

1 (2.00 pm)

2 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE

3 THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon.

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Good afternoon.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: Well, let's begin the afternoon session.

6 This afternoon our objective is to get the perspective
7 from Baghdad on the British Government's decision-making
8 and policy in the period 2007 to 2009 and our witness,
9 welcome, is Christopher Prentice, who was ambassador to
10 Baghdad from September 2007 to November 2009. Is that
11 correct?

12 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: During this session we will be asking
14 questions about the British Government's objectives in
15 Iraq during the time that you were in post and how you
16 and your colleagues sought to fulfil those objectives.
17 We shall also be looking at relations with the
18 Iraqi Government and the diplomatic handling of the UK
19 military drawdown, and, finally, about the situation in
20 Iraq where you left post at the end of last year and
21 about your view of the prospects for the future.

22 I think the session could last up to two hours, not
23 longer.

24 We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence
25 based on recollection, and we, of course, check what we

1 hear against papers to which we have access, and remind
2 the witness you will later be asked to sign a transcript
3 of the evidence to the effect that the evidence given is
4 truthful, fair and accurate. That's a universal
5 injunction. With that by way of preliminary, can I turn
6 to Sir Martin Gilbert?

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to turn to your point of
8 arrival in Iraq. It is normal, of course, for
9 ambassadors to receive a pre-posting briefing and
10 meetings with senior officials and ministers and
11 I wondered, when you arrived, what you understood the
12 British Government's primary objectives in Iraq to be.

13 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, I did, I had two months in
14 London in which I went round and talked to nearly all
15 senior officials and across Whitehall and I had
16 a personal meeting with the Foreign Secretary as well.
17 It was clear that, as Simon MacDonald said yesterday,
18 our strategy and our policy in Iraq was mature and, you
19 know, this was an operation that had been going on for
20 many years and was being brought to completion, and the
21 objective was to develop Iraqi capacity, governmental
22 and military, in order to allow us to transition from
23 our role in a multinational force to a normal,
24 long-term, bilateral relationship.

25 It wasn't put quite in those terms at the start, but

1 that, I would say, would characterise the whole period,
2 but that's --

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What would your role be in achieving this?

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I was leading the mission, leading
5 the three missions in Iraq, in Basra, Erbil, and in
6 Baghdad. I was -- those missions, particularly the one
7 in Baghdad, represented a very wide range of government
8 institutions, ministries, agencies, and, of course,
9 I was sitting alongside the Senior British Military
10 Representative, Iraq, who was also
11 Deputy Commander (MNF), and had to work in very close
12 harness with him on the British military engagement and
13 in fulfilling the government agenda, which was
14 essentially to help Iraq move forward.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was the plan for the military
16 drawdown at that time? Was there yet a date in prospect
17 for the end of the UK's military mission?

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I actually arrived in Iraq in
19 Basra on the day that the British military forces
20 relocated from Basra Palace to the COB. So that was one
21 bookend, as it were, to my mission. If I could just
22 interject with the other bookend - on the day I left
23 Baghdad, I was handed a piece of paper which was the
24 final Ministry of Foreign Affairs formal note confirming
25 their ratification of our long-term military agreement.

1 So it has a neat conclusion.

2 The -- as has been described by witnesses in the
3 last day and a half, on arrival we were in the process
4 of moving towards provincial Iraqi control in Basra. We
5 were implementing the final phase of Operation Zenith,
6 which has been described. We were doing so in the
7 closest collaboration with the US and with the
8 Iraqi Government, and my immediate task in those first
9 months was to be a part of the consultation process and
10 the decision-making process with the Americans, and in
11 particular the Iraqis, towards PIC in Basra.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Dominic Asquith told us that in his
13 time there were difficulties in communication and
14 co-ordination between Baghdad and Basra. I wondered if,
15 during your time, these difficulties were ironed out or
16 what the relationship was, the impact --

17 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I read his evidence and he
18 referred first to the difficulty of movement, which was
19 inhibiting, and that didn't change in my time, in that
20 we were dependent -- if we wanted to get to Basra, we
21 needed to have a military asset. Under our duty of care
22 regulations, we couldn't use the emerging commercial
23 flights, which, towards the end of my period, were
24 available but we weren't allowed to use the internal
25 commercial flights. So we had to depend on helicopters

1 and military lift. But during my time we also had use of
2 US civilian aircraft through the US embassy. They
3 kindly made those available to us occasionally. So
4 physical movement to and from Baghdad and Basra I would
5 say was improving during my time but was still
6 difficult.

7 In terms of communications, we had confidential
8 email, we had telephone contact. I did not have
9 a secret, secure telephone to Basra but I didn't find
10 that particularly inhibiting.

11 It felt quite joined-up and joined-up enough. We
12 had good teams in Basra. They were -- had delegated
13 a large measure of delegated authority to run their
14 business, their interaction with the Basra authorities,
15 their responsibilities without consultation with me, but
16 on issues which were of -- either on which they needed
17 help from us in Baghdad or on which they recognised that
18 there were Baghdad political sensitivities, we consulted
19 as necessary.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What sort of issues were there that
21 they needed your help for?

22 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: One of the issues that was running
23 strongly when I arrived was the dispute between
24 Prime Minister Maliki and Governor Wa'ili in Basra, and
25 there is a long history to that which you will see in

1 the papers. It was clear that the decision to -- the
2 handling of PIC in Basra was going to require a healing
3 of that relationship to the extent that the government
4 could delegate its authority, which we were handing over
5 to the civilian power locally, and, so long as
6 Prime Minister Maliki had taken the view that no one
7 should have any contact with Governor Wa'ili in the
8 Iraqi or international machinery and while there was
9 a court case about his status going through the Iraqi
10 higher courts, this was difficult.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you able personally to involve
12 yourself in this?

13 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, I became quite closely
14 involved in that and we moved it to a resolution based
15 on the implementation of the results of the court
16 processes in Iraq.

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I wanted to ask you generally about
18 your relations with the Maliki government and in
19 particular who your main contacts were and how they
20 worked, how they operated.

21 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: One of the extraordinary features
22 of being engaged in Iraq, and particularly as
23 ambassador, was the degree of access that one had to all
24 levels of the government. I engaged largely with the
25 senior ministerial level, as needed with Prime Minister

1 Maliki direct, and -- but through all levels of our
2 mission we had engagement with the Iraqi authorities, as
3 with the Americans and other international actors.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did the Americans have such a good
5 engagement?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: With the Iraqis? They had an even
7 better engagement. They were the main partner and this
8 was reflected in the access that they had, particularly
9 to Prime Minister Maliki, but I would say that the
10 difference in frequency of engagement reflected the
11 difference in volume of issues which they were looking
12 at in comparison to those that we were looking at, which
13 required Prime Ministerial, ambassadorial, engagement.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What did Maliki himself tell you that
15 he wanted of Britain, both in terms of our military
16 contribution and also of course our non-military
17 contribution at that time?

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: He was very, very keen on the
19 relationship with Britain, in that -- in two respects:
20 one, he gave credit and thanks for what we had done in
21 being a major partner in the coalition which removed
22 Saddam Hussein and enabled Iraq to emerge as a free
23 country, and he also was keen to develop the --
24 a broader, deeper relationship, a normal relationship,
25 with Britain and -- built in part on some of our

1 historical engagement in the past, although that came
2 more from others than from him personally, but also --
3 and this governs the first two comments I made -- he
4 wanted to move on -- by the time I was there, he wanted
5 to move on as fast possible towards establishment of
6 Iraqi sovereignty.

7 So there was an urgency, as I think Simon MacDonald
8 said yesterday -- Prime Minister Maliki was an
9 accelerator of our process of transition, which
10 reflected his personal political wishes, but also the
11 broad Iraqi political agenda, that as soon as Iraq could
12 move to full independence and sovereignty, there was
13 a very strong and wide desire that that should happen,
14 and we shared that.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Was this a case of, if you are riding
16 a bicycle, the faster you ride, the more stable it is
17 and the less likely you are to fall over?

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I hadn't thought of that, but that
19 is a good -- the building of capacity in the Iraqi
20 military and security forces was obviously a very
21 important condition and factor in the pace at which we
22 could transition, but increasingly, at the political
23 level, not just from Prime Minister Maliki, it became
24 a case of requiring a transition, even perhaps before
25 there was full capacity to take on all the military and

1 security responsibilities.

2 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How important to him was our position
3 in the south, before, of course, the Charge of the
4 Knights, in your initial period?

5 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think we had to see it in the
6 national perspective. I think throughout the early
7 years, my impression is that Basra was a lesser focus of
8 concern to the Americans, to the Government of Iraq,
9 because it didn't pose the same challenges and
10 difficulties as the centre and Mosul and the tensions
11 with the Kurds. Although we were coping with real and
12 very different difficulties, for a number of years, my
13 impression is that the main worries of the -- of MNF and
14 of the Iraqis were about Baghdad, the centre, Anbar and
15 the north.

16 Another factor in Prime Minister Maliki's mind very
17 much was that Basra was the economic heart of the
18 country and the south, so he acknowledged that -- you
19 know, the importance of that and of its development.
20 There was an element, not just in
21 Prime Minister Maliki's mind, and particularly those
22 around him -- I would say that Dominick's evidence as to
23 the -- the misrepresentation sometimes of our role and
24 of our intentions in the South, which came to
25 Prime Minister Maliki's ears from those in his immediate

1 entourage was not always helpful, but the sense that the
2 British could not really be there just for Iraq, they
3 must be there for their own interests was there as
4 a sort of suspicion in the minds of the general
5 political class, and it took a bit of a struggle to
6 convince people that actually our intentions were benign
7 and not malign.

8 It was remarkable the number of times that I had to
9 restate that we had no intention to -- not to
10 Prime Minister Maliki, who understood this, but in more
11 general political discussion -- we had no intention of
12 creating more permanent military bases, which was part
13 of the propaganda of parts of the Arab world and of the
14 Iranians, that that was, you know, the very reverse of
15 our intention.

16 So there was some basic political education to be
17 done in the Iraqi public and political mind throughout
18 my period.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Do you feel at the earlier period you
20 were successful at this, you were able to put our
21 position effectively?

22 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think our actions spoke for us
23 in the end, but right to the end there were Iraqi
24 members of the Council of Representatives who did not
25 believe that we were serious about moving our forces out

1 of the South and really transferring sovereignty and
2 decision-making into Iraqi hands. I found it
3 remarkable, but it was a fact.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We come on now to the security issue
5 and Sir Lawrence Freedman will take this up.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You arrived in the country when the
7 surge, the US surge, had been underway for a number of
8 months and the Sadrism national ceasefire had been
9 announced by Moqtadr Al-Sadr.

10 Could you give us your impression of the general
11 security situation at this time?

12 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It seemed to me, quite soon after
13 my arrival, that the situation across the board was
14 actually better than I had been led to expect from my
15 months through the summer of briefing in London. This
16 applies not just to the security situation. I think the
17 reason that my briefing gave me a slightly more sobering
18 impression than I had on arrival was because the
19 situation had actually developed over that summer quite
20 markedly, and it was during those summer months that the
21 impact of the surge, but not just of the surge, also of
22 the -- as you mentioned, the Sadrism ceasefire which had
23 been emerging and had been speculated about all
24 through August, also the developing engagement in Anbar
25 with the "Sahwat" the Awakening movements, the

1 maturing of that into an initiative which the Government
2 of Iraq began to see as something they could engage with
3 and not as something which the coalition had put
4 together with some suspect motivation. Time itself,
5 a certain amount of exhaustion, all those factors were
6 leading to the numbers of incidents beginning to reduce.

7 The mechanisms which had been put in place alongside
8 the surge for a very detailed focus on management of
9 Baghdad under the heading of "Impose The Law",
10 [Fardh Al Qanoon], which was a version of the
11 comprehensive approach with US and Iraqi forces embedded
12 in strong points throughout the city, keeping security
13 under control and gradually establishing local Iraqi-led
14 security and then getting short-term and longer-term
15 economic development going in area by area across
16 Baghdad - all that was beginning to mature.

17 So quite early in my time, I think in September,
18 I sent a message back to London saying, "Actually, you
19 know, we have the prospect here of Iraq emerging well.
20 You know, if you can have strategic patience with this,
21 and we can, then there is a prospect here of the -- what
22 had been seen in 2005/2006, into the early part of
23 2007", as the risk of descent into civil war, possible
24 breaking up of the country, the risks that William Patey
25 had described at the end of his time, were now looking

1 as though Iraq was climbing out of that, you know,
2 tentatively but also fairly decisively.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Dominic Asquith, I think, told us
4 that he was quite sceptical initially of whether the
5 surge really could make a difference.

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Particularly, I think, about the
7 Sahwat initiative, but I think he had revised his view
8 about that.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: He said that too. But what is --
10 I mean, just from what you were saying, is that the
11 tenor in London before you went, which was reflected in
12 your briefing was still generally pessimistic in the
13 first part of 2007 about where Iraq was going or how
14 long it would take to turn things round.

15 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It was determined, I would say,
16 rather than pessimistic. I don't know if I used that
17 word. I probably wouldn't have done by choice. Because
18 I think that there was a strong measure of determination
19 to see this project through and it had long dawned on
20 everybody that it was tough, required us to be agile and
21 to be rethinking our approach, and there was a wish to
22 see the project through to completion. But, as
23 I arrived, I was able to report that perhaps it was not
24 going to be as thorny a path as we had feared.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think your earlier answer

1 indicates that the improvement in the security situation
2 wasn't simply a function of extra American troops on the
3 ground, but a whole series of political developments
4 that had been taken, some before the extra American
5 troops had arrived.

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: A general theme of the time I was
7 there was the emergence of politics, and that is, you
8 know, one could say, not before time, but -- because
9 right from the start what we had been looking for was
10 effective Iraqi political cooperation and leadership and
11 national reconciliation, a government of national unity
12 working together to deliver Iraqi objectives, and you
13 know, the years which you have heard evidence about
14 before showed how difficult and complex that was.

15 A very significant process was started by the August
16 agreement brokered by the Americans between the main
17 political parties, just before my arrival. I forget how
18 it was described. I think it was a leadership statement
19 or -- which set up mechanisms for high level political
20 consultation between the Prime Minister and the three
21 members of the Presidency Council, the so-called three
22 plus one, of recommitment by all the parties to national
23 reconciliation and the -- to make the national unity
24 government work more effectively, and the commitment to
25 which Prime Minister Maliki himself was committed, which

1 was important, and that began to work. It then faltered
2 again in the course of the first year I was there, but
3 it began to work in September.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Why did it falter?

5 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It faltered because of the
6 complexity and difficulty of Iraqi politics and the
7 fact, which is still the case -- and we will come to
8 this later, no doubt -- that existential issues about
9 Iraqi politics had still not been settled, which gives
10 me the only grounds for anxiety about Iraq's future
11 development. It is -- the same difficulties which were
12 apparent in previous years were still there in my time,
13 where you had the Kurds not yet finding the relationship
14 they needed and Iraq needed to establish between the
15 Kurdish region and the rest. You had the Sunni and Shia
16 tensions. You had intra - Shia tensions, intra-Sunni
17 tensions, external insurgency, all the rest.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So these were still --

19 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, and increasingly and very
20 importantly reflected in politics and not in conflict.
21 That was increasingly emerging as the manner in which
22 the Iraqi leadership and the Iraqi people chose to
23 settle these differences.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But, I mean, we have heard that
25 Maliki initially was seen as potentially quite

1 a sectarian figure that had adopted this national
2 reconciliation plan on taking office and trying to
3 develop himself as more of a national leader.

4 What was your assessment of the national
5 reconciliation plan and how well that was going?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: As, I think, William and Dominic
7 both said, Prime Minister Maliki was sincerely committed
8 to national reconciliation, national unity government,
9 but, you know, needed partners for that and I would say
10 was not always entirely consistent in his actions
11 - you know, as indeed his potential partners were
12 not entirely consistent with the pure objectives of
13 national reconciliation - in everything that emerged out
14 of the Prime Minister's office. So it was a case of all
15 the Iraqi political leadership finding it difficult to
16 cleave to that commitment to a selfless national
17 reconciliation process.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: Lawrence, for my better understanding, could
19 I just ask, for clarity: the emergence of politics
20 rather than conflict as a means of resolving or at any
21 rate managing initiatives, was this a single narrative,
22 a single trend or was it actually a series of discrete
23 situations, centre, north, intra-Shia and so on?

24 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: There are so many different
25 strands to it. There was -- for instance, you mentioned

1 the Sadrist ceasefire. There were many elements to
2 that. One of them was the Sadrist perception that, by
3 previously abandoning the UIA and taking their people
4 out of government, they had actually marginalised
5 themselves and they needed to get back into politics.
6 That was one strand, and that came and went throughout
7 the time I was there, with a degree of sincerity and
8 inconsistency, I have to say, because Muqtadar al Sadr in
9 Qom was not at all consistent in his pronouncements
10 or in his actions.

11 There is the Sunni dynamic as well, which, again,
12 I think, was more consistent. It was on a track which
13 pretty much continued through the time, of --

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Of re-engagement?

15 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Of re-engagement. Of the
16 realisation that it had been a strategic mistake of the
17 community to boycott previous election cycles. The
18 opening to the Sahwat and the action of the coalition,
19 which was successful, to persuade other communities to
20 embrace the Sahwat and to see them as a potential force
21 for stabilization; that was continuing. The tensions
22 between the various representatives of the Shia
23 community were again fluctuating and all of those in
24 their relationship with the Kurds were fluctuating.

25 So at various times you had Shia parties becoming

1 closer to the Kurdish leadership and at other times, in
2 various other parts of the country, one of the Sunni
3 parties struck an accord with the Kurdish leadership.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you, as ambassador, able to engage
5 with each of these groups, for example with the Kurds?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: As I said, access was pretty
7 universal with the exception of the Sadrists, where
8 I think, as William Patey described, there was
9 a deliberate and sustained boycott of us by them,
10 although we did have some discreet contact with some of
11 the Sadrists who held official positions, but they were
12 able to cover themselves by seeing us in those positions
13 rather than as Sadrist representatives.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you able to travel at all, for
15 example, to Kurdistan?

16 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Frequently, yes, within the limits
17 of the resources available to us. By the end of my
18 time, we had actually our own aircraft allocated to the
19 embassy in order to -- because by the end of my time
20 there was no British military presence, there was no
21 British military aircraft available. So we, with
22 a certain amount of difficulty with the Iraqi bureaucracy, managed
23 to register, get licensing for our own aircraft to move
24 us around and I think my successor will find that an
25 immense help in unifying the effort of the three

1 missions.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to complete the context of the
3 time, what was your sense of the development of the
4 Iraqi security forces and improvements that they had
5 made as an important part of the equation, as an
6 objective of policy that they should take over?

7 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It was clearly very much work in
8 progress and different units of the Iraqi military were
9 in different stages of development. For us, I got the
10 impression that we had pretty much completed the
11 training of the 10 Division, which was morphing into the
12 14 Division. The 10 Division had, actually, parts of
13 it, significant parts of it, been brought up to Baghdad
14 to operate as part of Operation Fardh Al Qanoon and as
15 part of the Iraqi part of the surge. I think that was
16 a reflection of the quality of the training that they
17 had received.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What about the experience of the
19 police forces, that we come back to time and again?

20 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The police had -- it had been
21 clearly identified already by then that that was a more
22 difficult -- a more complex task, but there was already
23 one development underway which actually I haven't heard
24 mentioned in the last day and a half of evidence, which was
25 the development of the national police force through the

1 NATO training mission.

2 In the dark days, I think around, you know,
3 2004/2005, the national police force had been identified
4 as one of the main problems of -- one of the most
5 sectarian actors. By the time I left, the national
6 police force was getting gold stars for being a really
7 national unit, effective, well trained, disciplined and
8 able to be deployed in support of Iraqi military
9 operations as the first line of policing, as it were.

10 Now, the key element is that they were trained by
11 the Italian gendarmerie on a model which, as has been
12 discussed, was not one that we could provide, but was
13 suitable for the Iraqi context. The sort of policing
14 effort that we were focusing on was, I would say, more
15 for the long-term, and the next stage. It had two
16 elements, one was forensics and the second was -- which
17 is only in -- just in gestation now and I hope will be
18 able to be continued, which is community policing, which
19 emerged in the last year I was there in Basra as an
20 emerging requirement or a desirable way to lead the
21 Iraqi policing forward. But that's getting ahead of
22 ourselves to talk of that.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you. I want to move on to
24 a particular event. In September 2007, the British
25 moved out of Basra City and consolidated at

1 Basra Airport. We heard about that this morning.
2 Shortly afterwards, October 2007, the Prime Minister
3 announced plans to reduce the troops to 2,500 by spring
4 2009. How were these plans communicated to the
5 Americans in Baghdad? Did you have much discussion
6 about --

7 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The issues of the military tasks
8 and troops to tasks and the numbers I think, as has been
9 described, were discussed on military networks, multiple
10 military networks, and at the high political level
11 between London and Washington and my military
12 counterpart, SBMRI, was clearly involved in that with
13 General Petraeus. I was aware of them, but was not
14 directly involved in those, and the decision-making on
15 how this was to be presented and announced was very much
16 a matter for London and for Number 10 in particular.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Because there were American concerns
18 about the -- what Britain was going to be doing in Basra
19 in the future, but you are suggesting that these were
20 not really part of your --

21 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Concerns about what, I'm sorry?

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: About what the British were going to
23 be doing in Basra militarily in the future, whether this
24 drawdown would be too quick.

25 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: In terms of the tasking and what

1 our residual and continuing roles might be, the Embassy
2 was fully involved.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You were involved in all of that?

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, exactly.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did these discussions develop?

6 What were the main issues that the Americans were
7 raising about the future role the British could and
8 should play?

9 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Throughout my time -- I suppose
10 not at the end, because we had moved into a different
11 phase by then, but up until early 2009, the American
12 concern was about the lines of communication and supply.
13 They wished also to have a continuation of the UK as
14 a major partner either within the coalition or as
15 a bilateral partner after the end of the MNF. They
16 expressed enthusiasm for that and for us to continue in
17 our role as having the two-star command in
18 MND South East for so long as we wished to do that and
19 there was a role for it, and -- so there was an American
20 wish for us to be maximally engaged.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You used a phrase in one of your
22 reports that their confidence in us was becoming more
23 fragile, and you saw one of your tasks to reassure them.
24 How were you able to to do that at this time?

25 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I would have to look at that

1 particular report, but at what stage -- do you remember
2 what stage?

3 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Early on.

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The US confidence in us was
5 becoming more fragile?

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes.

7 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I'm surprised at that. I don't
8 remember the context.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of the rumours that we were
10 going to be leaving and leaving precipitately.

11 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think they were reacting to the
12 press reports rather than to reality maybe. If
13 briefings had taken place or had been -- or plans had
14 been -- had been aired which were not decisions, which
15 then appeared in the British media, and then there were
16 US concerns locally about, you know, were these press
17 stories true, because undoubtedly there was a continuing
18 task for us. It was one that the Americans valued our
19 participation in taking on and were wanting us to
20 continue.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: At this time, were British press
22 reports in a way a concern of yours on other issues?

23 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think the media handling of Iraq
24 has been a constant concern to those who were at the
25 coalface, because in many cases it was pursuing -- the

1 sort of media herd was pursuing a rather retrospective
2 agenda and a rather negative agenda on what was a very
3 difficult task, and, during my time, was emerging
4 actually as a rather positive task, which did not get
5 reflected in the public presentation by, particularly,
6 the British media.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was this something you also had to
8 reassure the Iraqi Government about?

9 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: They were less concerned about the
10 British media than we were, and also, at one level, as
11 I have mentioned, they were keen that we should be
12 transitioning -- you know, there was a broad wish for
13 the period in which Iraq was subject to UNSCR chapter 7
14 restraints, that there were limitations on Iraq's
15 exercise of its sovereignty, that that period should
16 come to an end as soon as possible.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I know someone has got some other
18 questions to ask in a moment, but I just want to
19 conclude this bit. It follows on very much from what
20 you have just said. The objective was to hand over to
21 Provisional Iraqi Control and there was a process that
22 was supposed to say how well this had been done, whether
23 the moment had arrived. But was it the case that, by
24 leaving Iraq -- by leaving Basra when we did, or
25 Basra City when we did, in September, that, in fact, we

1 almost circumvented the process, that there was nobody
2 else to hand over to, so whether or not the criteria had
3 been met, this was provisional Iraqi control.

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Provincial.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sorry, provincial.

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The process for declaring
7 Provincial Iraqi Control was quite a formal one, and
8 I don't know whether it is -- it has been clear enough
9 in the previous evidence that it was actually an Iraqi
10 decision in each case. It was a decision that had to be
11 taken -- was not taken by the multinational force, it
12 was taken by Prime Minister Maliki on behalf of the
13 government, on the recommendation of General Petraeus
14 and the MNF. There was a coalition process of
15 assessment, drawing on Iraqi assessments also, which was
16 discussed with the Iraqis and recommendations -- in each
17 province's case, but the decision was an Iraqi decision
18 and, as has been mentioned by others, this process was
19 taken through the Iraqi National Security Council on
20 which the US ambassador, the British ambassador, and the
21 Commander of MNF and the staff sat every week, which was
22 another most extraordinary aspect of serving in Iraq,
23 I have to say.

24 There was, by the time I arrived, also a second
25 weekly meeting, which was on the economic and

1 non-military aspects of the Baghdad Fardh Al Qanoon
2 campaign. So on Fridays I attended - with rather less
3 reason, I have to say, because we were not involved so
4 much in Baghdad, although we did have some role,
5 particularly in counter-terrorist operations -

6 On Fridays, we met with an economic focus, with the
7 Iraqis, all the ministries, chaired by the
8 Prime Minister to see -- really putting together the
9 sort of comprehensive approach for Baghdad, Americans
10 very much in the supporting role there; and on every
11 Sunday there was a meeting of the National
12 Security Council and the PIC process was put through
13 that and -- so when it came to Basra PIC, through the
14 autumn of 2007 there was a series of assessments and
15 recommendations and the timings, obviously, we
16 were consulting London about -- very much, and London
17 was seriously interested in what was possible, and
18 before the Prime Minister's October announcement,
19 Prime Minister Maliki had already said in public that he
20 envisaged Basra Provincial Iraqi Control within the next
21 two months. That was what was able to go into
22 the October statement.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So there wouldn't really have been
24 much of an alternative then, seeing that British forces
25 had left Basra City.

1 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: That was part of, as has been
2 explained, a plan to get the Iraqi Security Forces able
3 to develop their capacity. We were continuing to train,
4 mentor and engage with them. We were conducting quite
5 a high tempo of strike operations of a very particular
6 sort at that time in support of Mohan.

7 It was -- the move back to the COB at Basra was part
8 of a considered plan to take us out of the picture as
9 far as the engagement between Iraqi forces and the
10 militias, as has been explained in earlier evidence, and
11 it was a coherent step towards the formal declaration of
12 PIC, which came in December and I think that the -- it
13 was a logical part of it, but the move back to the COB
14 wasn't itself PIC.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, thank you.

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What did you think would be the effect
17 on UK/Iraqi relations as a result of the announcement of
18 the essentially early end of our combat mission?

19 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: What period are you talking about?

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: After the Prime Minister's
21 announcement.

22 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It wasn't really the end of our
23 combat mission that was announced in October.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The drawdown?

25 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The Iraqis were almost indifferent

1 to troop numbers. In terms of the presence of the Multi
2 National Force levels in country, the British military
3 presence was a very small proportion of the whole. They
4 were interested in the roles and the effect of what we
5 were delivering, but in the numbers of troops needed to
6 do that, that was much more a British concern than --
7 for various reasons, than it was an Iraqi concern.

8 Prime Minister Maliki and others, as I was saying,
9 broadly welcomed the idea that tasks were moving to
10 completion and that the time, the period, in which
11 foreign forces would be present and have to be present
12 in Iraq might be drawing close to its end. That was
13 welcome.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: As an interjection, was Prime Minister Maliki
15 aware, did you sense, that he was managing risk, in
16 quite a substantial way in seeking to accelerate or at
17 any rate maximise the speed of transition and then of
18 withdrawal?

19 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, because alongside their
20 desire to assert sovereignty was an awareness of
21 a continued measure and large measure of dependence and
22 there was an acute appreciation of the role that the
23 coalition had in building up, training, developing,
24 equipping Iraqi security forces, in which we played our
25 part in the south, and an impatience that the process

1 should be brought to a conclusion, but also a concern
2 that the Iraqi security forces needed to be in
3 a position to be able to rise to the challenges they
4 would meet, and that is a continuing process now.

5 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did you offer particular advice on the
6 timetable of the drawdown?

7 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: In terms of PIC and the -- I don't
8 remember you know, making recommendations on exact -- on
9 the timings; it was more advice on what was emerging and
10 what was possible and what were the conclusions. It
11 was, after all, determined by conditions and the
12 judgments against the five criteria, which Jon Day read
13 out at the end of his evidence.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you involved at all in the
15 discussion of the --

16 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: My embassy was represented on the
17 committees which discussed the recommendations which
18 went through to General Petraeus and ultimately to
19 Prime Minister Maliki.

20 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Could we just look briefly at the
21 immediate post-Charge of the Knights situation? What
22 impact this had on the -- on your advice, your
23 perception, where things would move from there?

24 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: If we are thinking of after the
25 Charge of the Knights and after it had settled into its

1 pattern of success, then our early advice -- which
2 was -- which fell on fertile ground, was that this was
3 a real opportunity.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So essentially, present an opportunity
5 to draw down more quickly than had been --

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: No, to -- what actually happened
7 was a pause, which was announced by the
8 Defence Secretary, I think. The October
9 announcement, which was in October, was made very much
10 subject to advice and emerging conditions. In, I think,
11 the spring time, round about Easter of 2008, the
12 Defence Secretary announced a pause, that the levels of
13 our forces would remain, even slightly increase, so that
14 we could come in in full support of the emerging success
15 of Charge of the Knights.

16 Charge of the Knights was not a single operation.
17 I think there were 11 phases of it or 12 -- I forget how
18 many -- which continued all the way through in parallel
19 with the other operations which Prime Minister Maliki
20 launched in Amarah and Najaf and Diyala and Mosul and
21 Sadr City itself. So it was -- the Charge of the
22 Knights was a turning point in a number of ways, and we
23 and the Americans, you know, in our own ways, piled in
24 behind it in order to help the Government of Iraq
25 achieve and consolidate the emerging success.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When the Prime Minister announced
2 in July 2008 that there would be a fundamental change of
3 mission for the United Kingdom forces in the first
4 months of 2009, what did you understand then would be
5 the likely end of our combat mission?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I mean, that was also part of an
7 announcement, which I saw almost as more significant, of
8 transition to a broad-based, normal, bilateral
9 relationship with Iraq and -- and I will come back to
10 answer your particular question, but I would like to
11 underline that, from my perspective, that was more
12 important than -- and I think increasingly across
13 Whitehall it became more important than the -- what has
14 been described as withdrawal.

15 I didn't see it as withdrawal. I saw it as
16 completion of mission and transition to the new
17 relationship and the debate internally on our side
18 became increasingly focused on what the components of
19 that long-term relationship should be, how to manage
20 that transition, where to get the resources from to make
21 that as complete as possible.

22 So again, that July statement was looking ahead to
23 when we thought our tasks post-Charge of the Knights
24 might be completed and Peter Wall and Jon Day have
25 described those very fully this morning.

1 The main timing constraints were provincial Iraqi
2 elections and the completion of the training of all the
3 component parts of the 14 Division to the adequate
4 levels, which were assessed to require training beyond
5 the end of 2008, which, of course, led to questions
6 about the legal base for our continuing presence because
7 it had already been established that there would not be
8 a further extension of the UNSCR.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I want to ask you about the economic
10 aspect in a moment, but, first thing, Sir Lawrence wants
11 to speak about the Status of Forces Agreement.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Before I do that, I want to go back
13 to the Charge of the Knights. We have had quite a lot
14 of accounts of this which have followed the same
15 pattern. You were quite surprised by the event as it
16 took place, but then feeling we had to make it work, but
17 we heard evidence this morning that indeed it could have
18 made things worse, that there was some concern that this
19 was something which should be properly prepared. It
20 wasn't that the objective was wrong, but that this had
21 come all at a bit of a rush.

22 So I'm just interested in terms of your own
23 involvement in these discussions, getting notice that
24 this is what was being planned and how this was
25 discussed with the Iraqi Government in terms of, was

1 this wise and how can it be done successfully?

2 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Well, because it came, as

3 Peter Wall said, slightly out of left field, there

4 weren't the normal processes in advance of what might

5 have been a carefully considered and prepared campaign,

6 but my perspective was that the Iraqi Government and

7 Prime Minister Maliki personally decided, for a whole

8 range of reasons, but, essentially, this again is

9 politics, that he needed to set an example, assert his

10 leadership of the military and he was very much focused

11 on his role as Commander-in-chief throughout his time as

12 Prime Minister, and still is; that this was a period

13 when provincial elections were in the offing, although

14 they didn't happen for -- until the beginning of the

15 following year, but it was very much -- he was facing

16 his first political test within a year.

17 I do not have full insight into his political

18 calculations, but I'm sure that they were predominant.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: It was not so much that he had a greater

20 appetite for risk than the coalition, but rather that he

21 felt impelled by some calculus of his political

22 situation?

23 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: This goes back to what I alluded

24 to earlier, that he was hearing from certain people

25 around him a rather bleaker picture of conditions in the

1 south and in Basra than really was the case. I don't
2 really want to go into the details of that, but there is
3 no doubt that assessments were reaching him which may
4 have impelled him in that direction which we wouldn't
5 have necessarily, or the Americans wouldn't necessarily
6 have shared.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That it was a more urgent situation
8 than --

9 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: That it was more urgent, and there
10 was also a complex relationship with General Mohan at
11 that stage, where it was -- General Mohan was in Basra
12 post-PIC, feeling his way towards how -- in consultation
13 with us, in close consultation with us, about how best
14 to prepare for the necessary showdown with the
15 extremists that was acknowledged was needed.

16 Mohan was taking a fairly deliberate and careful
17 approach to this and I think it wasn't just the
18 conditions on the ground which might have been
19 misrepresented to Prime Minister Maliki, but
20 misinterpretations reaching him of Mohan's own planning
21 and intentions.

22 So anyway, for whatever reasons, a decision was
23 taken by Prime Minister Maliki personally -- I mean,
24 I think it was very much a Prime Ministerial personal
25 level of authority -- on his own authority. He engaged

1 with the MNF through General Petraeus and
2 General Odierno - no, it was Lloyd Austin who had just
3 arrived, I think, and, of course, we were engaged
4 indirectly because of our being fully embedded
5 throughout the MNF. So on that level we knew about it.

6 The plan was to assert central government authority
7 and go down to Basra. It is not clear to me -- as
8 I believe it was not clear also to the US -- that
9 Prime Minister Maliki intended almost immediately to
10 become engaged in extensive operations and full
11 hostilities with the militias, but that developed almost
12 as soon as the new forces came into Basra and those --
13 and the new forces -- which had come down at short
14 notice, became engaged in an extensive fire-fight and
15 the coalition piled in behind as best they could, given
16 the lack of notice and planning, and we were a full part
17 of giving support.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm just a little interested in how
19 we discussed this with the -- with Maliki and other
20 people. Did we -- and also what you said about
21 General Mohan. Were we sort of caught in the middle
22 a bit, in a power struggle between two figures --

23 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I wouldn't describe it as a power
24 struggle. Mohan doesn't set himself up as in any way
25 a rival or -- certainly not a political authority. But

1 he would -- he was sent down as the operational
2 commander in Basra. He was developing his own plan. He
3 had come up, I think, and had briefed that plan to
4 Maliki, and it was in response to that that Maliki said,
5 "We must do this more quickly", and had accelerated the
6 process. So Mohan's was very much a subordinate
7 relationship, and we were, through MND South East and
8 General Austin commanding, engaged with Mohan in
9 developing that more deliberate plan and, like him, like
10 Mohan, and like the Americans, we found ourselves
11 involved in helping to implement a rather more urgent
12 plan.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, let's move on from that to the
14 status of forces agreement. Again, we have had some
15 evidence on this already, quite a bit. One of the
16 things that has come through is -- and it fits in with
17 what you have been talking about -- is a tension between
18 the military, anxious for some sort of continued British
19 role and presence, and the Government of Iraq, thinking
20 perhaps more in terms of sovereignty and putting that as
21 a higher priority, not being, as I understand it,
22 against the military role but being sure that it was
23 clear that this was -- this is a matter for a sovereign
24 government to work out. Is that a fair sense of the
25 tension?

1 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The politics of the presence of
2 foreign forces in -- across the whole Middle East is
3 extremely sensitive, and there is a long history. The
4 Iraqis, the public, the political class were, and are,
5 anxious to get to the stage where they can hold their
6 heads up in the Arab world and say, "We are no way any
7 longer under occupation. We are not in any way beholden
8 to foreigners. We are fully independent and
9 free-standing". That is the dynamic that is in place.

10 It was not the government alone, but the whole
11 political class, which was keen that they should move as
12 soon as possible to end chapter 7. There was an
13 acknowledgment by the Ministry of Defence and, indeed,
14 a strong wish from the Ministry of Defence of their
15 continuing professional needs.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, that is the Iraqi defence?

17 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, the Ministry of Defence.
18 Some others across the political spectrum understood
19 that. A significant number of politicians actually
20 wanted to get through this military phase and into
21 a phase of natural strong relations with Britain. The
22 complexity arose from, again, the dynamics of Iraqi
23 politics, and this affected the Americans as much or
24 even more than ourselves; that Prime Minister Maliki was
25 in some ways still a controversial, internally, head of

1 a slightly dysfunctional national unity government,
2 trying to put through difficult domestic legislation,
3 tackling an insurgency, needing the support and
4 practical help of the international forces in this
5 country, but was in a very awkward position politically
6 to take the lead in arguing for that to be enshrined in
7 law.

8 The whole of my period was really governed by the
9 question of which combination of political actors in
10 Iraq could be brought together to trust each other
11 enough to take a collective decision to put a stamp of
12 legality on the continued international presence, and we
13 are not talking about the UK, we are talking about the
14 US in particular. This whole issue was used as a -- was
15 a symptom and also a sort of football, kicked around
16 amongst the political actors who were trying to
17 manoeuvre each other into a position of appearing to be
18 the advocate of continued international occupation of
19 Iraq. That was how -- they wanted to pin that on their
20 opponents and Prime Minister Maliki was no different
21 from the others in the political spectrum.

22 Just a bit of light relief: during the debate on the
23 US agreement, the speaker of the Parliament, a rather
24 lively figure called Mashhadani, summed up the
25 situation about the US agreement. He said that the

1 Kurds are saying "yes" and they mean "yes", the Sunnis are
2 saying "no" and they mean "yes", and the Shia are saying
3 "yes" and they mean "no".

4 It was -- that was only just then. So there was an
5 immensely complex political background to the whole
6 issue of foreign forces which ran throughout the
7 discussion of US presence, and then, as a subordinate
8 issue, as far as the Iraqis were concerned, the UK
9 continuing presence, either in that period, when we had
10 to complete our tasks and we needed a continued legal
11 base for that, or, when it came to, I think, the more
12 significant decision, which was the formal ratification
13 of the full agreement with us for a continuing military
14 relationship, which is what was completed in October
15 and November last year.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you have this reluctance to be
17 seen in any sense to be an occupied country, which is
18 understandable, and you have the Americans in there with
19 the British, and the Americans the top priority for the
20 Iraqis. So we were in a sense waiting on the solution
21 of the -- final negotiation of the agreement with the
22 Americans?

23 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes, the key issue for the
24 Americans and for ourselves was the jurisdictions and
25 legal immunities and the -- it was clear to us that the

1 American negotiation of that would set the bar, as it
2 were.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you fully sort of engaged with
4 Americans on --

5 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Absolutely joined at the hip,
6 completely. In my time, the cooperation on these formal
7 issues with the Americans was intensive and absolutely
8 comprehensive and they were open with us about the state
9 of their confidential negotiations with the Iraqis in
10 a way that kept us absolutely clearly in the picture.

11 During the previous negotiation at the end of 2007
12 for the final rollover of UNSCR 1723, I was asked by the
13 two US negotiators to sit in on those negotiations
14 because of our interest and because of the particular
15 angles we had about the way in which the supporting
16 letters from the two governments needed to be expressed
17 in order to satisfy our legal requirements. So I didn't
18 feel in any way that we were blindsided by the
19 Americans.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally before handing back to
21 Sir Martin, why was it so important that we had
22 a continuing military presence in Iraq? Was this
23 something that we were anxious to have as a means of
24 continuing influence or was it something they were
25 anxious to have as a source of training and support?

1 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: You are talking now about the
2 final agreement --

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: -- that was concluded? I don't
5 think the significance was the military presence at all,
6 because what we were talking about is essentially three
7 tasks, one of which I don't think has been mentioned in
8 the evidence that I have heard, which is the ships in
9 the northern Gulf which are protecting Iraqi platforms
10 as part of the international force engaged in the
11 northern Gulf in Iraqi territorial waters. That and the
12 officer training task, which is being done through NATO,
13 and the Naval training, which is covered by our lasting
14 agreement, which has a ceiling of 100 people at Um Qasr,
15 they are the main tasks. They are real tasks which the
16 Iraqis wish us to carry out.

17 The military agreement, which has been signed, has
18 a duration of one year. It doesn't explicitly mention
19 any extension of that, but I expect that, after the
20 forthcoming elections, there will be fairly early
21 engagement with the Iraqi Government, at their request,
22 to consider the further extension of that, and then
23 there will be, perhaps, an issue of how it is extended,
24 whether there has to be a further agreement that goes to
25 the new Council of Representatives or not.

1 But the -- I see this agreement as meeting Iraqi
2 needs, expressed needs, and also being a natural part of
3 a full bilateral relationship with a country with whom
4 we have historical ties with their military. As
5 Peter Wall said, their doctrines historically have been
6 based on ours. Their military are comfortable working
7 with us, and it would seem right and natural that there
8 should be a military element to our full continuing
9 relationship with Iraq.

10 What is most welcome -- and I found politically
11 symbolic -- was that in last autumn, when the Iraqis
12 were wrestling with some really difficult internal
13 political issues over the shape of their election law,
14 the Council of Representatives, with a vote supported by
15 all the political parties other than the Sadrists, were
16 willing to take a public decision that Iraq wanted to
17 have a military aspect to the relationship with a former
18 occupying power, let's say, which is how it is
19 perceived. That is, within an Arab country, a very
20 symbolic and important sign of the maturing of politics
21 and the maturing of attitudes to their future
22 international partnerships.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

24 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It is part of the emerging
25 success.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: I would like, just before Martin comes in --
2 the expiry of the UNSCR at the end of 2008, leaving no
3 legal base unless it could be replaced for us, the
4 Americans had negotiated a status of forces agreement
5 embodied in Iraqi law as well as in their own. We
6 settled for, or got, at the very last moment,
7 a Memorandum of Understanding.

8 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes.

9 THE CHAIRMAN: Right? I'm coming round to asking how firm
10 and solid is the legal base of that for our continuing
11 combat operations up until the early months of 2009?

12 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It was sufficient. I mean, the --
13 I think one has to go back to the US agreement and note
14 that early hopes that they might be able to conclude
15 that by July were, I suppose, not surprisingly in the
16 circumstances in Iraqi politics, disappointed and they
17 eventually had their agreement concluded with the
18 government only after the US elections in November, and
19 then, in the -- in a very difficult process, ratified by the CoR
20 only on 27 November, against a deadline of
21 the end of December, when we were going to fall off
22 a cliff on the legal base.

23 At that point, there was exhaustion in the Iraqi
24 body politic with the idea of international agreements
25 and there were potentially half a dozen or more others

1 in addition to ourselves, all of whom -- I forget
2 exactly how many residual members of the coalition were
3 still requiring a legal base for their continued
4 presence. There just wasn't the capacity or the
5 political will or -- to go through that process again.

6 So on Iraqi advice we went for an authorising law in
7 the Parliament -- and this was the recommendation of the
8 Prime Minister's legal adviser, that -- the Iraqi
9 Prime Minister's legal adviser. This was not ideal
10 because it was not explicit to the Iraqi Parliament in
11 the terms of that draft law exactly what the roles were
12 that we would be doing. It was a law which would
13 empower the government to sign with us a Memorandum of
14 Understanding on what those roles would be without
15 actually explicitly giving the Parliament -- and not
16 surprisingly, for that, and a whole host of other
17 reasons, mostly to do with Iraqi politics at the time -
18 because within the Council of Representatives at that
19 time there was an emerging row with the speaker himself,
20 who was forced to resign in late December just at the
21 moment of our agreement being voted on - that draft law failed its
22 second reading. So that
23 first attempt to get a legal base in place had to be
24 changed and the revised process, again on the
25 recommendation of Iraqis, this time a recommendation

1 from within the Council of Representatives, was for
2 another instrument to be used, which was called
3 a decision, a qirar in Arabic of the Council of
4 Representatives which, as it were, endorsed the draft
5 law of the Council of Ministers but was short of a law.

6 Now, we took advice on the status of such a twin
7 mechanism, the Council of Ministers' resolution endorsed
8 by a qirar, rather than a qanoon, a law, in the
9 Council of Representatives, and the advice was that this
10 would be binding in law and that advice went up through
11 the British legal chain and the recommendation was that
12 this would be sufficient and we managed to then sign the
13 agreement with the Iraqi Government in the last days
14 of December.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. "Qanoon", the word for law?

16 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: "Qanoon".

17 THE CHAIRMAN: The same word as "canon" as in canon law?

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It is where we get it from.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to turn, as I said, to the
20 question of economic development and Gordon Brown having
21 put an emphasis on economic development and promoting
22 investment in Iraq. First of all, in general terms, how
23 do you see this as being an integral part of our whole
24 concept beginning with our sort of end-state ideas in
25 2002, as to what we wanted Iraq to be?

1 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: You have heard evidence this
2 morning of how economic development of Iraq and the
3 stabilisation and prosperity of Iraq has not -- it is not an
4 idea that suddenly emerged in 2008. It was clearly
5 fundamental to the whole project from the very first
6 moments after the invasion, and so we had been engaged
7 already, both locally in Basra in capacity building
8 efforts and in some short-term hearts and minds, and
9 immediate effect efforts as well; and we had been
10 engaged already in Baghdad in some quiet but very
11 important capacity building at the centre of the
12 financial heart of government.

13 What was announced and put forward as part of the
14 post-Charge of the Knights -- actually before, in the
15 autumn of 2007 -- was additional to that. After Charge
16 of the Knights, it was able really to take off in the
17 new circumstances created by Prime Minister Maliki's
18 facing down of the militias and squeezing out of militia
19 activity out of the Basra society and economy. The
20 circumstances were more propitious, the whole political
21 scene had eased along with the broader security scene as
22 well and investment promotion for Iraq was seen as not
23 only essential, but also viable.

24 I should perhaps add that UKTI, whom you referred
25 to, had been a part of the British Embassy mission from

1 the early days up until early 2007 and the UKTI had
2 withdrawn their UK-based presence in Baghdad by the time
3 I arrived, some months before, because of the lack of
4 opportunity essentially to make full use of those assets
5 in place then and the UKTI support for Iraq had been
6 done through a part of the section, the UKTI section, in
7 Amman and also from London and a bit through Erbil.

8 The perceived need, which was met by the
9 Prime Minister's initiative, was to show that the new
10 Basra emerging was open for business and Iraq was
11 increasingly open for business. So, as described this
12 morning, DFID were asked to lead on this initiative and
13 it was, from the UK bilateral perspective, a selfless
14 initiative in that we were promoting any international
15 investment into Iraq at that stage.

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What particular steps has the UK
17 government taken to increase investment and help develop
18 the Iraq economy?

19 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Building on those initiatives,
20 there is the Basra Development Commission headed by
21 Michael Waring, there was the Basra Development
22 Promotion Agency, which in the last year has -- our
23 effort with that has transferred with
24 Prime Minister Maliki's strong encouragement to support
25 for the National Investment Commission in Baghdad, which

1 we have substantially mentored and helped, as have the
2 Americans.

3 There was also an initiative to try to establish
4 a Basra development fund, which was also actually
5 overtaken by the availability of Iraqi funds, which were
6 coming onstream more and more, and all this was
7 happening at the same time as the continuation of the
8 provincial reconstruction team, PRT, in Basra, which was
9 UK-led, and was engaged in building local Basrawi
10 capacity, at provincial level to make better use of the
11 Iraqi assets which were becoming available from central
12 government funds.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you able to see specific
14 achievements by November when you left?

15 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Well, certainly the longer-term
16 projects at the centre, in particular, as was mentioned
17 this morning, the capacity building in the
18 Cabinet Secretariat was really beginning to show
19 results.

20 This was a very quiet project, which I think was not
21 widely known amongst the Iraqi politicians whose
22 interests it was serving, and all the better for being
23 below the surface because it was so central to the
24 government machine, and it was one which was very much
25 hands-off. It was DFID working through

1 Adam Smith International, who were providing consultancy
2 for the Iraqis, that was confidential to the Iraqis
3 and it was -- it could have been a delicate matter, but
4 actually was handled quietly and successfully and -- by
5 the time I left, the Cabinet Secretary had got to the
6 point of being able to -- already had started transition
7 planning for the handover of government after the
8 elections, now due in March, pulling together deputy
9 ministerial level representatives across their
10 equivalent of Whitehall, to draw some lessons from this
11 period of government in terms of the structure of
12 government for presentation to the new Prime Minister,
13 when elected. That's a fairly sophisticated operation
14 and was really, I think, an example of success.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I come in here? Deputy minister in
16 the, as it were, Canadian sense, permanent officials?

17 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes. Well, they are political --
18 it is ambiguous, some of them are political appointees,
19 some of them are lasting, non-political technocrats.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Having got in, but not a quite separate
21 topic, I just wanted to go back a bit to investment and
22 UKTI's conclusion in 2007, I think you said. There were
23 no opportunities. Was this really because -- not so
24 much there weren't things that could be done, but there
25 was a basic lack of security sufficient to engage?

1 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It was as a result of the
2 conditions.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: What about the legal basis for doing
4 business, commercial law, and commercial courts, was
5 that not a hindrance?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I recall -- I was in Jordan at the
7 time of the invasion, from 2002. By 2003 -- I was there
8 from 2002 to 2006 - and in the first years after the fall
9 of Saddam Hussein, a number of Invest Iraq conferences
10 were put together, particularly by the Americans, to try
11 to generate international engagement, and the -- the
12 problem was not the potential opportunities, it
13 was all of what you mentioned: what was the legal context going
14 to be, the legal basis of contract? What would be the
15 certainty of payment? Who would your partners be? What
16 would be the security conditions for setting up
17 a business?

18 That -- the net commercial -- international
19 commercial assessment all the way through this period
20 was this is not do-able, essentially, except in very
21 narrow fields like security companies and others who
22 were living in that environment and some of the major
23 oil giants, oil and energy people who could live in that
24 environment.

25 That has now radically changed, but in the time you

1 were talking about, in 2007, it had got to the point
2 where patience for the change had worn out and UKTI
3 resource constraints were such that they had to take
4 that decision. I mean, it is worth noting that the cost
5 for all Whitehall Departments of deploying a single
6 person to the embassy in Baghdad is absolutely
7 horrendous.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

9 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: You know, I can't put an exact
10 figure on it, because it fluctuates, but it is somewhere
11 between half a million and 1 million per head per year.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Just one more question, which is on the
13 investment situation essentially now, and that really
14 is: what was the impact and what was the result of
15 the April 2009 -- first of all, the British business
16 delegation to Iraq and then the conference in London,
17 which was held?

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Well, these were both drivers for
19 further success but also symptoms of success. They also
20 symbolised for us and for the Iraqis, the reality of the
21 new phase in our relationship, which was going to focus
22 increasingly on natural, normal business and commercial
23 and investment promotion, educational exchanges and
24 normal bilateral business.

25 So the Trade Secretary's mission came with 20/25

1 senior businessmen to Baghdad. That was followed by the
2 Invest Iraq conference in London with 400 delegates,
3 including somewhere between 100 and 200 flown in from
4 Baghdad for the conference. It was very successful in
5 its own terms. It was imitated in the course of the
6 rest of 2009 by similar conferences in Washington and
7 elsewhere.

8 There is still a way to go for Iraq in convincing
9 international business that -- not that there is
10 opportunity, but that the Iraqi machine can deliver
11 contracts and can respond to international offers of
12 engagement. This is something which is a matter of
13 capacity and a sort of indigestion within the system. It
14 goes back to the issue of corruption which was mentioned
15 earlier, in earlier evidence.

16 There is so much sensitivity over potential
17 corruption in commercial contracting that decisions have
18 been forced to the highest levels, even on the most
19 detailed and mundane issue. Committees have been formed
20 which are incapable of taking effective decisions and
21 there is a congestion which needs to be addressed by the
22 Iraqis themselves, and is being addressed, and they are
23 well aware of this as a major obstacle to the real
24 loosening of the potential for international commercial
25 engagement.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: Martin?

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Before I ask you some questions on
4 regional relations, I just want to ask a question that
5 was answered this morning by General Wall and Jon Day on
6 locally engaged staff. I wondered really if you had
7 anything to add to what was said about this being
8 a response to concerns in Parliament and the media,
9 eventually a package was implemented and seems now to be
10 working well. Do you have anything to add to that?

11 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It was a campaign and the
12 government responded to that campaign, but the resulting
13 locally engaged scheme has been operating throughout my
14 time. It was introduced more or less at the same time
15 as I arrived in Baghdad and it has worked well. I think
16 consideration needs now to be given, and will be given,
17 to when it should be drawn to a close, because
18 circumstances are changing and it is -- you know, it is
19 not a normal arrangement, and it would -- there will be
20 a time when the scheme will close. But at the moment,
21 it is necessary and is working effectively.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just out of interest, what do the
23 Americans do on this issue?

24 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: They have their own plan, their
25 own resolution, which involves, I think, resettlement as

1 well and I don't know the terms of it exactly, but there
2 is something similar.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. I just want to ask a set of
4 questions on regional relations. Going right back to
5 the start of this story, a concern of the
6 British Government was about an Iran that was a danger
7 to its own people and a danger to the region, a source
8 of instability at different times during the course of
9 this past decade, there were concerns that Iraq, because
10 of terrorism or whatever, could again become a source of
11 instability.

12 So in terms of seeing where we are, I would just be
13 interested in our views about a number of aspects of
14 Iraq's foreign relations, position in the Middle East.
15 Perhaps just to start with a concern that is evident
16 still in the Arab world, which is that this has seen
17 a transfer of power from Sunni to Shia, and, therefore,
18 a link with Iran potentially if not there actually at
19 the moment. How do you see the Iranian/Iraqi link
20 developing in the future?

21 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think the Iranians have fairly
22 comprehensively overplayed their hand in Iraq and that
23 they will continue -- the present Islamic
24 Republic of Iran will continue to try to exert influence
25 over the emerging Iraq, but increasingly Iraq will stand

1 on its own feet and consult Iraq's own interests and, as
2 that happens, the regional Arab Sunni partners of Iraq
3 will feel reassured. That is a process that is in
4 train. There has been -- there was good progress during
5 the last year of my time in Baghdad in relations with
6 Egypt. Some progress, which could not be brought to
7 a conclusion before elections in Iraq, with Kuwait,
8 but --

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Is that because of the border
10 issues?

11 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: -- is unfinished business which
12 will require some difficult decisions by the Iraqis, but
13 I think that they will get to that and I think they are
14 aware that that is a necessary step by them.

15 The Saudis have stood aloof more than we would wish,
16 but, again, after the elections in Iraq, this issue will
17 need to be readdressed by them, and, as they see Iraq
18 emerging as a stable and increasingly prosperous,
19 increasingly important regional power, energy power, it
20 is a country with whom they will wish to engage fully
21 and I'm reasonably confident that Iraq will find a new
22 place in the regional Arab world and, indeed, the wider
23 world, which potentially will give it an important role
24 in being a bridge to either the present Iran or a future
25 Iran and will show that really serious differences

1 between communities and between different branches of
2 Islamic faith and between different ethnic groups can be
3 settled through a largely democratic, in fact, wholly
4 democratic, form of politics. So I think -- I go back
5 to Iran, if you want, on why I believe that Iran has
6 overplayed its hands.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have heard evidence on that. One
8 suggestion has been that the Iranian interest was in
9 stirring things to cause trouble for Britain and the
10 United States and to put them on notice as to what could
11 happen if there was a real confrontation between these
12 countries and Iran. Presumably, if the forces are
13 leaving, then that will become less of an interest for
14 Iran?

15 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: If you are talking about the
16 confrontation over the nuclear programme, I don't see
17 that as being a particular factor. It was clearly an
18 Iranian ambition to discomfort the coalition in its own
19 terms. Another ambition was to maximise its influence
20 over the emerging Iraq. Possibly it is suggested they
21 might see an interest in keeping Iraq weaker, you know,
22 so that it doesn't represent -- weaker not by being
23 partitioned or fracturing but just by being an
24 ineffective weak country.

25 But I'm not absolutely sure that that's the case,

1 because they perhaps conceive that they could, through
2 the Shia majority who were emerging as the dominant
3 political force, that they could exercise control and
4 precisely that sort of role which the Sunni world was
5 afraid of. But in that they have been disappointed.

6 One, going back to the Charge of the Knights,
7 I think one effect of that was to expose to the
8 political class and Prime Minister Maliki personally and
9 to the public, the degree to which Iranian backing had
10 been a driver behind malevolent militias in the south
11 who had been responsible for many Shia deaths and
12 intra-Shia tensions, and that played very strongly
13 against Iran's interests, particularly when it came to
14 the provincial elections and since.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Two other countries. Turkey, there
16 has always been the question of the Turkish view of
17 Kurdish autonomy, support for the PKK within Turkey and
18 so on. How do you see that situation at the moment --

19 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Well, one of the major success
20 stories of the past two years has been the development
21 of Turkish/Iraq relations based on improvement in
22 Turkey's attitude to and relations with the Kurdish
23 leadership in the Kurdish region, but also a very
24 wholehearted engagement by Turkey in Baghdad and,
25 indeed, in Basra, and a Turkish appreciation that

1 a prosperous, successful new Iraq is a major opportunity
2 for Turkey.

3 The vision that I had of the future Iraq's alignment
4 was of combining the sort of secular Islamic democracy
5 of a Turkey, in its geostrategic position, with the oil
6 wealth of a Gulf state and the economic sophistication
7 and market sophistication of a Gulf state. Combine all
8 that with the historical cultural weight of Iraq in the
9 Arab world, the quality of its people and that is,
10 I think, the direction that Iraq is going.

11 The alternative alignment, the malign alignment,
12 would be the east/west alignment, where Iraq might have
13 fallen into an alignment with Iran and Syria, Hezbollah
14 and -- you know, that sort of alignment, and I think the
15 prospect of that is receding to the point of ...

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would you describe this future Iran
17 as pro-western or would that --

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Iraq, sorry?

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Iraq. I keep getting my consonants
20 wrong. Would you describe the future in Iraq as
21 a pro-western country? Would that not be a very helpful
22 label to give it?

23 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: What I hope -- what we would hope
24 for is for a partnership, a strategic partnership for us
25 and others, an Iraq that is consulting Iraq's own

1 national interests but seeing those national interests
2 as increasingly aligned with the sort of international
3 efforts that we also seek.

4 It will develop into a vigorous player within the
5 Arab league. It will have views again and play a role
6 on regional political issues on which we will have
7 differences with Iraq. But if Iraq develops, as
8 I believe there is a serious prospect, into an
9 increasingly well governed, better governed, extremely
10 wealthy country with a constitution that works and it is
11 a government that is democratic and attuned to all its
12 constituent communities, that will be a force for good.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What aspect of -- implied by your
14 last answer is the question of the relationship with
15 Israel or non-relationship with Israel, I suppose as it
16 is at the moment? Again, going back to the argument of
17 2001/2003, one of them was that the United States was
18 hoping to turn Iraq into some sort of pro-Israel Arab
19 country. That clearly has not happened, but can you see
20 Iraq becoming a player in the Middle East peace process
21 or will it stay apart from that for a while?

22 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Iraq is still in an introspective
23 phase, and I think will remain so for some time. In
24 contrast to my five years in Jordan, I have had very,
25 very few discussions about Palestine in the two, two and

1 a half years that I was in Baghdad, and there is a very
2 natural explanation for that, but that's not to say that
3 the Iraqi public and Iraqi political class aren't highly
4 attuned to the Arab view of this issue and they will, as
5 I say, play a -- will, when they have recovered their
6 role in the region, which they will, they will be
7 playing a full part on that.

8 My hope is that it will be a mature, well considered
9 role, not an extremist -- extreme one, and that they
10 will be an additional partner to those Arab partners
11 that we do have who sincerely are seeking a just peace
12 in the region between Israel and the Palestinians.

13 The Iraqis are not going to emerge as anything
14 different from what you would expect from a major Arab
15 country.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Lastly, again just looking back at
17 perhaps some of the claims that were made in 2001/2003,
18 and are still made, is the argument that the American
19 and British motivation was to get access, influence,
20 over Iraqi oil assets and policies? We had the
21 suggestion from Simon MacDonald yesterday afternoon
22 that, at least in terms of recent contracts, there is
23 some advantage to the UK in its relationship but nothing
24 like perhaps what was being suggested.

25 But how do you see Iraq as a major player in OPEC

1 and whether the British and Americans do have any
2 particular influence over its policies that it might not
3 otherwise have had?

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: The -- there are two aspects of
5 that to comment on. One is the suggestion that there
6 has been a sort of commercial gain out of this whole
7 episode. It is true that many Iraqi politicians respect
8 the role that we have played, are grateful for it and
9 are very keen that there should be a very full
10 British/Iraqi relationship in the future and
11 Prime Minister Maliki is one of those and many senior
12 members of his Cabinet also.

13 What is not the case is that they are therefore
14 going to pour contracts into our lap or into the lap of
15 our companies. Our companies, it is quite clear, have
16 to compete on merit, and that is as it should be, and
17 the recent success of our major multinational -- major
18 energy companies in securing some of these contracts in
19 partnership with others including the Chinese has been
20 on the merits of their proposals and the fact that in
21 the case of Shell they are the world leaders in gas
22 gathering and the strategic developments of Iraq's
23 southern gas really cannot be undertaken by anybody
24 else, as people have realised.

25 The future role of Iraq within OPEC is a very

1 interesting one. My last conversation with the Minister
2 of Oil of Iraq made plain that they don't see themselves
3 as in any way constrained by OPEC quotas whatsoever.
4 There is a discussion which they need to have with their
5 OPEC partners when their present ambitions, to lift their
6 oil production from an amount of 2 million barrels per
7 day exports to six within five years and 12 within ten
8 to 15 years, become a reality. They have a long way to
9 go before this is a reality and there is plenty of time
10 for them to engage with OPEC partners on how that is
11 going to be managed within that organisation.

12 Our own ability -- which is your question -- to
13 influence Iraq's approach to that I would say is going
14 to be -- well, pretty limited, I would think. We
15 will -- if we have particular concerns and interests, we
16 will be able to feed them in. We will have access, we
17 will be listened to, but Iraq -- the future Iraq will
18 take its national decisions based on its national
19 interests and that is the sort of Iraq which we have
20 sought to establish and which I would welcome.

21 The positive aspect out of the emerging of a stable
22 and secure Iraq is that it is going to be able to open
23 up new avenues of supply of gas, potentially, and
24 certainly oil for Europe. It will diversify -- be
25 another means of diversifying the EU energy

1 perspective -- independence and EU energy security will
2 be enhanced, and through that our own, and if Iraq
3 emerges as I see every prospect of it doing, they will be
4 a responsible major producer.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I just have two more questions and they
7 both arise from your very bold geopolitical prospect
8 that you put before us. The first one -- and it relates
9 both, of course, now and also, I suppose more
10 importantly after the election, after the March
11 election.

12 What more do you think the United Kingdom government
13 can do to help ensure a stable, prosperous and peaceful
14 Iraq within this forward-looking perspective?

15 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think that the broad-based whole
16 Iraq relationship, which we have now established and
17 transitioned into out of the military phase, which was
18 dominant in previous years, is a very good basis. We
19 are wholly engaged with the development of Iraq's -- to
20 the extent we can, Iraq's educational capacity. The
21 British Council is becoming more and more active. We
22 are -- we have got a consortium of British universities
23 which are focusing on Iraq. We are taking part in the
24 Iraqi Government's scholarship, very large scholarship,
25 multiannual scholarship programme which may lead to

1 thousands of Iraqi postgraduate students coming to the
2 UK over time, with many issues that still need to be
3 resolved on that but that is one area of potential
4 growth. UKTI are back in Baghdad, they are looking at
5 their future priorities, trying to free up money to
6 build up their operations in Iraq. That is, I think, an
7 increasingly important area.

8 We hope that the unit cost of Whitehall engagement
9 in Iraq is going to come down. That will depend on the
10 security, above all, and the issues of duty of care are
11 overriding. So I have a short-term fear that next
12 year's public sector expenditure round and the pressures
13 on budgets could lead Whitehall collectively to
14 retrench, where, from a purely -- from the perspective
15 of what would be good for developing and building on
16 success in Iraq, we would want to -- we would want to
17 invest more.

18 So I really hope that, despite the very high unit
19 costs of engagement in our three missions in Iraq, there
20 is -- all those missions can be maintained and indeed
21 developed with increasing participation across the whole
22 of Whitehall. But that is something that, where I am
23 now, I can't influence now, unfortunately.

24 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Increasing stability and --

25 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: If Iraq develops -- if the

1 elections go well, if the -- as I would expect, the new
2 government in Iraq opens up with the Americans the issue
3 of a further continuing military relationship with them
4 to -- to focus on their residual long-term tasks where
5 Iraq has needs and the US can satisfy them, if all that
6 can go well, then -- and internally the recent
7 improvements, as you look at it in the long-term, in
8 security can continue, then we should be able to, within
9 a number of years, get back to having normal embassy
10 activities in Iraq and to make it a country in which
11 normal business is conducted in a normal fashion.

12 I wouldn't like to put a timescale on that but that
13 is possible within years.

14 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My final question is, I suppose,
15 slightly more philosophical. It has been said that Iraq
16 is arguably the heart of the Arab world, and drawing on
17 part of your answer to Sir Lawrence, I wonder if you
18 could tell us in broader terms why and how you see Iraq
19 as important to the United Kingdom?

20 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It brings together so many of the
21 elements that we have mentioned. It is going to be the
22 second largest producer of energy in the world, maybe,
23 possibly even the first if we all take their ambitions
24 at face value. The whole region, the Middle East
25 region, is increasingly central to national security

1 concerns, which we have, in counter-terrorism interests.
2 A secure, stable Iraq will be will be a positive -- and
3 a democratic Iraq will be a positive influence on that
4 front. The reverse would obviously be -- the inverse of that
5 would obviously be true.

6 I think this is slightly more tendentious, but if
7 Iraq's constitutional, democratic development entrenches
8 itself, it could become something of a model of --
9 within the wider region, but it is quite clear to us
10 that each country across this very complex region has to
11 develop its own broad reform and modernisation
12 programme, so you can't transpose from Iraq on to others
13 but, as you say, Iraq has -- is the cradle of our own
14 civilisation and is regarded across the Arab world as
15 absolutely central to the development of Arab culture,
16 and an Iraq which increasingly finds its new place as
17 a democratic country will inevitably have positive
18 influences.

19 In relation to Iran, I have spoken about this
20 geostrategic alignment. An Iraq which stands up for its
21 own interests, which manages its complex internal
22 dynamics successfully, will probably continue to be led
23 by a Shia Prime Minister, but a Shia Iraqi
24 Prime Minister, a Shia Arab/Iraqi Prime Minister; and such an
25 Iraq with solid relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt

1 but with special relations with Iran also, and a
2 history of cooperation with major western powers, will be
3 a crucible for better international relations.

4 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Perhaps this was one of the outcomes
5 of March 2003 or might be?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I think that -- I mean,
7 William Patey said that somebody might say that
8 strategic success was possible but not assured. I was
9 that person.

10 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Usha?

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Mr Prentice, you have painted
13 a picture which gives you glimmers of hope, but do you
14 think that we have left behind a platform which will
15 entrench the kind of democratic principle -- I mean,
16 I take the point they will develop their own, but do you
17 think we have left behind a legacy which can be built
18 upon?

19 The second issue, which, if I may wrap it up now,
20 you have been talking about the work being done with
21 universities and the British Council and the support
22 they are giving, but what about issues like women's
23 issues, human rights -- and you talked about it being
24 a cradle of civilisation and the damage that was done to
25 museums and libraries and all of that. Where is that

1 agenda as part of all of this and was something -- was
2 attention being paid to those issues while you were
3 there?

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Yes. All that is very important
5 and, indeed, in painting this very optimistic projection
6 of how it might be, one has to come back to reality and
7 say that it is not assured and that there are those
8 unresolved existential political issues internally
9 within Iraq which have not been settled yet, and, until
10 they are settled, there cannot be complete confidence
11 that the model will hold, but my overall assessment is
12 that politics has become the medium of settlement of
13 dispute, not conflict, and that that is what is holding.

14 It also incidentally leads to the slow pace
15 of things, the complexity, the frustrating delays in
16 passage of laws -- which we have seen at almost every
17 single stage. That will continue. Part of the
18 unsettled business is -- and a symptom of the
19 continued real sensitivities and even barely suppressed
20 hostilities between communities - is the human rights
21 agenda, the suspicion of -- that the critical
22 institutions in the field of rule of law, the police,
23 the judiciary are still governed by various sectarian
24 influences; that understandably in a society that has
25 gone through so much trauma, the desire for revenge is

1 only barely below the surface. The instinct for
2 violence has not gone away; it is subordinate and it is
3 subdued. I don't want to talk myself into a depression,
4 but all of that is true.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It is a reality check?

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It is a reality check, and during
7 the period that I was there, we had a programme, partly
8 through the EU, with EU JUSTLEX, partly with the
9 Americans in the rule of law complex, on human rights,
10 judicial reform, training of judges, engagement with the
11 military on human rights training of the military so
12 that the issue of treatment of detainees could be
13 improved further. I lobbied on behalf of Iraqi trade
14 unions at the request of the TUC and HMG. There is
15 a lot of unfinished business, but, encouragingly, there
16 are champions for these issues amongst the Iraqis, whose
17 voices are not suppressed, but in this phase of Iraqi
18 political development they are still tackling and have
19 not yet resolved really big existential issues, the
20 relationship with the Kurds, the relationship between
21 the central government and the regions, the division of
22 resources, the revision of the constitution, the
23 relative powers of the Prime Minister and the President.
24 All of those issues are for the next political phase
25 which will follow the elections, and my parting private

1 and public urging of Iraqi politicians and others in
2 Iraq was that the period of government formation which
3 will inevitably follow the elections and be quite
4 prolonged, should be used as a period to focus on
5 a political platform, a consensus on these issues which
6 could then -- you know, as the new government is formed,
7 and it is likely to be a coalition government again, the
8 government -- there is going to be an instinct to put
9 together a government of national unity again
10 encompassing all the constituent political actors - that
11 that government should come into power with an agreed
12 basis for tackling these issues and bringing them to
13 legislative reality.

14 There was a market for that. People were saying,
15 "Yes, that's right, that's what we should do", but there
16 was also the comment, "But it is going to be very
17 difficult and may not be how it happens". I encourage
18 you to watch that process. It will be a very vigorous,
19 real political process and in a way that is the big
20 achievement out of these seven years, which is that Iraq
21 has real politics.

22 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Roderic?

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm conscious that we are running out of
24 time and the snow is probably piling up outside this
25 bunker, but just a couple of quick questions, if I may.

1 First, to pursue a little further the unresolved
2 existential issues. When you were ambassador in Amman
3 in 2002, part of the task of your embassy was to report
4 on what was going on inside Iraq because we didn't have
5 an embassy there and your staff used to go in and out.
6 So your embassy was taking snapshots as best you could
7 of the situation in Iraq and passing them back to
8 London.

9 How would you compare the quality of life for
10 ordinary Iraqis, you found when you went to Iraq as
11 ambassador in 2007, with those snapshots from 2002/early
12 2003?

13 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I mean, I wouldn't put too much
14 weight on the snapshots that we developed of life in
15 Iraq in that period as being a sort of comprehensive
16 record of conditions in Iraq.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you had a feel for the economic
18 situation, the way people live, the security?

19 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Personally, I don't remember that
20 being a major part of the effort of my mission in
21 Iraq -- in Jordan. But I think that the general sense
22 of conditions in Iraq were of a country that was in its
23 infrastructure coming apart at the seams. It was
24 suffering the effects of decades of dictatorship,
25 mismanagement and the effects of the sanctions regime

1 and -- so that was the situation, the picture that
2 presented itself, and depending on which community you
3 belonged to, whether you were favoured or not, you might
4 be more or less oppressed by the government in Baghdad
5 at that time.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. I mean, others have described the
7 situation to us immediately after the campaign. What
8 I'm really interested in is what you found when you went
9 back in 2007, in terms of quality of life -- not "went
10 back", when you went there in 2007, and how this
11 compared with this earlier picture?

12 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: If you are leading up to the issue
13 of delivery of services and satisfaction of public
14 expectations amongst Iraqis of the results of this seven
15 years...

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I really want to know if the quality of
17 life was better.

18 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I can't make that judgment, but
19 I think there is a considerable measure of acute
20 disappointment amongst Iraqis that the better life has
21 not come quicker and there is -- there were clearly
22 unrealistic expectations on all sides about how quickly
23 such a severely damaged infrastructure could be put
24 together, particularly in the context of the developing
25 insurgency, but even without that, I think it would have

1 taken a very great deal of effort to -- and required
2 years to really raise living standards and opportunities
3 back to levels --

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: William Patey said this is a sort of
5 ten-year job and we are not at ten years yet.

6 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It is also now very much and has
7 been for years an Iraqi-led process, using Iraqi
8 resources, using Iraqi Governmental processes, local and
9 central, which we have tried to build into -- build
10 their capacity to deliver and there is no doubt at all
11 that service delivery is going to be one of the, if not
12 the main issue, for the politicians as they face their
13 electorate in March next year.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you see living standards improve in
15 the two and a half years, two and a quarter years that
16 you were ambassador there?

17 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Public sector salaries were
18 increased very extensively, and, unfortunately, Iraq has
19 a very high proportion of public sector employment.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It sounds like the UK.

21 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: So crude measures of available
22 disposable income for the majority of the population
23 might be able to show an improvement, but I think that,
24 in general, the feeling was that people were not
25 satisfied with delivery of water, electricity, health,

1 education. There was some recognition of the
2 difficulties and I think some recognition that -- in the
3 years that I was there, that these were Iraqi
4 difficulties, endemic Iraqi problems rather than the
5 fault of the coalition, but there was undoubtedly an
6 expectation on the coalition at various stages that we
7 were going to come with a magic wand and be able to
8 deliver --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thanks. Can I just ask one question
10 picking up a point you made, another point? The cost of
11 us being there. Do you have in your head a ballpark
12 figure for the annual cost, running cost, of the three
13 missions that you were responsible for and the
14 approximate staffing, UK-based and locally engaged at
15 the time you left? Without notice you may not have
16 that, but just a ballpark?

17 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I'm just guessing, perhaps
18 Margaret might know this answer, but I think it may be
19 about 57 million.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We can obviously ask.

21 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: But I do know that it is more than
22 the entire North American network.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So it is quite dramatic, and numbers, the
24 staff?

25 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It depends whom you are counting,

1 but UK-based staff, about -- well, again, are you
2 talking about Foreign Office, are you talking about
3 Whitehall?

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, the people, UK-based staff.

5 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I do not have the total numbers
6 across Whitehall of the whole of the missions in my
7 head, but I think --

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But a large number. Mark Lowcock talked
9 quite -- about the understandable difficulties of
10 getting -- finding staff with the right qualifications,
11 who could go and serve in a country like Iraq,
12 particularly taking account of family circumstances.

13 I wonder if, just in conclusion, you would like to
14 say a little bit about this. How difficult was it? You
15 spent more than twice as long there as your two or three
16 immediate predecessors. How hard is it to be living
17 there? How hard is it to get people to go there? Did
18 you have the sort of quality of staff that ideally you
19 would have wanted to have, including language skills?

20 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I would like to pay a tribute, if
21 I'm given the opportunity, to the commitment and
22 endeavour of all the staff that served in Baghdad, in all
23 three missions, during the time I was there. It was from
24 time to time extremely hard and difficult circumstances.

25 The two and a quarter years I was there included

1 a period of six weeks of the most intense rocketry and
2 mortaring into the Green Zone, and the -- I have got
3 nothing but admiration for the staff, all of whom are
4 volunteers. Certainly the quality was high -- it
5 fluctuated a bit, but we encouragingly had more
6 volunteers for almost all the positions than we could
7 have expected, and only very occasional difficulty in filling
8 positions, usually because of changes at short notice.

9 The conditions are that everyone is unaccompanied.
10 You are there for about six to eight weeks at a time and
11 then you leave for a break of a week or ten days, then
12 go back. Travelling in and out was arduous. Travel
13 within the Green Zone was done in protected vehicles.
14 Outside in -- outside the international zone in fully
15 planned and protected convoys under personal protection.
16 There were multiple security threats which are probably
17 diminishing over time, but the duty of care of the
18 Foreign Office at DFID, the MoD and all the departments
19 was very careful and there was -- conditions were
20 comparable for everybody there.

21 You might wish to explore separately whether some
22 co-ordination of the terms and conditions of service of
23 people across all the Whitehall Departments could be co-ordinated in
24 future operations like this, because there were some
25 issues that arose, even down to who was able to travel

1 in what sort of transport. One really ought to be able
2 to equalise that across --

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It was still happening in your time?

4 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: There were some difficulties about
5 that, yes.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: More in Basra than in Baghdad?

7 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: No, just where it arose, and
8 sensible local decisions had to be made in order to
9 operate. I felt that the -- Baghdad and Iraq as a whole
10 is a place where people of the right type were really
11 keen to serve and got a lot out of it. Other people
12 have observed to me that in other missions, other parts
13 of our network, that those who had come to them who had
14 served in Baghdad, came with enhanced skills and
15 qualities and that it did well for people. It didn't
16 suit everybody, but there were remarkably few people who
17 did not volunteer to extend. They were only committed
18 for six months. Nearly everybody stayed for a year,
19 and, as I was leaving, more and more people were wishing
20 and being allowed to extend for operational purposes
21 beyond that year, 18 months, sometimes two years, not
22 just because I had done it, but because it was being
23 perceived as practical and useful and compatible with
24 their health and welfare, which was what had been a severe
25 constraint. William was right when he said that the

1 rule was pretty strictly enforced that nobody should be
2 in theatre beyond a year.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: We have sometimes asked our witnesses if they
4 have any final comments to make, but I think you have
5 had quite a full opportunity, Mr Prentice. Have we left
6 anything out?

7 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: I have got a list of things here,
8 which I thought should be mentioned, if there was an
9 opportunity, and there is one that hasn't been
10 mentioned, if I could just do that.

11 This period was characterised by the real emergence
12 of an effective UN role. We haven't had a chance to
13 explore that, but through the person of
14 Staffan de Mistura and his team and Ad Melkert, who has
15 succeeded him, part of the effective international
16 support to the emergence of Iraqi politics and political
17 reconciliation, was done through the UN and I think that
18 is a very important factor.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: We will, if we may, log that. You are,
20 I think, the first person to say that. We have all been
21 conscious of the fairly disastrous implications of the
22 bombing back in 2003 on UN engagement and involvement
23 and it is good to hear that that in a sense has receded.

24 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It has more than receded --

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did DFID have a role in that? Were

1 they instrumental in bringing the UN ...

2 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: It arose from the enabling

3 resolution which was passed by the UN in the summer of

4 2007, I think it was 1770, which was a further step in

5 the international community recognising that support

6 for the emerging Iraq was becoming an important

7 international collective priority and Stefan de Mistura,

8 who took over very shortly after I arrived, was

9 particularly dynamic and successful. He established

10 a very successful and intensive engagement with the

11 Iraqi politicians, and through him and his team,

12 particularly on the elections, and the setting up of the

13 independent higher electoral commission, the proposing

14 of compromise formula on the very difficult issues to do

15 with handling of minorities and the role of Kirkuk, the

16 treatment of Kirkuk in the provincial elections and the

17 national elections, on all those issues it became clear

18 that where Iraqis would be

19 reluctant to take suggestions from the US or from us or

20 from any national actor, they were willing to take

21 suggestions from the UN, who were perceived not to have

22 any national axe to grind or were not open to suspicion

23 of that.

24 So the UN developed this role of engaging at one

25 level with the full international community, with the US

1 and the UK and becoming -- distilling their advice for
2 Iraq and delivering that into the Iraqi bloodstream and
3 helping the Iraqi politicians to reach their essential
4 political compromises on some extremely difficult
5 legislation.

6 That will -- their role will, after the elections,
7 be absolutely critical on the issue of Kirkuk,
8 where there is a dormant process, where the
9 Baghdad Government and the regional authorities are both
10 engaged on the basis of a 500-page UN analysis of all
11 the disputed internal borders, including Kirkuk,
12 a separate package of recommendations -- not
13 recommendations, but of options for handling of Kirkuk;
14 and after the elections it is expected that that high
15 level task force, UN chaired, will start again with the
16 new government and with the regional government and that
17 role will be critical in helping Iraq achieve these
18 solutions.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did the US appreciate that?

20 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Oh, yes. This happened with
21 absolutely full support from all members of the
22 international community and -- I mean, in the same
23 category, I would draw attention to the increased EU
24 engagement and role. The EU ambassadors were the
25 majority of the diplomatic corps when I was there and

1 under successive Presidencies, including instructively the
2 French presidency, given the history of the
3 French attitude, there was an increasingly co-ordinated
4 and concerted EU political engagement, particularly on
5 justice issues and humanitarian issues, the death
6 penalty, on those issues, complementary to the US effort
7 and encouraged by the US.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

9 MR CHRISTOPHER PRENTICE: Sorry, that was a bit too much.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: Not at all. We asked for final comments and
11 we received them, but with thanks, and genuine thanks to
12 you, and indeed all of those who have provided evidence
13 in the course of today and to those who have been here
14 for the hearings.

15 Our next hearing starts at 10 o'clock tomorrow
16 morning, when we shall be seeing Major General
17 Barney White-Spunner and he will be followed later
18 tomorrow morning by Nigel Haywood of the FCO and
19 Keith Mackiggan of the DFID and that will conclude
20 tomorrow's hearings at the end of the morning.

21 So with that, I shall close the session. Thank you.

22 (4.30 pm)

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

24

25

FINAL