

Thursday, 7 January 2010

(10.00 am)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning.

LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome everybody, including our witness. The objective of this session this morning is to understand the situation on the ground in Basra between February and August 2008. For the first session we have Lieutenant General Barney White-Spunner, who served, I think, as GOC MND South East during the period, and later in the morning we have the Consul General at the time and the head of the provincial reconstruction team.

I envisage this session as lasting about an hour or a bit more, and the only other preliminary I want to say, as I always do, we recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events, and we are, of course, checking what we hear against the papers to which we have access, and I remind every witness that he will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and contract.

I think without more preliminaries, I will turn to Sir Lawrence to open the questioning.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: General, you arrived a few weeks  
2 before the Charge of the Knights, and we will talk about  
3 that in a moment. I just thought it would be useful,  
4 perhaps, if you could start by giving a sense of what  
5 you were led to expect in your briefing before you  
6 arrived and what you actually found when you did arrive,  
7 your overall sense of the security situation and the  
8 political situation in Basra.

9 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. Probably quite a lengthy  
10 answer, is that okay just to talk on and you can stop  
11 me?

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

13 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I got there, as you said,  
14 before the beginning of the Charge of the Knights. Of  
15 course, that was about five months after the withdrawal  
16 from Basra to the airport, and it was -- about two  
17 months after PIC in Basra province, which was  
18 16 December.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: PIC is the --

20 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Provincial Iraqi Control.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- Provincial Iraqi Control, yes.

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We had already, as you will  
23 have heard, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Maysan had already  
24 PIC'd, so Basra was the last one to go.

25 The strategy, which I was briefed on, was to

1 maintain the operating base at the airport whilst  
2 training up the Iraqi security forces so that they could  
3 exercise more effective control.

4 The division we had originally trained in 2007,  
5 10 Div, had, of course, gone from Basra by then,  
6 General Habib's division, so we had started -- my  
7 predecessors, 1 Div -- and I think Graham Binns is  
8 coming on Monday -- had started training the 14 Division  
9 under General Mohammed. When I arrived, we had two of  
10 its brigades, 50 and 51 Brigade, trained and deployed,  
11 but without MiTTs and I would quite like to come back to  
12 the MiTT issue.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we will park that for  
14 a moment.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The third brigade, 52 Brigade,  
16 was forming up at Shaibah, which is where we did the  
17 training, a short distance from the COB. The  
18 multinational elements at the time was an Australian  
19 contingent remaining at Tallil, who was still there, and  
20 they were maintaining a liaison relationship and  
21 overwatching Muthanna, and then there was a Czech  
22 company who was helping us to guard the COB.

23 We were roughly at 4,100 troops at the COB, quite  
24 lot of those tied up -- are you happy for me to use the  
25 term "COB", are you familiar with it? With

1 a contingency operating base. Sorry, it is sort of army  
2 shorthand, I am afraid.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Reduce the number of acronyms. Was  
4 that 4,100 just the UK contingent?

5 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: That was the UK, 4,100 UK  
6 contingent. You will, of course, have been briefed  
7 that, on 8 October, the Prime Minister had announced  
8 reducing British troops in the spring to 2,500. So,  
9 when I deployed, there was an expectation that that  
10 4,100 would reduce in the spring to 2,500. Events  
11 obviously changed that.

12 Do you want me to chat through the political  
13 situation in Basra?

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that would be helpful.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think the first thing is  
16 that overall in Iraq, in February to March 2008,  
17 although things were beginning to go much better, the  
18 Sunni attacks were decreasing, there was still -- the  
19 situation was still, in General Petraeus' words,  
20 fragile. There was still considerable violence in Mosul  
21 and in parts of Baghdad and the Shia factions, although  
22 the Sadrism ceasefire was still in place, and, in fact,  
23 was renewed shortly after I got there, for what it was  
24 worth.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: The national ceasefire?

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The Sadrs, OMS --  
2 THE CHAIRMAN: As opposed to Basra.  
3 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Precisely. Although, of  
4 course, special groups were exempted by Moqtadr Al Sadr.  
5 So when the ceasefire applied to the Iraqi security  
6 forces, it didn't, of course, apply to attacks on the  
7 coalition, he did charmingly exempt that.  
8 Sadr himself was by this stage a waning  
9 political force, I'm pretty certain he was in Iran for  
10 much of the time I was there and the political situation  
11 in Basra itself was also pretty fragile. The governor  
12 was Wa'ili and -- with his Fadhila party, at odds with  
13 Prime Minister Maliki and the Baghdad Government, and  
14 open talk at the time of the south-east forming some  
15 form of secessionist, if you like, sort of federation,  
16 which I'm sure you are familiar with, which obviously  
17 was fairly inimical to the nationalist Shia parties  
18 because obviously it involves a large chunk of the Shia  
19 vote, which is inside south east Iraq.  
20 There was a feeling that the Fadhila administration  
21 in Basra was incompetent. Basra was not, despite all  
22 our efforts, functioning that well, and, from  
23 a coalition perspective, ie from our perspective, two  
24 things were really increasingly obvious to me.  
25 The first, that we needed to redirect our training

1 of the ISF and we needed to make more -- dedicate more  
2 of a mission to training, to develop 14 Division. That  
3 was really the first thing.

4 I talked to General Mohan at length very soon  
5 afternoon I arrived -- General Mohan, are you familiar,  
6 who had been appointed the year before, was the overall  
7 commander of the ISF in Basra -- about what he wanted,  
8 and what he wanted then -- and again, I will explain the  
9 military acronyms in a moment -- was offensive support.

10 By this we mean those weapons systems, collective  
11 weapons systems, which support infantry rather than  
12 being infantry themselves, particularly the ability to  
13 target air and helicopters, intelligence and  
14 surveillance assistance, assistance with command and  
15 control and logistics.

16 Now, doing a sort of appreciation of what that  
17 meant, that meant that we did -- to actually meet those  
18 requirements, we were actively changing our lay-down.

19 I think, secondly, it was absolutely clear that we  
20 needed an operation to clear the Shia militias out of  
21 the city, because although we had gone to PIC, actually  
22 the -- sorry, Provincial Iraqi Control in December, the  
23 situation in Basra was not -- was not that good.

24 I don't know whether you have had evidence yet  
25 from General Shirreff about Operation Sinbad.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, we have heard about that.

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think it is important to

3 take my remarks in the context of what Sinbad had

4 achieved and how the Iraqis perceived Sinbad to have

5 gone.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would probably be very helpful.

7 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I will come back to that if

8 I may, but Sinbad had taught a lot the lessons to the

9 Iraqis. Not least -- and actually, for these clearance

10 operations to be effective, they really had to be

11 Iraqi-led with us in support rather than the other way

12 on. Us being in the lead on Sinbad with them in

13 support, if you like, was still giving an excuse to the

14 extremist militias to attack us because they could use

15 us, if you like, as a rationale for --

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sinbad had been late 2006.

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Late 2006 -- hold on, I can't

18 remember the exact dates. I just need to check the

19 exact dates, but it went on over a long-ish period.

20 Effectively, it was the sort of precursor to Charge of

21 the Knights. So what I started doing on arrival with

22 General Mohan was to plan these clearance operations.

23 He and I went up to Baghdad to brief General Petraeus

24 and Rubaie, who was Prime Minister Maliki's security

25 adviser, again whom I think you are all familiar with.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Just for the record, Sinbad is 2007, isn't  
2 it?

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is late 2007. Zenith --

4 THE CHAIRMAN: 2006 was mentioned. It was 2007?

5 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: So General Mohan and I drew up  
6 this plan which saw an Iraqi lead with us in support  
7 rather than the other way on, as in Sinbad. We went up and  
8 presented that to General Petraeus and Mr Rubaie and the  
9 overall plan, which was actually very similar to Sinbad  
10 in concept, it was a clearance of Basra and the whole  
11 province by phases, was accepted and General Mohan  
12 briefed it and I obviously supported it, but the issue  
13 then was we had to fit it into the priorities of the  
14 Multi-National Corps in Iraq.

15 I would just like to digress for a moment on the  
16 command and control. May I do that?

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I was working to a US -- the  
19 18th US Airborne Corps, who were new in theatre, almost  
20 the same week I was, commanded by Lieutenant General  
21 Lloyd Austin.

22 I think it is important, particularly in the way  
23 Charge of the Knights developed, to realise that was  
24 a very close relationship and our operational command  
25 was very much exercised through the MNC-I, through the



1 Multi-National Corps Iraq, through General Austin.  
2 Obviously, there was a strong UK influence, as you would  
3 expect, and indeed as there should be, but it is  
4 absolutely clear that we fitted our operations into  
5 a pattern laid down by General Austin, not in some sort  
6 of little UK enclave separate to that. I think that's  
7 actually quite a key point.

8 Because, at that meeting in March, when we sat round  
9 in Baghdad with General Petraeus and Mr Rubaie, the  
10 point was made very clearly to us that we would need to  
11 resource this operation in Basra effectively, if it was  
12 going to work.

13 Just to remind you on the force ratios, in Basra, as  
14 Iraq's second city, and with its only port, at that time  
15 we had about seven weak-ish battalions for a city --  
16 well, nobody knows exactly what the population of Basra  
17 is but 2.5 probably 3 million compared to sort of 40 in  
18 Baghdad.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have heard 2 million before, so  
20 that indicates --

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: There was no accurate census.  
22 No one could accurately define the population in Basra,  
23 and of course, it changes as people come in, but the  
24 point is it is the second city, a very large city, very large  
25 population, but very low force levels.

1           So to actually do an operation like Charge of the  
2       Knights, in the planning, we knew we would need at least  
3       an extra division, if not more, and we would need  
4       considerable Corps support to do it. General Austin was  
5       absolutely clear that his priorities in  
6       late February/beginning of March, where we now are, was  
7       to finish the operations in Mosul and Diyala and parts  
8       of Baghdad, and we had left that Baghdad meeting with a  
9       start date of 1 June for Charge of the Knights, by which  
10      time --

11   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was it known as Charge of the  
12      Knights, or was that a later --

13   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think General Mohan called  
14      it Charge of the Knights. I can't remember exactly, but  
15      I think it was, yes.

16   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So this wasn't -- because it is  
17      associated with what happened in March --

18   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It is the same operation.

19   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I know it is the same operation  
20      brought forward, but it is just --

21   THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry to intervene, speed of speech on both  
22      sides. Can we slow down a little bit?

23   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Of course, sorry.

24           So we left Baghdad, clear that the plan was  
25      supported, supported by Dr Rubaie, supported by

1 General Petraeus and would be resourced later in the  
2 summer.

3 As I got back, I then also realised we would need  
4 additional UK assets and it would take time to source  
5 those. We were distracted by the kidnap of a British  
6 journalist in Basra who'd gone into the city unescorted  
7 and we had to devote considerable resources to his  
8 release, but, during March, we were planning to develop  
9 the operation and starting to just begin to start to do  
10 the detailed planning.

11 I could describe the phases of that operation, if  
12 that would be of interest.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we can pass over that  
14 because it didn't happen that way.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: So we started joint planning.

16 I then went to Germany to brief 7 Brigade, who were the  
17 incoming brigade, and to have some mid-tour break early,  
18 because I suspected, quite correctly, I would be unable  
19 to do so later in the summer.

20 Then Prime Minister Maliki, unexpectedly to  
21 everybody, moved down to Basra over the weekend of  
22 22 and 23 March and it became apparent to us about two  
23 days later, two days after that, that he intended to  
24 mount Charge of the Knights.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you go back to Iraq?

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Absolutely, as soon as it  
2 became clear what was happening. I had a fraught  
3 journey back. Of course, the trouble is there were  
4 insufficient troops in the city. Now, far be it for me  
5 to divine Prime Minister Maliki's motives, but I have  
6 described the political situation in Basra at the  
7 beginning, but it was an anxious time because we didn't  
8 have sufficient troops, 52 Brigade, as I said at the  
9 beginning, was inadequately trained. I say  
10 "inadequate", I mean they hadn't finished training.  
11 I don't mean the training was inadequate. We hadn't  
12 finished it. It was a worrying time and we had to do  
13 several things fairly quickly to restore the situation, which  
14 I'm happy to describe if you would like me to.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's just pause and be clear where  
16 we are. What you have described is a situation in which  
17 there was evident tension between Baghdad and Basra  
18 politically --

19 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- and a degree of urgency,  
21 therefore, that attached to that situation with  
22 Prime Minister Maliki.

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That the Americans were -- had  
25 different priorities elsewhere still, that they were

1 looking at Mosul and Baghdad and that the general  
2 agreement, which included the Iraqi military contingent  
3 or military leadership was for June.

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that was the assumptions. So  
6 now, all of a sudden, Prime Minister Maliki decides that  
7 this timetable is presumably too relaxed, too gradual.

8 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. So now you find yourself  
10 dashing back from Germany into this situation. What  
11 were the immediate priorities?

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think they were sort of  
13 fourfold really. The first was we had to get more  
14 troops into the city, and going back to what I said at  
15 the beginning, we had to maintain an Iraqi lead on this.  
16 So -- we, the corps -- I would just like to pause to  
17 describe this concept -- American concept of corps and  
18 the main effort. It might sound like military  
19 gobbledygook. Corps, as in C-O-R-P-S, ie the  
20 organisation that held all the Multi-National assets,  
21 most of which were American, bearing in mind our corps  
22 had just returned from Kabul, the ARRC, was the  
23 organisation which would flex and move troops. By "main  
24 effort" we mean which had been previously been in Mosul,  
25 we mean that operation to which the Corps Commander will

1 flex his assets, because it is, to him, the most  
2 critical for the time being.

3 We were very well supported by the Americans in this  
4 and General Austin immediately realised now that the  
5 situation in Basra was challenging, and, therefore, by  
6 making it the Corps main effort, we then came -- it  
7 opened the doors for additional military support.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I intervene for my own better  
9 understanding? We heard evidence from General Wall  
10 yesterday that certain key assets are held at Corps  
11 level and deployed to the main effort at the time, and  
12 by creating in March what should have been not required  
13 until June, they had to be reallocated very fast.

14 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, that's entirely right.  
15 There would have been -- by June also, we would have  
16 brought out some specific additional UK assets, and  
17 indeed we did, in the last week of March, bring out  
18 a considerable number of extra --

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What sorts of numbers are we talking  
20 about here?

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: In the hundreds, primarily  
22 supporting things like air controllers, joint tactical  
23 air controllers, specific communications support and  
24 other support, which I'm happy to detail later.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What sort of numbers were the

1 Americans bringing in?

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The Americans were not  
3 bringing in formations, they were not bringing in  
4 regiments and battalions. The First Iraqi Division was  
5 MiTTed -- sorry, this is again -- the American approach  
6 to training --

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Just the acronym please.

8 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It is an embedded military  
9 training team. So what the Americans had done with the  
10 First Division, and indeed with most of their formations  
11 for which they were responsible in the Iraqi army, was  
12 they had put dedicated teams into that formation who  
13 lived and worked with them. So when that formation  
14 deployed, as the First Division did, it brought those  
15 teams with it.

16 Now, if we had been doing the same, then -- for  
17 example, if our 14 Div, for whom we were responsible,  
18 had deployed, then it would have taken British troops  
19 with it, and indeed we did have, at times, that happen.

20 So what we got from the Americans was, first of all,  
21 going back to my point just now, a large slice of the  
22 corps, C-O-R-P-S, assets, things which the Americans  
23 were providing on behalf of the coalition. Specific  
24 things which were really helpful to us, were  
25 helicopters, were unmanned aerial vehicles, additional

1 support on -- money on the reconstruction side to follow  
2 up this operation, which I'm happy to come back to,  
3 those sort of assets.

4 At the same time, we had a slice of American staff  
5 to help us task those who came and sat in our  
6 headquarters, which was immensely helpful, and then we  
7 had some American teams with the Iraqi troops, but you  
8 didn't have American regiments or battalions going to  
9 Basra.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this would still have been quite  
11 a substantial number of people involved?

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. It varied enormously.  
13 I think at one point it was up to 1,000, and I think it  
14 then reduced down later to a few hundred. It varied all  
15 the time depending on -- you know, if a Corps decided on  
16 a particular day that actually it needed its attack  
17 helicopters somewhere else, then they would sort of  
18 flex.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I just go back one to the March/June  
20 difference of timing? With the ISF 14 Div, it was  
21 expected in March that it would be declared ready  
22 by June?

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Exactly so, yes. That was  
24 part of a logic and that's why General Mohan and I were  
25 very happy with and to accept the June timing.



1 THE CHAIRMAN: The fact that it was not ready in March when  
2 Prime Minister Maliki wanted to have to go into the  
3 operation, did that generate a requirement for  
4 additional boots on the ground, infantry, or rather was  
5 it just there was a general unpreparedness?

6 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Two of its brigades did quite  
7 well, the two trained ones. 52 Brigade didn't do  
8 particularly well. Therefore, that created a vacuum,  
9 exactly as you say, and that's why the arrival of the  
10 Iraqi 1st Division was absolutely critical.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would be quite useful just to  
12 describe the concept of operations, what the Knights  
13 were supposed to be doing as they charged.

14 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: To start with, there wasn't  
15 one, because, of course, the detailed planning hadn't  
16 been done. That's why the first few days were very  
17 anxious, because -- particularly for General Mohan --  
18 because there was really no plan for his existing  
19 troops -- 14 Div, and the police, of  
20 course, there was a large number of police -- to work  
21 to.

22 Then the second thing which I was going to describe  
23 was what we then did was put a planning team in with him  
24 and got him to set up -- he had already got  
25 a headquarters, but thickened up his headquarters in the

1 Shatt Al Arab Hotel building down in the south of Basra,  
2 to form that into a proper headquarters.

3 Bear in mind, at this time we still had  
4 Prime Minister Maliki in Basra Palace. So to get  
5 a proper planning team in with him was absolutely  
6 critical and we moved a lot of extra -- I say a lot, in  
7 the region of roughly 100 -- I can't remember roughly  
8 what the figure was -- extra British officers in from  
9 our corps headquarters to help him. The Americans  
10 provided considerable assistance as well.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is intriguing the role that  
12 Prime Minister Maliki saw himself playing in this. You  
13 can imagine giving symbolic political support, but was  
14 he going back to sort of 18th Century models of the  
15 sovereign leading -- commanding from the front?

16 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: That is neatly put. I mean,  
17 there was -- it really isn't for me, as a British tactical  
18 commander, to speculate on the Iraqi Prime Minister's  
19 motives, but, yes, that is effectively what he was  
20 doing, he moved his Cabinet or a large part of his  
21 Cabinet down to Basra.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But was he sort of -- wishing to  
23 give operational orders to the troops?

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, he sat, to start off  
25 with, with General Mohan, and one of the first things we

1       needed to do was to get a proper military -- to get  
2       a proper planning team, which, again, we had started  
3       building up in preparation for June. I had  
4       Colonel Richard Iron, who was my liaison officer to him,  
5       with him already developing a team. We were actually  
6       building an operations room down there in the  
7       Shatt Al Arab. We had to very quickly make that work  
8       effectively and to thrash out an operational plan,  
9       which, actually, as I said at the beginning, ended up  
10      looking not unlike Operation Sinbad. It was  
11      a systematic clearance of areas of Basra, followed by  
12      a sort of holding operation to hold the areas cleared  
13      and then to try and rebuild and reconstruct them. A lot  
14      was done by us, by the Iraqis, and, again,  
15      particularly -- a lot of American help on the  
16      reconstruction, on clearing areas.

17           Again -- I'll come back to the other two things, but  
18      are you happy if I just do one digression on that? Is  
19      that okay?

20   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, but slowly again.

21   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Slowly. It was very  
22      interesting how quickly the Shia militias crumbled.  
23      When the Iraqi people, when people in Basra saw that the  
24      operation was being led by their own army, there was  
25      no -- the rationale for opposition had gone, hence the

1 whole concept of Charge of the Knights, and they  
2 crumbled extremely quickly. A certain number of militia  
3 and militia leaders were killed. A fair number went  
4 back to Iran and a lot of the rank and file just melted  
5 away.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When you say went back to Iran, was  
7 this because they were Iranian or because Iran had been  
8 their base?

9 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Not necessarily Iranian, but  
10 certainly had received training and assistance from  
11 Iran.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were these militias largely seen as  
13 being Iranian-inspired and run or were some of the  
14 militias?

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: They were, yes. The exact  
16 nature of the Iranian support is almost a separate  
17 issue, but certainly the support for the extremist Shia  
18 militias, of whom there were several groupings, and  
19 again I could very happily --

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have had evidence on that.

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: A lot more than I. What was definitely  
22 coming over the border, as was a lot of the weaponry. So they  
23 did crumble quite quickly, and the population in Basra, as  
24 soon as they saw the Iraqi army which had had a set-back  
25 in the early days, then, if you like, operating in

1 support with us, with the coalition, with our teams --  
2 I will come back to how we reorganised in a minute --  
3 you know, operating with them, with air support and  
4 accurate targeting, something else I might come back to,  
5 if you are happy -- it was -- they collapsed very  
6 quickly, it was a phased operation, we did 13 phases of  
7 Charge of the Knights.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So how long did those 13 phases  
9 take?

10 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The last phase ended in end  
11 of May when we did Al Qurnah, the last operation  
12 4 Brigade did. It was rapidly clear, after that anxious  
13 start, that this was going to be a major success. It  
14 had taken us by surprise with absolutely no argument.  
15 We were taken by surprise, as were the Iraqi army, as  
16 was General Petraeus, by Prime Minister Maliki's move  
17 and we had a very worrying week.

18 But having got over that, and having -- there were  
19 another couple of measures we took, sorry, which I will  
20 come back to, another couple of things we did.  
21 Actually, it was very rapidly clear this was going to be  
22 a major success.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How long did Prime Minister Maliki  
24 stay in Basra while this was going on?

25 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I can't remember exactly, but

1           roughly ten days, I think.

2   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:   So he was there to give initial

3           impetus?

4   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   But he then left other Cabinet

5           ministers down there to keep an eye on his generals.

6   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:   How did this effect civil/military

7           relations?   It was quite an unusual situation.

8   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   It put Governor Wa'ili in

9           a very difficult position, but I think Governor Wa'ili

10          realised that Charge of the Knights had effectively

11          spelled the end of Fadhila as a force in Basra, and

12          indeed the elections confirmed that.

13               Two other things which I should just go back to,

14          other things which we did in that week.   A considerable

15          amount of support given, which is sometimes, I think,

16          overlooked by the coalition, even in those very early

17          chaotic few days, and I would just -- if you haven't, as

18          a Committee, you may like to look at some of the

19          gallantry citations from us, and certainly I can think

20          of a couple over that period.   There were some really

21          gutsy things happening, people reacting and falling back

22          on what resources they had.

23               But I think the third major thing was we radically

24          changed our posture, in that we did -- we brought

25          forward what I had been planning to do again, which was

1 to change the way that we trained and mentored the  
2 Iraqis. So instead of training them and then deploying  
3 brigades, without us, if you like, sort of casting them  
4 loose, we changed that system, and I have to say I got  
5 extremely rapid ministerial agreement here to do that.  
6 I think you have seen the submission I put up. If you  
7 haven't, I know that the MoD has certainly got it and  
8 I think you have seen it.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, I think this is the MiTting  
10 thing again.

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Exactly.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to that. I would  
13 just like to see what the scene is now developing in  
14 terms of the configuration within Basra. You have had  
15 a major initiative taken by Prime Minister Maliki  
16 perhaps, rescued with the help of the coalition, but the  
17 Iraqi forces were in the lead, as we had always wanted.  
18 But you have also now got the Americans, a much more  
19 substantial presence in Basra.

20 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm interested in how that affected  
22 the way that you saw your role and how that affected the  
23 concepts of operations that were developing at the time.

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Hugely welcome. Hugely welcome, because,  
25 again, to go back to this, bear in mind I think we were I said at

1 the beginning, 4,100 British troops working in an American  
2 force of 160,000, that you know, Basra had -- sorry,  
3 I was going to use an eloquent expression which  
4 I won't -- Basra had always been slightly starved of  
5 resources because it hadn't been the priority until  
6 Prime Minister Maliki made it so. So to actually  
7 suddenly be the focus and to have these extra resources  
8 was (a) absolutely essential, particularly in the areas  
9 of air support, but -- enormously welcome both to us and  
10 of course to General Mohan, because it meant that -- you  
11 know, we didn't have them all summer, Charge of the  
12 Knights evidently went better and problems, as you are  
13 aware, were still evident in Baghdad in Sadr City and Mosul so  
14 obviously we lost a lot of them.

15 So we had, say, roughly 1,000 Americans supporting  
16 us and their assets for a short period, and then, as  
17 things went well in Basra, they were flexed back up to back  
18 to Sadr City and Mosul.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: It is very important for the Committee to  
20 understand that this is not a significant American  
21 infantry presence. It is a very specialised asset.

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, they are the things which  
23 a corps holds -- the things the American corps held on  
24 behalf of the coalition. Primarily, the things which  
25 were really critical were the helicopters, particularly



1 the attack helicopters and the unmanned aerial vehicles,  
2 particularly the system known as the Predator system,  
3 which enabled very accurate targeting, and I will just  
4 cover a point of perception, which -- actually, I will  
5 cover it now, if you want.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Please.

7 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We were asked at times in  
8 those very chaotic early days to do some things by the  
9 Iraqis, which, if we had agreed to, I would be sitting  
10 in front of a very different tribunal now, and the  
11 American -- American rules of engagement were slightly  
12 easier, not hugely, slightly, which meant they were able  
13 to do some things that we weren't. I have to say which  
14 I think quite correctly we weren't.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it would be helpful to have  
16 some examples of what you are talking about, I think we  
17 can guess.

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We were invited to drop aerial  
19 ordnance on areas which we considered not to have been  
20 thoroughly enough vetted and which could have caused  
21 considerable civilian casualties.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was both from the Iraqi  
23 commanders, but the Americans somewhere in between where  
24 we --

25 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, it is too far to say the

1 Americans somewhere in between. This is the lack of  
2 planning, because you know, if we had done the planning  
3 thoroughly for this, if we had had the time, we would  
4 have known what the targets were, we would have studied  
5 them and we had very clear rules as to the amount of  
6 acceptable damage. They are very, as you would expect,  
7 in an operation like that, extremely restrictive in  
8 a city like Basra.

9 But it is inaccurate to say the Americans were  
10 somewhere in the middle. The American rules were very  
11 similar to ours. There were occasions when they could  
12 use aerial weapon systems when we could not, but it  
13 would be going far too far to say that was half way from what the  
14 Iraqi commanders wanted.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was quite an important issue in terms  
16 of the potential tensions, going back to what I was asking before  
17 about civil/military relations. In all Multi-National operations  
18 these issues arise, but we have encouraged the Iraqis to be in the  
19 lead and in control, but that you don't -- you don't want to be seen  
20 to be attacking civilians. So how do you handle these  
21 relations with the Iraqis?

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It causes some  
23 misunderstanding and there are some -- there are some  
24 moments when the Iraqis are irritated with us because we  
25 haven't done exactly what they ask, but, as we got this

1       planning cell together and we got people alongside  
2       General Mohan's -- we got the proper planning team in,  
3       they gradually go. So I'm talking about --  
4   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This in the first --  
5   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: This is in the first days,  
6       almost hours. But it did give rise to some people  
7       saying, oh, we weren't as co-operative as we could have  
8       been, but there were very good reasons.  
9   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I was going to ask about that,  
10       because reading about this at the time and things that  
11       were said, you got a sense, first, of some tensions  
12       between the Americans and the Iraqis, because this  
13       wasn't how the Americans would have prioritised  
14       operations at that time, and then, second, both of them,  
15       perhaps not quite sure exactly what the Brits were  
16       contributing to things. I mean, were you aware of these  
17       sorts of perceptions around at the time?  
18   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Funnily enough, not so much at  
19       the time. There was no western media in Basra at the  
20       time. Indeed, there wasn't for some months afterwards.  
21       There was the odd -- one visit. But there was very --  
22       we were aware that the Iraqis were asking us to do some  
23       things, as I have described, we didn't want to do and  
24       wouldn't do, but generally, on the ground, the sort  
25       of -- the relationship between us and the corps and

1 General Mohan's headquarters was incredibly close, as  
2 indeed it had to be, because we were prosecuting daily  
3 operations with all our soldiers in danger.

4 So there was a sort of -- I'm not totally certain  
5 where this has all come from, to be honest. We actually  
6 perceived tension in the early days of some  
7 misunderstanding in the early days, as I have described  
8 but very quickly resolving, particularly when we  
9 started MiTTing. I know you don't want to talk about  
10 mitts, but I'll come back to --

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Before I hand over to  
12 Baroness Prashar, I just want to see again where we are.

13 Initially, Basra is the British area, this was our  
14 responsibility and we were training the forces to  
15 operate in that area, we were trying to bring law and  
16 order and so on, and you have described a situation  
17 where actually we haven't done that well, the position  
18 in Basra was not a paragon of law and order, shall we  
19 say, and now -- and we had always wanted the Iraqis to  
20 come in, but now the Americans are also having to move  
21 in quite strongly as well. So -- and this is obviously  
22 referring to a very long period of time that the  
23 situation has developed, but would it be fair to say  
24 that, as this situation works itself through, the  
25 British have become a more marginal factor in overall

1 situation?

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, I don't think it would, to  
3 be honest. I think in the early days the effort in  
4 Basra was with 1 Division, the Iraqi 1 Division, because  
5 14 Division had suffered quite badly, as I described,  
6 during that initial week. So the bulk of the  
7 operations, if you like -- I can't remember the exact  
8 timeline -- in the sort of, maybe, the subsequent  
9 10 days was led by the Iraqi 1 Division which had the  
10 American teams with it, and we still at the time, the  
11 bulk of the air assets, the -- the reconnaissance  
12 assets, surveillance assets, ISTARs -- more military  
13 acronyms and I promised I wouldn't -- you know, were  
14 corps provided. I think it is always better to say  
15 "corps" rather than "American", although most of them  
16 were American. You don't sort of see it in national  
17 blocks, we were part of a multinational coalition, as  
18 I have described.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I can see militarily that would be  
20 so. If you have worked through NATO, that's how you  
21 would see things, but politically it may not appear that  
22 way.

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, it may not, and my eyes  
24 were down on the ground in Basra. But then -- yes, as  
25 the -- as 14 Division was rehabilitated and

1       reconstructed, then, with our embedded teams, for the  
2       latter stages of Charge of the Knights it was  
3       14 Division who were conducting a large part of the  
4       operations, and indeed 1 Division was subsequently  
5       moved, as, again, the main effort moved to different  
6       bits of Iraq.

7       SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

8       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Could I explore a little further the  
9       relationship between US and UK, because it was an agreed  
10      mission in Basra by April?

11      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

12      BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were there any differences in our  
13      strategies with the US and the UK or were you working as  
14      a cohesive force?

15      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: My boss was American, my  
16      orders were from General Austin, and through him from  
17      General Petraeus. We were very much part of the corps,  
18      and although I would talk obviously to the headquarters  
19      in Northwood and occasionally, when asked to do so, to  
20      ministers and officials here, the operational -- my  
21      orders were coming very much from General Austin.

22      BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What kind of messages were you  
23      getting from Northwood and ministers?

24      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Very supportive. I think,  
25      like all of us, taken back in those early days but then

1       very quickly realising that this -- you know, the  
2       opportunity that, although it wasn't to our timing, it  
3       was the operation we had always wanted, and pushing it  
4       and exploiting it.

5       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But wasn't our strategy at that time  
6       to draw down?

7       LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

8       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The Americans -- they were not  
9       drawing down?

10      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The Americans were beginning  
11      to draw down, yes, to a slightly different timetable to  
12      us, but, yes, there was the beginnings of an American  
13      drawdown. I can't remember the exact details of it  
14      but -- it is still going on, as I'm sure you know.

15      BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was our approach and their approach  
16      to MITting the same, the question of overwatch?

17      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We changed -- one of those  
18      things we did in the first days of Charge of the Knights  
19      was bring forward what we had wanted to do, what we had  
20      realised we had to do in February, which was to put  
21      teams in with the MITTs we keep mentioning, to put them  
22      in with the Iraqi formations to whom we were  
23      responsible.

24             So that was a major change, but I have to say that,  
25      once we got authority to do it, we had the 1st Battalion

1 Royal Regiment of Scotland out the same evening in that  
2 format.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were the Americans doing the same?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. Ultimately, we looked at  
5 what they were doing and certainly it was very  
6 influential. Our construct was slightly different, and  
7 indeed it is a construct that we are developing in  
8 Afghanistan at the moment, but the point was that we  
9 reversed what had been British policy up until then,  
10 which wasn't to do this, and had very strong and  
11 immediate support -- I put a submission in to the  
12 Ministry of Defence I think on 1 April and had authority  
13 the next day to do this. So I thought that showed great  
14 sort of flexibility and ability to adapt.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What did that mean in terms of --  
16 did you think you had the skills to do it?

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, we had to bring some extra  
18 people in. We had to bring in specialists like the air  
19 controllers particularly. We were short of them and  
20 other specialists. I mean, the construct of the teams  
21 I'm very happy to describe. It is actually in that bit  
22 of -- oh, okay.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, please.

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Certainly. It has a commander  
25 who led it and who acted as the mentor to his Iraqi



1 counterpart. He would have obviously an interpreter, he  
2 would have a communicator. He would have a medic and he  
3 would have one of these joint tactical air controllers,  
4 because what was critical in this was accuracy of  
5 targeting and the Basrawi population very soon -- they  
6 become irritated if they saw a considerable amount of  
7 collateral damage. Hence some of my issues in the early  
8 days of this thing.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What did that actually mean in terms  
10 of fitting in with the Council General and the  
11 Provincial -- the reconstruction teams, you know, how  
12 was that relationship working?

13 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: That relationship was -- the  
14 Provincial Reconstruction Teams had found it difficult  
15 to operate over the winter of 2007 to 2008, and the  
16 reason for that was that, having gone to Provincial  
17 Iraqi Control -- I didn't say "PIC" -- in Basra, we  
18 didn't have the freedom of manoeuvre that we wanted and  
19 they were not able to get access.

20 What happened fairly immediately as a result of the  
21 Charge of the Knights is they had considerably improved  
22 access, and, indeed, were beginning to drive fairly  
23 freely around Basra. One of the things which to me was  
24 a seminal moment was Nigel Haywood, who you will be  
25 hearing from this afternoon.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This afternoon, yes.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: This morning.

3 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Nigel opening the Jameat meat  
4 market. The Jameat building, you may recall, was  
5 a building that had been used as a Sadrists headquarters  
6 and they had taken hostage British servicemen in --  
7 I can't remember the date, but I'm sure you have got  
8 it -- in 2006/2007 -- 2006 I think -- it was in  
9 12 Brigade's time.

10 Now, one very symbolic moment to us was that  
11 building, having been demolished by us, being rebuilt  
12 and opened as a meat market by the Consul General.  
13 Fairly -- certainly before the end of Charge of the  
14 Knights, I can't remember the exact date, and that was  
15 a -- a lot of Iraqi press coverage for that, which was  
16 excellent.

17 So to answer your question, considerably improved,  
18 and, of course, we had those very welcome initiatives at  
19 the time from the Prime Minister, with the Basra  
20 Development Commission headed by Michael Wareing.  
21 I don't know whether Michael is giving evidence to you,  
22 but he was then head of KPMG and was active in sort of  
23 getting private enterprise into Basra. We were seeing  
24 a lot of him. We had a lot of support again from the  
25 Americans because American funding is easier for

1 reconstruction and there was a system known as the  
2 CERPS -- you are going to ask me what it stands for.  
3 It is basically American money which is given for the  
4 reconstruction of missions which the Americans are  
5 leading on, and, as we were working to an American  
6 corps, we were given an allocation of that.

7 We had a joint office that -- some Americans in it,  
8 some from Basra's Provincial Council's own development  
9 people, our own DFID people and our own military people  
10 whom we have on that side, and there was quite rapid  
11 progress in some areas.

12 Now, the big underlying problems in Basra were  
13 obviously not tackled early on in Charge of the Knights:  
14 sewage, electricity, the clearance of the waterways.  
15 The big projects obviously were going to take longer,  
16 although we did get Umm Qasr port open really quite early  
17 on, very soon, which was very encouraging.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: For commercial rather than --

19 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: For limited commercial, not  
20 for -- one of the problems of Umm Qasr is you can't turn  
21 a big modern ship in it because it is too narrow,  
22 but you can tie it up outside and offload it.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What sort of military support were  
24 you providing for the civilian activity at this stage?

25 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Some protection,

1           communications, liaison, transport, that sort of thing.

2   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   How did the situation evolve during

3           your time in Basra?   Can you just describe to me the

4           time you got there to the time you left?

5   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   Yes.   It improved, but slowly.

6           It was -- Basra was economically in a bad situation

7           in February, I think and we had spent a lot of money.

8           Again, the Americans had spent a lot of money in Basra.

9           A lot of that had been to very good effect, but it

10          was -- I think -- throughout this operation, I think it

11          is fair to say that we underestimated the amount of

12          damage that had been done to the economy in Basra

13          province under Saddam and that very vindictive series of

14          operations that he ran in the south-east of Iraq

15          after -- well, the early to mid-90s.

16   THE CHAIRMAN:   Is that physical damage to infrastructure, or

17          also, as it were, damage to civil society, to --

18   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   It is both, sir.   The problem

19          with civil society is that the action he took against

20          the Marsh Arabs had actually pushed a lot of people from

21          the countryside into the environs of Basra.   I go back

22          to why I defy anybody to give you an accurate census of

23          Basra, and there were a lot of people almost shanty town

24          living, not quite, but almost, and, of course, the

25          tribal structure, which is important in Iraq, had

1        actually broken down in bits of Basra. In some bits the  
2        tribal structure was quite intact.

3        THE CHAIRMAN: Bits of Basra province?

4        LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: And in Basra City, actually,  
5        but mostly in Basra province. The trouble with the  
6        clearance of the marshes -- and it is awful flying now  
7        north from Basra up to Amarah. The devastation wrought  
8        on those communities was terrible and a lot of young  
9        people had drifted. Of course, there was very little  
10       work. So socially, Basra, and still is, remains  
11       fragile, although Basra, as a whole, is getting better  
12       and better all the time. I will come back to again, if  
13       I may. So big societal problems and those will take  
14       some time to solve.

15       The other trouble, of course, was there was  
16       a serious drought going on through all this period, and  
17       in southern Iran at the time, and farming was just not  
18       producing a living and farms that had previously  
19       supported big families actually were unable to do so and  
20       you found children being sent into the city to find  
21       other livelihoods.

22       So if you would like -- slow progress. I think what  
23       happened during our time was the security finally came  
24       and in the way we wanted, in an unintended way. I don't  
25       say for a moment -- not unintended, but in the wrong

1 timing.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That enabled you to look at other

3 issues?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: You will find, if you then, as

5 I hope I'm sure you are, taking evidence from the

6 headquarters that came after us, the last headquarters,

7 they were really able to concentrate and Nigel Haywood

8 I hope will talk about this -- were really able to

9 concentrate on development.

10 But I would say, if you look at Basra now, it is

11 quite satisfactory the way it is progressing, a huge

12 increase in property prices. The Sunnis, the Sunni

13 diaspora returned, the Sunni mosques operating, a lot of

14 the wider Basra diaspora having come back, and if you

15 look at the situation in Iraq, Basra, touch wood, is

16 pretty stable. It is beginning to work.

17 It took a lot of getting there and we made a lot of

18 mistakes along the way, nobody would deny that, but it

19 has actually -- touch wood, it has been successful.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But by the time you left Basra, the

21 Prime Minister had announced a fundamental change of the

22 mission in the first few months of 2009.

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What contribution did you make to

25 assessing how the mission should end? Were you actually

1           involved in that?

2   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We were involved heavily  
3           because obviously the Prime Minister's office talked  
4           endlessly to the Ministry of Defence and the  
5           Foreign Office. It became rapidly clear to us that the  
6           nature of support that the Iraqi security forces wanted  
7           had changed with Charge of the Knights. Actually, it  
8           had changed in the way that General Mohan and I had  
9           discussed previously. So we had those discussions, we  
10          were going to do it.

11          Charge of the Knights meant we had to adjust very  
12          rapidly and untidily, but we did it, and then we took  
13          stock and when 7 Brigade came in, in June/July, to  
14          replace 4 Brigade, they came with a slightly different  
15          construct and it became clear that actually what the  
16          Iraqi security forces now wanted was a different level  
17          of training and a different sophistication: help with  
18          issues like the Naval training team in Um Qasr, staff  
19          colleges et al, so subtly different.

20          So we were endlessly feeding into the work that was  
21          going on, again very closely co-ordinated with the  
22          Americans, as to how the British strategy would develop.

23   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were they actually reacting to the  
24          feedback that you were giving? Do you think policy  
25          decisions were being made in response to events on the

1 ground --

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think they were then, yes.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: -- or were there other factors?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Obviously there were other

5 factors. I was a tactical commander in Basra.

6 Obviously, there were other factors which are going to

7 influence ministerial and high level official decisions

8 here, but I was confident that what I was feeding back

9 from Basra was being listened to and was being

10 accommodated, and, indeed, you could see it in how the

11 policy played out. We recommended strongly that

12 20 Brigade should deploy, which they duly did

13 after 7 Brigade.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When Basra had achieved the

15 Provincial Iraqi Control, the multinational force was

16 withdrawn completely and it was all with the US

17 military. Is that --

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Sorry?

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It went to the US military?

20 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No. When Basra went to

21 Provincial Iraqi Control on 16 December 2007, there were

22 no US military in Basra. The US military only came in

23 then to help us when we became, as I say, corps main

24 effort. There was an American presence in Basra as part

25 of the overall Iraq drawdown plan, but that didn't come



1           in until early 2009, I think, so much, much later, two  
2           years later.

3   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   Yes.

4   THE CHAIRMAN:   You said the essential handover was to Iraqi  
5           security forces?

6   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   Yes, that was two months  
7           before I got there.

8   BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   As you were saying, what was  
9           expected was that you realised by the end?

10  LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   I think so. I say untidily,  
11           and I wouldn't for a moment pretend everything went  
12           exactly according to plan, but military operations  
13           don't, that is the nature of them. The key is to  
14           exploit the opportunities they offer, and that happened.

15           I point to Basra now and you look at the state of  
16           Basra and Iraq overall, you know, I think one should be  
17           cautious, but I think we should draw encouragement from  
18           it.

19  BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:   Were there any overall observations  
20           you wanted to make in the way the UK team worked  
21           together, the way you worked with the Americans and the  
22           Iraqis?

23  LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER:   I think very well.

24           Inevitably, in something like that there will be the odd  
25           tension and, as I mentioned, you know, there was some

1 Iraqi annoyance in -- at our targeting policy, which  
2 I understood. I wasn't going to compromise on it, but  
3 I understood it. So there are going to be tensions like  
4 that. But overall, the relationships -- were very  
5 strong. I mean very strong between us and the corps,  
6 and very strong with us and the ISF and General Mohammed  
7 who took over after General Mohan as the overall  
8 commander in Basra. You know, very supportive, very  
9 keen on continued involvement and a lot of -- an  
10 enormous support in Basra.

11 I mean, I think it is important to realise that this  
12 started from freeing Basra from Saddam Hussein. There  
13 was a huge -- there were -- there will always be the nay  
14 sayers and they will always get airtime because that is  
15 the nature of life, but the majority of the Basrawi  
16 population are extremely appreciative of the huge  
17 efforts that were made. General Mohammed, if I thanked  
18 him for anything, he would see always say back to me,  
19 "No, thank you for coming from your country to be here",  
20 et cetera. I mean, there was a real depth of  
21 appreciation which is sometimes missed in this debate.  
22 It was a very happy relationship.

23 Yes, I mean, inevitably, people will turn to those  
24 now who have got more money to invest, and inevitably,  
25 you know, market forces will now take off and countries

1       who maybe weren't involved in the operation, but are  
2       happy to invest there, will, I'm sure, find a welcome  
3       too. But we shouldn't underplay the real depth of  
4       warmth in Basra.

5       BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It seems to me that we started with  
6       wanting Basra to be the exemplar and then our  
7       expectations were scaled down, and we were told, I think  
8       a couple of days ago, that it was to kind of leave it  
9       with our reputation intact. Do you think we did that?

10      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, I do. I think Charge of  
11      the Knights was a shock and we had to react quickly.  
12      But we did so. I certainly think that -- as I say, the  
13      proof of a pudding will be in how Basra develops, won't  
14      it? If Basra continues as it is in the next few years,  
15      we can hold our heads up very high.

16      If Basra descends into chaos -- one of the things I  
17      haven't covered is, at the end of the Charge of the  
18      Knights, General Mohammed and I put together, I hope,  
19      quite a sophisticated counter-terrorist structure in  
20      Basra with a co-ordination committee which brought all  
21      the Iraqi security forces together. We fused them into  
22      various intelligence agencies, which I will be very  
23      happy to develop later. We were able to combine police  
24      and army posts across the city. We were able to put in  
25      a structure to try and stop those special -- Shia

1 special groups coming back.

2 Now, I don't deny that the problems in Iran probably  
3 helped Basra as well, but the fact is there is  
4 a structure in the city, which I think is now enduring,  
5 and which is now -- well, almost entirely Iraqi-run,  
6 obviously with some American support as they are now  
7 there instead of us, which was put together by the  
8 British and Iraqis together.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can you say a little bit about the  
10 policing?

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, of course. The police --  
12 I don't think the police came out of Charge of the  
13 Knights very well, if I'm being honest. I think we  
14 need -- we do need to look at how we trained the police  
15 prior to that. I think we may have erred on the side of  
16 training the police in what I would call sort of  
17 UK/Home Counties policing, whereas actually what was  
18 probably wanted was something slightly more robust.  
19 I think that's a lesson we very much learned for  
20 Afghanistan. I was in Afghanistan during police training  
21 the other day and it is going quite well  
22 there.

23 What happened during the Charge of the Knights was  
24 actually a lot of the police collapsed effectively and  
25 it took a lot of time to rebuild them and we tried to

1        rebuild them on a different model, on more what I would  
2        call almost sort of what I think you call a paramilitary basis,  
3        so that they could fire weapons, defend themselves and  
4        restore order as much as they could take fingerprints  
5        and gather evidence.

6            So there was a -- yes, there was quite a -- work to  
7        do on the police. It was -- yes.

8    BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much.

9    SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask one question  
10       following on from that? You talked about army/police  
11       working together. Was this to have the army watch over  
12       the police more, to mentor the police more?

13   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, effectively. It was  
14       because the police were felt to be less reliable than  
15       the Iraqi army. The Iraqi army has always been to the  
16       fore in Iraq under Saddam and before, and there was  
17       a feeling that the police would be morally and  
18       physically strengthened by having the Iraqi army  
19       posted alongside them.

20   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You said they didn't cover  
21       themselves with glory during Charge of the Knights and  
22       the assumption is that a large number of them were  
23       infiltrated by the militia.

24   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: They were, yes.

25   SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did they fight on the other side?

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: A few, very few. Some units  
2 did very well. I certainly wouldn't want to be  
3 overcritical of the force as a whole and General Jalil,  
4 the commander of the police at the time, is a friend of  
5 mine and a very competent and decent man, and some of  
6 his units did very well, but a lot just put their  
7 weapons down and melted away. Some were infiltrated by  
8 JAM.

9 I think the lessons from it, one needed to vet the  
10 police more closely, the people who were going into it.  
11 As I say, I think we needed to make the training more on  
12 the side of the military rather than on the policing.  
13 But, no, some did well, and, of course, in Iraq you have  
14 this national police as well and the national police  
15 battalion in Basra did very well. It was posted up near  
16 Basra Palace. I'm talking about, if you like, the civil  
17 police, the local police force.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, okay.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder whether we could hear just a little  
20 bit more before we finish about MiTTing, concepts, how  
21 it worked and our shift of concept and doctrine.

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think, as I said, it was --  
23 clear in February that we needed to -- once  
24 Provincial Iraqi Control had happened, we needed to look  
25 critically at how we were doing the training. Given

1       that discussion I had with Mohan, General Mohan, about  
2       what he wanted, it was clear that, to deliver that, we  
3       were going to have to change the approach.

4           We were going to do that in measured time, between,  
5       really, prior to the start of the planned operation on  
6       1 June, but then we had to do it very quickly, and the  
7       construct was one I described to Baroness Prashar just  
8       now. The only bit I didn't get round to describing was  
9       the force protection element that we put with it.  
10       Obviously it is a risky undertaking, MiTTing. But  
11       that's what armies are for and there were various things  
12       we could put in.

13   THE CHAIRMAN: You did mention about bringing in specialised  
14       resources.

15   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I did.

16   THE CHAIRMAN: I just wonder whether you could characterise  
17       those.

18   LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. The joint tactical air  
19       controllers, who were critical. We needed more  
20       communicators, we needed more medics, and we needed more  
21       interpreters. We had an issue with vehicles because,  
22       for MiTT to really work well, it wants to always be slightly  
23       unobtrusive, if you see what I mean, and we had large  
24       protective vehicles because of the dangers we had been  
25       facing.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Whereas the ISF elements within which we were  
2 embedding --

3 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Were mostly in humvees and  
4 other types of vehicles. In practical terms, it would  
5 just have been completely impossible to have overnight  
6 produced an ideal vehicle that would have met the government's  
7 very proper requirements for protection and with  
8 a profile we wanted. Industry just can't do this, they  
9 are not in the showroom. So we had to use the Mastiff  
10 vehicles, which, you know, it is an excellent vehicle,  
11 Mastiff, it is just slightly large for going down the  
12 more delicate bits of the Hanaya.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you having to provide special  
14 protection for the interpreters?

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The interpreters worked with  
16 the teams and were protected by the teams. By this  
17 stage, we were -- going on at this time was the issue  
18 of, you know, the overall future of interpreters who had  
19 worked with us, which is something Nigel Haywood was  
20 heavily involved with as well. But the interpreters we  
21 were using for this were protected by living in the  
22 team, but, of course, you know, they are Iraqis with  
23 Iraqi troops now. That is very different to being an  
24 Iraqi interpreter just with a British unit. They were  
25 with their brothers, if you like.



1 THE CHAIRMAN: Just before asking my other colleagues  
2 whether they have got things they would like to ask,  
3 lessons learnt for us from this. Two. On policing,  
4 you, as other witnesses, have made fairly clear where we  
5 need to go and indeed where we are with Afghanistan.  
6 I think this Inquiry will simply need to register that  
7 and take a view about it perhaps, but the other is  
8 MiTTing itself, the training, enabling of local forces,  
9 are there lessons learned or have we actually got them  
10 now?

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: There were very respectable  
12 reasons why it wasn't done before. I won't comment on  
13 them because I wasn't there and it will be for others  
14 you are questioning to be asked about that, but it was  
15 a big success when it happened.

16 In my current job, I command the Field Army. We  
17 have looked at this exhaustively. In fact, I spent all day  
18 yesterday looking at the construct, developing how we  
19 are going to fulfil General McChrystal's directives on  
20 embedded partnering, which is effectively the same  
21 thing, in Afghanistan.

22 There is no one sort of pattern fits all in this.  
23 Each operation imposes a different requirement. So we  
24 don't want to end up with us saying we have always got  
25 to do it that way. As I say, there were very

1        respectable reasons why this wasn't done before. The  
2        requirement, when I was there, was to do it, and we did  
3        it, and got huge support, and very quick. Literally,  
4        I mean, it turned round overnight from the MoD from the  
5        Secretary of State to do so. But -- and we have learned  
6        from that for Afghanistan, but for future military  
7        operations, we don't want to say we always have to do it  
8        like that. We need to trust the judgment of the people  
9        who are on the ground really.

10    THE CHAIRMAN: So part of the lesson to be learned is adapt  
11        to the next situation.

12    LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, adapt. I'm afraid it is  
13        the nature of military operations. Things don't always  
14        go particularly smoothly.

15    THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Martin?

16    SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned your friendship with  
17        General Jalil and your relationship with  
18        General Mohammed and so on. I wonder if you could tell  
19        us something generally about the relationship with  
20        senior Iraqis, the relationship between your officers  
21        and even your --

22    LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think there are those --  
23        again, my remarks probably concern the south and not  
24        necessarily the Sunni tribes, because I had less  
25        dealing, fairly obviously, with the Sunni elements. So

1 I won't sort of talk about, if you like, what I call the  
2 Takriti clique. Generally, extremely warm and very  
3 appreciative. Most of these officers had been -- nearly  
4 all the senior ones, almost without exception, had been  
5 senior officers in Saddam's army, and what I always  
6 found slightly odd is that, having all been got rid of  
7 early on in this operation, they all reappeared in  
8 uniform quite soon thereafter.

9 So they were very professional people and they had  
10 a lot of operational experience in the Iraq/Iran war,  
11 which, of course, was for Basra, is a very, very deep and  
12 formative experience. It was a very -- you know better  
13 than I do, it was a very bloody and unpleasant conflict.  
14 So a lot of operational experience, a lot of the same  
15 values in the care of soldiers as we have.

16 I think, as always, they would like us to have  
17 produced more equipment, produced the more sophisticated  
18 systems we had for them. Now, obviously, it is not  
19 always possible. We worked through the -- what's called  
20 MNSTC, and I apologise for the abbreviation, ie that  
21 part of the coalition, which was very much a coalition  
22 effort, although American-run, which actually generated  
23 the Iraqi army.

24 But in terms of planning, once we got over the  
25 hiatus of the early days of Charge of the Knights,

1 professional, very receptive, and a very warm  
2 relationship. The casualties were all cared for by  
3 British hospitals, the logistics were nearly all  
4 provided by us, and, obviously, when you work that  
5 closely -- I mean our team is living and working day by  
6 day -- you build up a very close relationship. Yes.

7 Now, I mean very -- and obviously there are those  
8 in -- there are those in Iraqi politics who think back  
9 to previous British periods in Iraq. There were those  
10 in senior positions in Iraq who aren't necessarily very  
11 pro-British per se, but in my sort of local level, my  
12 level in Basra, one couldn't have wanted for a better  
13 relationship.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just to be clear about this, the  
16 commanders you were working with had been disqualified  
17 by Paul Bremer's de-Ba'athification provisions and had  
18 to be rehabilitated?

19 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Some. Some had actually  
20 fallen foul before that, and I couldn't comment --  
21 I couldn't generalise on that, but certainly quite  
22 a lot. The more senior ones and people like  
23 General Mohan, actually -- I really don't think I should  
24 talk too much about him personally, about his personal  
25 experience, because it is his own privacy, but he had

1 actually had issues with Saddam beforehand, and so some  
2 of the senior officers actually were sort of beyond  
3 that, but I think if you looked at some of what I would call the  
4 middle-ranking battalion officers, the majors and the  
5 captains, a lot of them had actually been victims of  
6 that but had actually fairly quickly joined up again  
7 into the new Iraqi army.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just coming back to a point you were  
9 discussing with Baroness Prashar and Lawrence Freedman,  
10 you were reporting, as you have explained, to an  
11 American corps commander, but you were also talking to  
12 PJHQ and to ministers and officials.

13 Did you feel that you were at any stage being  
14 subjected to undue backseat driving from Whitehall or  
15 were you left to make the appropriate tactical decisions  
16 at the tactical level?

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, very much the latter.

18 Again, this goes back to the point of perception,  
19 I think, that Sir Lawrence raised earlier.

20 We saw ourselves, as indeed we were, as part of  
21 a multinational coalition which was American-led. We  
22 didn't see ourselves as a little England in the  
23 south-east doing a national effort. It just wasn't like  
24 that.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was there political pressure to make

1 British control appear to be a successful factor down  
2 there, or were you allowed to operate freely within the  
3 coalition?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: There were issues like, you  
5 know, we were subject to British law, there were rules  
6 of engagement, fairly obviously. There were issues on  
7 how we interpret reconstruction and we use aid, which  
8 were different, but in terms of the military operation,  
9 no, I mean, it was very clear and of course we did  
10 have --

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You weren't being told to wave the flag?

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, we did actually have  
13 senior British officers in Baghdad. You had people also  
14 in the corps. We had a Major General in the corps.  
15 There was little divergence really. It was in our  
16 national interests for Charge of the Knights to be  
17 successful.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Finally on targeting, you said there were  
19 some differences, not huge, between us and the  
20 Americans. Was this because they had a different  
21 approach to collateral damage or was it because they had  
22 greater confidence in the position of their aerial  
23 ordnance?

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The ordnance was very  
25 similar. It is rules of engagement, their laws are

1       slightly different and the rules of engagement that  
2       result from them are slightly different. Not hugely.  
3       They are similar. But there are -- there were small  
4       differences.

5       SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

6       THE CHAIRMAN: This has been very helpful. We could go on  
7       a very long time, but time is against us.

8             I wonder, are there any particular points you would  
9       like to raise finally before we move on after the break?

10      LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think, sir, we have covered  
11      most of them. I think we have talked about Basra.  
12      I think we have talked about the perception issue, and  
13      a point I was very keen to get over is this issue of how  
14      we fitted into the Americans.

15             I think this perception has grown up that there was  
16      more American involvement than there perhaps was, and but  
17      I don't want to underplay the huge assistance that the  
18      corps gave.

19      THE CHAIRMAN: I think you and witnesses in the last day or  
20      two have given us a helpful understanding of the  
21      distinction, if you like, between the Americans on the  
22      one hand and corps on the other, and also the nature of  
23      the kind of American military which went in behind  
24      Charge of the Knights, that this was not fully-formed  
25      battalions or cavalry.

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Obviously not, no. Unless  
2 there was anything else?

3 THE CHAIRMAN: In that case, can we thank you very much? We  
4 are going to have a break now until 11.30 am, at which  
5 point we will have Nigel Haywood, who was our  
6 Consul General in Basra at the relevant time, together  
7 with Keith MacKiggan, who ran the Provincial  
8 Reconstruction Team. So back at 11.30 am.

9 Just before we do, for the record, there was  
10 a slight uncertainty, which I take responsibility for,  
11 about the exact timing of Operation Sinbad.  
12 Sir Lawrence Freedman and, indeed, our witness were  
13 correct. This was in fact begun in September 2006 and  
14 it was Zenith which began in early 2007.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

16 (11.17 am)

17 (Short break)

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