focus of our
4 deployment from north to south and, in doing that,
5 kickstart the whole process of wider NATO engagement,
6 and so on and so on and so on.

7 I think there was also a view within the British
8 army that they could have more success in Afghanistan
9 than they could have in Iraq. So, you know, again this
10 wasn't a single conversation about a single theme; there
11 were many strands to the conversations that were taking
12 place.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So if we have got to fight
14 somewhere, we would rather fight in Afghanistan, where
15 we could make a difference, and on such basis we make,
16 sort of, grand strategic decisions?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: No, what I've said to you is those
18 are strands of the conversations that were taking place.
19 Grand strategic decisions were made on the synthesis of
20 all of the points that were created at the time.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I ask what your position was in
22 all of this, what arguments you were making?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: At the time I felt that if we could
24 properly sequence ourselves out of Iraq, then the
25 overall plan was possible, but again, just as with the

1 invasion of Iraq, there were inherent risks involved in
2 it.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the main risk, as we have heard,
4 is, first, it would be harder to get out of Iraq and,
5 secondly that, once we had got into Afghanistan, it
6 would be much worse and more demanding than we were
7 anticipating.

8 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but that wasn't clear at the
9 time by any means. I think that the greatest risk at
10 the time was seen as spreading the British army far too
11 thin.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And how was that risk to be
13 mitigated?

14 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was to be mitigated by creating
15 the effect that we hoped to in Iraq, and it was also to
16 be mitigated by asking more of the field army than
17 either our assumptions or our previous practices had
18 assumed.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And when the moment came for the
20 decision on Afghanistan to be made, in January 2006, how
21 was this presented in terms of the likely impact on our
22 ability to draw down with a degree of ability and grace,
23 if you like, from Iraq.

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think the assumptions -- and this
25 was -- I think I was probably in Baghdad at the time

1 that this was going on?

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I thought you went to Baghdad

3 a little later but maybe --

4 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Early 2006?

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think I left the

7 Ministry of Defence around January.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, yes.

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: So my recollection of it at the time

10 was that we certainly at that stage did not see the

11 scale of challenge that Afghanistan would subsequently

12 become. Neither, initially, did we make assumptions

13 about the force levels that that would require. So we

14 were expecting at that stage that there would be

15 a significantly lower investment of force than

16 eventually proved to be the case. So there was a --

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Are we are talking about 4,000 or so

18 troops?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't remember. Yes, it sounds

20 about right.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we thought it would be

22 manageable?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, we did.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. So we now about to move on to

25 your period in Baghdad.

1 Can I just ask one question about your sense of Iraq
2 over this period and the deterioration in the security
3 situation? How frustrating was it that it seemed that
4 almost nothing that was tried seemed to be working over
5 2004/2005?

6 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It was intensely frustrating.

7 I think we went back and forth to Baghdad -- I went
8 there on a number of occasions, other people did as
9 well -- and it was our collective inability to see which
10 levers you needed to pull in order to bring about the
11 things that we wanted to bring about, and we could feel
12 that we were devoting levels of resource to this thing
13 that should have been having manifestations that we
14 simply couldn't see.

15 So it was trying to see through the complexities of
16 Iraqi behaviours, Iraqi bureaucracy and the way in
17 which we could get the best out of those, which was the
18 major challenge of the time.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I mean, the American strategy was
20 sort of a larger version of ours at the same time, which
21 was to hopefully draw down their forces while building
22 up the Iraqis.

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, but I think that changed during
24 the course of 2006, and I think that has been recorded
25 to you already. And during 2006, or the latter part

1 of 2006, the Iraq Study Group came out with its report
2 that invited that certain internal and external measures
3 be taken.

4 I think that history might recall that
5 President Bush had a Lincoln moment and decided to go in
6 a different direction and go for the surge at that
7 stage -- I think that was the point which would have
8 been late 2006 or early 2007, where we and the Americans
9 began to go in separate directions. And at that stage
10 they decided that they were going to do everything they
11 could do to win and we had decided that we were really
12 about trying to create the circumstances most conducive
13 to our own withdrawal.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You were in Baghdad while that
15 discussion was going on?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: For part of the discussion. The final
17 decisions were made subsequently.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Presumably you were advising back on
19 how it seemed to be in Baghdad --

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- at the time. And how did it seem
22 to you?

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: It seemed to me to be parlous.

24 I think what I'm about to say now, as I think about it
25 retrospectively, will have a clarity that I didn't

1 possess at the time, but I think that looking back on it
2 what needed to happen in Iraq at that time was three
3 things: First of all, Al-Qaeda needed to be defeated;
4 secondly that the Sunni extremist elements needed to be
5 accommodated and reconciled; and thirdly, the Shia
6 extremist elements needed to be contained.

7 Now, the first of those created the pre-conditions
8 for the second, and the first of those was an almost
9 entirely military enterprise. The second one was
10 partially military, but mainly political, and the second
11 one, the reconciliation of the Sunni, in a sense then
12 created the political circumstances which allowed the
13 freedom of action of the Maliki Government to try and
14 contain the Sadrist elements within the Shia community.

15 So I think that looking back on it, I can see a
16 clear sequencing, and in many ways that is exactly what
17 turned out. I think that the defeat of Al-Qaeda is, as
18 yet -- it's an unrecorded story and I think that the
19 role of British -- particularly British special forces
20 in that was of an absolutely historic scale.

21 Once it was clear that Al-Qaeda in Iraq could be
22 defeated, then the Sunni extremist elements no longer
23 saw it in their interests to be continuing -- to
24 continue to be associated with the part of the
25 insurgency which Al-Qaeda had created. They then became

1 far more susceptible to an accommodation with
2 government. And once that started to happen, then the
3 whole emphasis of the internal political process could
4 be turned on to the containment of the Shia.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But at the time that you were
6 looking at it in early 2006, when you arrived, you had
7 the Grand Mosque in Samarra, and a common assessment at
8 the time was that the country was just heading towards
9 civil war.

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Correct. I said I see this with
11 greater clarity in retrospect, but I think at the time
12 what was actually happening is that incoherent
13 insurgency was becoming much more coherent, and also
14 there were reciprocal acts of provocation and violence
15 between the Sunni and the Shia communities which were
16 leading to this rapidly escalating process. And as
17 you've described it, it looked very much like civil war
18 at the time.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of our previous
20 conversation, did this create an incentive to get out as
21 quickly as we could lest we be enveloped in this, or
22 a sense of responsibility that we needed to stay longer
23 to see --

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it created a sense of
25 responsibility, but also an imperative to leave. And I

1 have already described that I think we decided during
2 that period to create the circumstances for our own
3 withdrawal rather than seek anything that might be
4 a more decisive outcome.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So although there was a more benign
6 development, in the way that you have described it, as
7 the Sunni community turned against Al-Qaeda and the ways
8 that were found to exploit this, we wanted to get out
9 come what may?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I don't think come what may is
11 a fair assessment, but yes, we did want to get out.
12 That undoubtedly was true.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So by this time the idea that we can
14 play an exemplary role to demonstrate how the whole
15 thing should be managed is really very much part of
16 history?

17 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I also think that the baton had
18 passed -- of intellectual leadership had passed from the
19 British military to the American military. The American
20 military by this stage had fully codified their
21 counter-insurgency procedures and were becoming better
22 and better at bringing about decisive effects on the
23 ground.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One final question and then I'll
25 hand over.

1 Just in terms of that doctrinal point, and going
2 back to what we said about Afghanistan -- we only
3 discussed this yesterday -- it is an important point
4 that the Americans -- and you have made it already --
5 that the Americans learned painfully and effectively
6 from the lessons of Iraq quite quickly.

7 Now, where, starting -- at this time, 2006 -- to
8 move into a new mission in Afghanistan, had we learned
9 sufficient of the lessons from our earlier experiences
10 in Iraq to apply them to Afghanistan?

11 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, that assumes that the two
12 theatres are synonymous and I don't think that's the
13 case.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I don't think they're synonymous,
15 but both counter-insurgency.

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think we lost the mantle of
17 intellectual leadership during the period of 2002
18 to 2006/2007. I think at the earlier stages, the
19 British armed forces were undoubtedly the best
20 practitioners of counter-insurgency probably on a global
21 basis. I think that position by 2006/2007 was occupied
22 by the American armed forces.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is one thing to lose intellectual
24 leadership. Did we grasp the lessons that might have
25 been applicable to Afghanistan as well as the Americans

1 did?

2 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think that the key lesson out of

3 all this, and I think this is a strand through

4 everything I have said this morning, is that if you want

5 to embark on great enterprises and bring about some

6 decisive outcome, then you need every bit of national

7 power that you can deploy and I don't think that lesson

8 necessarily went to Afghanistan.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just a couple of very quick questions,

11 because I think you and Sir Lawrence have covered all

12 the ground thoroughly.

13 Just in this period when you are the Senior British

14 Military Representative in Baghdad, picking up from your

15 points about intellectual leadership, did you feel as

16 General Cooper felt when he was doing the same job at

17 a different period, that as we had diminished the number

18 of British forces in the theatre -- and he was talking

19 about the fact that at this time the levels didn't

20 change greatly, we were down to 5,000 to 6,000 against

21 140,000 Americans -- that we were simply not going to

22 have a command role there, that realistically our

23 influence was really small at this time?

24 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think our influence declined over

25 the period for all sorts of reasons. I think the fact

1 that we were drawing down -- but, I mean, we were
2 drawing down with American agreement. We were drawing
3 down against a set of effective criteria about the
4 Iraqi-isation of the process. But undoubtedly there
5 were fewer of us there than there were before.

6 I think the Americans thought we had a lot to teach
7 them in the early part of the campaign. As time went on
8 they felt we had less to teach them. And both of those
9 things would have resulted in a reduction in influence.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: How did they view our performance in the
11 latter stages?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I don't entirely know. I think that
13 the -- when it gets through to 2007, which is the
14 denouement of the entire process, perhaps too far away
15 from it to offer you a clear view, but I think that they
16 always value what we did. I think that they learned
17 a lot from us, but I do not think at the end of the
18 process that they regarded us as the benchmark against
19 which they would compare results in their own areas.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, when you were there between March
21 and September of 2006, did they express any views,
22 positive or negative? I mean, you say "they valued us",
23 but were there any criticisms of us expressed to you in
24 private in Baghdad?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. There were criticisms of who

1 actually commanded MND South East, and was it the
2 American general in Baghdad, or was it the Chief of
3 Joint Operations in Northwood, or was it the CDS in
4 London, or was it the cacophony of noise that was around
5 him in Basra.

6 I think one of the great clarities of the American
7 military system is the simplicity and accountability of
8 their chains of command. I don't think they felt they
9 saw the same thing on our side.

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What did you feel? Did we have
11 insufficient clarity of command?

12 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I felt they were right.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were right. So of these different
14 elements, which was the nearest to being the driving
15 force, in your view?

16 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Of the diminution of our influence?

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Of the command in the south-east. You
18 said the Americans were unclear as to who commanded.
19 Who was the prime commander, in your view? Was it the
20 man on the spot? Was he being second guessed and
21 micromanaged from Northwood, from Whitehall or what?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it was a combination of all
23 those things. I think there was less discretion given
24 to the local commander than the Americans would have
25 expected, and there was less automaticity in the way

1 that he responded to the direction from Baghdad than
2 they would have expected inside their own system.

3 Having said that, one of the roles of the GOC of
4 MND South East was to exercise a national veto, and
5 there were certain circumstances under which that might
6 have been necessary.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you want to say any more about those
8 circumstances?

9 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I can't give you a specific example
10 and I do not have anything in mind, but one of the ways
11 in which we always equip our deployed commanders when
12 working in a coalition which is under somebody else's
13 command is you always give them the capacity to say no
14 if the circumstances demand it.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you think that we have since then
16 drawn the right lessons for the future about the way the
17 command is operated in these circumstances? Have there
18 been changes?

19 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, I think that in comparing the
20 way that we look at things to the way in which the
21 Americans look at things, there is a natural clarity to
22 their set-up because they are in charge.

23 If you are a subordinate part of this whole thing,
24 you are always working within an American framework and,
25 therefore, that complicates the way in which you have to

1 operate. I think that there is an inherent and an
2 enduring tension between guaranteeing the collective
3 outcome, which can only be achieved by getting the best
4 out of the coalition and also reserving a national
5 position, and that sometimes requires reference to
6 capitals.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Finally, when you left Iraq, probably
8 with some relief, in September 2006 having dealt with
9 this subject continuously for years, how did you assess
10 what we had achieved and what the future prospects were?
11 Had we succeeded or were we succeeding in sticking Iraq
12 back together again, as you put it? Were we anywhere
13 near to achieving the end state objectives that we had
14 with set out at the beginning, or had we changed those
15 objectives? Had we deployed enough resources, not only
16 troops on the ground, but resources to achieve our
17 objectives? What was your final assessment as you left?

18 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think the objectives that we
19 created for ourselves in the first instance were
20 unrecognisable in the autumn of 2006.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But we hadn't restated them?

22 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: We had left them behind.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did we have objectives at this stage or
24 not?

25 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, we did have objectives but they

1 were primarily -- the early part of the conversation --
2 primarily about getting out of the situation, but not at
3 any cost: getting out of the situation at some minimal
4 level of achievement. But at the same time there were
5 some things happening around then that began to look
6 encouraging and some of those things were the process of
7 dialogue with some of the Sunni refuseniks. It began to
8 look increasingly that they were beginning to form the
9 opinion that their future didn't lie in some ad hoc
10 alliance with Al-Qaeda, and also that their future lay
11 inside the political process and not outside the
12 political process.

13 So I think that at that time what I could see is
14 that there were some -- there were some undercurrents
15 taking place in Iraq that had the possibility of
16 bringing about a degree of closure and conclusion, which
17 I found reasonably encouraging.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Including things like Iraqi-isation as
19 well?

20 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes, Iraqi-isation had been going on
21 throughout the whole period.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But it takes time.

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: What I'm really talking about is the
24 reconciliation of these sometimes completely unbiddable
25 blocks: the Sunni population, the Shia population and

1 the Kurds playing a radical third role. You began to
2 see for the first time that there might be something
3 that could resemble a political consensus at the end of
4 the whole process.

5 Now, I think that that was only being brought about
6 because the ring had been held primarily by American
7 forces, but to a certain extent by British forces during
8 the time when the internal processes to bring that about
9 had actually occurred. So I felt that was an
10 achievement, but I think one could only see glimmerings
11 of hope at that time.

12 If I look back then and if I look back now and make
13 a judgment on whether we applied enough resource to
14 that, no, I don't think we did. But for the reasons
15 that I gave earlier in my testimony, the mechanisms of
16 government to bring that about were simply compromised
17 at the time.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And also because we had trouble taking
19 clear decisions about where to put our very limited
20 military resources. We only effectively had one
21 operational brigade, but that was one sixth of what we
22 could deploy in total.

23 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: That's true. I think
24 Professor Freedman implied this point earlier on, that
25 there might have been a mismatch between our level of

1 strategic ambition and our material ability to acquit
2 that.

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said earlier on that these things
4 were out of kilter.

5 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay, thank you.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: General Fry, I was going to ask whether you
8 had any final observations. Is there anything you would
9 like to add before we close this session?

10 LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think I just said it. If we make
11 the decision to embark on very large national
12 enterprises, we need to make sure that the full capacity
13 of the nation is behind them.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much indeed for your testimony
15 and thanks to all those who have sat through this
16 session this morning.

17 We will close now. At 2 o'clock we resume with an
18 afternoon session and our witnesses will be
19 Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Sir John Sawers and Desmond Bowen
20 representing, if you like, the triangle of senior
21 officials in Whitehall.

22 With that, thank you very much.

23 (12.35 pm)

24 (The short adjournment)

25