

Monday, 11 January 2010

(2.00 pm)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF

THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon.

LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Good afternoon.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's open this afternoon's session. This afternoon we are hearing from Lieutenant General Sir Richard Shirreff and, later, Major General Jonathan Shaw, who were successively in command of Multi National, mainly British, Forces in south eastern Iraq between July 2006 and August 2007, and responsible for the security of Basra and surrounding provinces.

This session therefore follows on from two we held before Christmas when we heard from Lieutenant General Rollo, Lieutenant General Riley, and Lieutenant General Cooper. We start by welcoming you.

LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on recollections of events and we, of course cross-check what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

I remind every witness that he will later be asked to sign a transcript of his evidence to the effect that the evidence he has given is truthful, fair and accurate. With that, I will hand over to

1 Sir Lawrence Freedman to begin the session.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Perhaps you could just start by
3 telling us what you saw as your objectives when you
4 arrived in Basra in the summer of 2006 and how did the
5 situation look to you from when you arrived?

6 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: My objective was to achieve
7 Provincial Iraqi Control in the four provinces for which
8 I was responsible as the divisional commander of
9 Multi National Division South East. I stress that it
10 was not just Basra I was looking at.

11 In order to achieve Provincial Iraqi Control, my
12 overriding preoccupation was to establish security,
13 without which there could be no Provincial Iraqi
14 Control.

15 You asked me what my view of the situation was:
16 well, my view of the situation, looking across the
17 divisional area, first of all, Muthanna province had
18 gone to Provincial Iraqi Control, the most secure, the
19 quietest of the provinces, and that had gone to
20 Provincial Iraqi Control in July.

21 Dhi Qar province, headed up -- led by -- with the
22 Multi National Force effort led by an Italian brigade
23 under my command was looking good for Provincial Iraqi
24 Control. The very good Italian brigadier, with very
25 good relations between the governor, the Iraqi army

1 brigade commander and the Iraqi police governor, police
2 chief.

3 Despite some tribal fighting, despite various
4 outbreaks of Jaysh Al Mahdi activity, which were well
5 handled by both the Iraqi security forces and the
6 Italians, that progressed satisfactorily to Provincial
7 Iraqi Control in September.

8 The two provinces which were principally the concern
9 of the British, Maysan and Basra, were a different story
10 though. Maysan had always been a very difficult
11 province. There was effectively no security at all
12 where MNF were concerned. The cities of Amarah
13 and Majarr-al-Kabir were effectively no-go areas, and in
14 particular Amarah; any operations into Amarah resulted
15 in significant fighting, at times up to battle group
16 level. The principal British base in Maysan,
17 Camp Abu Naji, was being subjected to continuous attack,
18 as was any movement up and down the route to and from
19 that camp.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Can you slow down just a bit for the
21 stenographer?

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Basra itself seemed to me to
23 be the key issue, the second city of Iraq, and it was in
24 Basra that the British reputation was going to stand or
25 fall. What I found when I arrived was effectively no

1 security at all. Any movement required deliberate
2 operation to conduct -- to get around the city. There
3 was a significant lack of troops on the ground.

4 I think when I went out on my recce in May 2006, the
5 single battalion commander responsible for a city of
6 1.3 million people told me that he could put no more
7 than 13 half platoons or multiples on the ground, less
8 than 200 soldiers on the ground, in a city of
9 1.3 million. You compare that, for example, with what
10 I recall, as a young platoon commander in West Belfast
11 in the late 1970s when there was a brigade on the
12 ground.

13 The result of all that was what I call a cycle of
14 insecurity. No security meant no reconstruction and
15 development, it meant a loss of consent, the militia
16 filled the gap and, effectively, the militia controlled
17 the city. So my objective was to re-establish security
18 in Basra.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You say "re-establish", what you
20 have described is a pretty gloomy prospect. How do you
21 think, after all this time, this situation had been
22 allowed to develop?

23 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I can't answer that. All

24 I can tell you is the situation as I found it.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was this what you had been led to

1 expect on the basis of your briefings and your recces
2 beforehand?

3 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: It was not what I expected.

4 It was very clear to me that the intent, from a British
5 perspective, was to progress to transition, Iraqi
6 control, as quickly as possible, but equally, from my
7 observation on the ground when I arrived, it was clear
8 to me that there could no transition to Iraqi control
9 without security.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How were you -- how did develop your
11 strategy to establish more security?

12 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I started with
13 a reconnaissance in May, following which I conducted an
14 estimate process with my command group, formulated
15 a concept of operations, briefed that to the Permanent
16 Joint Headquarters as to my intent, and my intent was
17 that we -- in order to re-establish the security,
18 a decisive operation was going to be required.
19 I briefed that, as I say to the Permanent Joint
20 Headquarters, CJO and his deputy.

21 On arrival in July, I effectively spent a couple of
22 days getting around the provinces, getting around the
23 divisional area to satisfy myself of the extent to which
24 the situation had changed. Effectively, it had not, and
25 from then on it was into significant planning mode in

1 order to set the conditions for a deliberate divisional
2 operation.

3 First of all, I clearly had to establish the right
4 links and get clearances from my American commander,
5 bearing in mind I was a divisional commander under
6 Commander General Chiarelli, the American corps commander,
7 and I had to set the conditions politically and
8 militarily, in order to establish the operation.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to the operation in
10 a moment. Can I just clarify the nature of the
11 situation as you found it? We must have had about 7,000
12 troops at the time. Why was it only possible to get 200
13 into Basra?

14 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Because, effectively, I think
15 we were fixed by the number of bases we had -- and
16 various other commitments as well, but effectively --
17 I don't think the troops were deployed as effectively as
18 they needed to be deployed and I think the teeth to tail
19 ratio was not as it should have been.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we had a lot more people in
21 support than we did --

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Well, I wouldn't say so much
23 in support, but troops that could have been used on the
24 ground perhaps were tied up guarding, securing convoys.
25 Bear in mind, I go back -- for example, every time there

1 was any sort of logistic resupply of Camp Abu Naji,
2 a long way up the route into Maysan province, that
3 required a significant effort in order just to survive
4 and maintain ourselves standing still.

5 I think, in a sense, what we had reached was
6 a position of -- I think there was a sort of stalemate
7 and the momentum was going downhill on the way to where
8 we did not want to go.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Effectively, our forces were
10 spending a lot of their time protecting themselves --

11 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- and were therefore not available
13 for other tasks. Given the context of the time, how
14 much did you feel that you were also struggling with the
15 backdrop of other demands on British forces developing
16 at this time. Did you have enough resources?

17 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Well, it was pretty clear to
18 me that -- and in a sense, you are now looking over the
19 period as a whole of my time in command -- we had
20 a strategy that involved extraction rather than necessarily
21 achieving mission success. It was, in a sense, an exit
22 strategy rather than a winning strategy.

23 A winning strategy was going to require
24 significant additional resources.

25 Bear in mind that we had, as an

1 army, just gone through a resources-driven defence
2 review in 2003/2004, in which the infantry in particular
3 had been significantly reduced. Large numbers of
4 amalgamations had taken place, and bear in mind, also,
5 that, at the same time, a decision had been taken to
6 open up a second front in Afghanistan before the
7 situation in Iraq was satisfactorily resolved.

8 So, of course, we were going to be short of
9 resources, but I stress also that I made no assumption
10 about significant reinforcement in my estimate and
11 concept of operations. Clearly we were going to need
12 some assets, but it was also quite clear to me that we
13 were not going to get the sort of assets that we really
14 needed.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you ask for more resources?

16 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I asked for more resources,
17 but I wasn't going to ask for what was impossible.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So did you get what was possible?

19 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I got what was possible, as
20 far as possible, but if I can just add -- but I would
21 stress, though, that what was possible was ultimately
22 not going to be enough.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on that, that puts you in
24 a rather difficult position if you are about to embark
25 on an operation. How do you define success in those

1 terms?

2 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I took a risk and I took the
3 risk that by some -- and some significant readjustment
4 within theatre, I could generate additional force levels
5 in order to concentrate force within Basra.

6 I also took a risk in the way that the operation was
7 designed, because what we ended up doing was -- and I'm
8 getting into the detail here a bit, but you need to
9 understand this -- rather than -- what we ended up doing
10 was surging into specific areas of the city on
11 a consecutive basis, and clearly the risk was that, once
12 we had moved on from one area, we would lose it in
13 a sense, back to the militia.

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Given what you were saying before,
15 you had in mind that you were developing a strategy that
16 would make possible an exit rather than win in
17 a traditional sense?

18 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, I was pretty clear that
19 what we were in the business of doing was establishing
20 good enough conditions for -- adequate for Provincial
21 Iraqi Control. Good enough was the motto, not
22 perfection.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Between perfection and good enough
24 there is quite a range, so how good was good enough?

25 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Good enough would be

1 a subjective military and political judgment when the
2 time came, and I think, by the end of my time, we had
3 gone some way to creating some of the conditions for
4 provincial Iraqi control, certainly in some of the
5 mechanistic terms, but clearly security remained
6 a significant problem.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to come back at the end to
8 your overall reflections, but before we do that, just
9 one question on the situation you found at the
10 beginning, which clearly, from what you say, was worse
11 than you had expected to find.

12 To what extent did you feel that, at the time that
13 you left to take up this appointment, it was properly
14 appreciated at the top decision-making levels back in
15 Whitehall, and indeed Northwood, how bad the situation
16 had become in MND South East?

17 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: While I think we had a --
18 there was a difference of opinion, and clearly I based
19 my assessment on what I saw. I briefed what I saw, my
20 assessment, and, as I said, my proposals for dealing
21 with the situation. My sense was that the overriding --
22 the overriding theme within PJHQ within London was, as
23 I say, accelerated transition and that the gravity of
24 the situation was not fully appreciated. As I say, the
25 focus was to exit rather than achieving adequate

1 success.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was that because the focus had shifted by
3 then to Afghanistan? Your arrival pretty well coincided
4 with the deployment of significant extra forces to
5 Afghanistan.

6 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think you would have to ask
7 other players as to that one -- for an answer on that.
8 I was looking at it from the perspective of a commander
9 on the ground. What I can certainly say is that
10 because -- it was quite clear that, with a ramp-up in
11 Afghanistan, we were not going to get additional assets.
12 For example, I remember well the Nimrod crash -- the
13 Nimrod crash in Afghanistan put an absolute stop, for
14 example, on the surveillance support we were getting
15 from the Nimrod fleet, because the focus was shifting to
16 Afghanistan. So clearly Afghanistan had a major impact
17 on our ability to get resources.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What was the main channel for reporting
19 the situation back from MND South East to Whitehall?

20 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: My regular Tuesday evening,
21 I think there were sessions with PJHQ through CJO, and
22 in addition to that I wrote a weekly letter, a regular
23 weekly letter throughout the tour.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That, of course, would only have
25 continued the habit of your predecessors, but somehow

1 the penny hadn't dropped at the other end?

2 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: My letters, and they are, I'm
3 sure, available to the Inquiry, I think are pretty clear
4 about what I felt about the situation.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes. What I'm wondering is how it was
6 underappreciated in the period before you got there.
7 Obviously there is no press reporting to speak of
8 because there aren't any British or foreign journalists
9 stationed in Basra at this time. It was pretty well
10 impossible for them to operate.

11 Are there any alternative channels for Whitehall to
12 appreciate how things are changing better or worse?

13 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I can't comment on what
14 happened before I arrived.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were pretty well dependent on one
16 channel.

17 Could you just take us through the operation you
18 described which started off by being called Salamanca
19 and then was renamed Sinbad. You have talked a little
20 bit about it. How did it develop, how was it
21 implemented and what problems did you have in getting it
22 going?

23 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Well, first of all, I had to
24 set the conditions militarily, and, indeed, politically.
25 I mentioned that we had to -- we had to free up as many

1 forces as we possibly could. We had to take risks.
2 Muthanna was relatively secure and I depended very much
3 on the Australians. I stress here that it was
4 a divisional operation in which I depended on the
5 Australian task force to look after Muthanna in terms of
6 overwatch. The Italians to continue their process
7 towards provincial Iraqi control in Dhi Qar, and,
8 ultimately, the Australians took over overwatch of
9 Dhi Qar when the Italians were redeployed. So that in
10 a sense freed up my flank there.

11 I mentioned Maysan. I had two options in Maysan.
12 One was to establish -- re-establish security in those
13 no-go cities. That clearly would have taken at least
14 a division's worth of troops and was a non-starter. So
15 I had to go for the indirect approach.

16 The principal concern in Maysan, certainly at corps
17 level, was the open flank from Iraq and the assessment
18 that large amounts of what was known as lethal aid,
19 ammunition, IEDs and stuff was coming across Iraq and
20 being targeted at Baghdad. My deduction, therefore, was
21 to adopt the indirect approach. I closed Camp Abu Naji,
22 freed up combat power from that, in order to be
23 concentrated in Basra, and established a light recce
24 force that lived in the desert and continued the process
25 of securing or interdiction on the border as well as

1 working with the Iraqi army and police as much as they
2 could. So that really concentrated effort in Basra.

3 In addition to that, I had -- we concentrated effort
4 with the Iraqi army and started a training programme
5 with the Iraqi battalions that were going to be used in
6 Basra to prepare them for the operation.

7 Politically, of course, you have to bear in mind
8 that, at this stage, the -- that Prime Minister Maliki
9 had declared a state of emergency in Basra in,
10 I think, June. He had established -- or announced
11 a Basra security plan which amounted really to nothing
12 more than the establishment of a Basra security
13 committee, which was, in Iraqi terms, responsible for
14 all security, and, of course, Iraq was a sovereign
15 nation by this stages.

16 So the plan became the operationalising of the Iraqi
17 Basra security plan, if I can put it that way, and I had
18 to work very, very closely with the security committee
19 led by an individual called General Hamadi to persuade,
20 to cajole, to coax him into accepting the proposals
21 which we came up with, and that worked relatively
22 satisfactorily.

23 Clearly, we had to set the conditions with London as
24 well, because there was no appetite for any sort of
25 surge operation; other activities, Afghanistan

1 et cetera, were pre-eminent now, and so I had to do
2 a certain amount of persuading, persuading of PJHQ in
3 London in order to get them to accept -- the release of
4 whatever limited reinforcements they could provide, and
5 that worked reasonably satisfactorily.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were they worried that this was too high
7 risk?

8 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think they were worried --
9 I think there was a concern that this was not on the --
10 a surge operation, however small, was not on the main
11 events list. Op Plan G, such as it was, which was the
12 operational plan, focused on getting Basra to Provincial
13 Iraqi Control as quickly as possible, and then,
14 ultimately, to the withdrawal or the reduction --
15 significant drawdown of British forces in Iraq.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So they were in the grip of a rigid
17 timetable and rigid plan?

18 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think the plan was more
19 time-based than events and conditions-based.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Can I just come in on that and ask what was
21 going up and down your chain of command at corps level?

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: As soon as I arrived in
23 theatre, having effectively prepared my plan and having
24 assessed the situation and decided that the imperative
25 for an operation was paramount, I flew up to Baghdad,

1 briefed General Chiarelli, said exactly what I wanted to
2 achieve, and his reaction was very positive. It tied in
3 very closely to what was then being worked up in
4 Baghdad, and, in fact, he was very supportive and
5 offered a number of resources. We then had to talk it
6 through with General Casey as well.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: I was going to say support wasn't just
8 psychological and moral, it was actually in release of
9 corps level held assets.

10 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, he offered me a battalion
11 from his corps operational reserve, which ultimately
12 I couldn't -- my recollection was that this did not go
13 down particularly well, the idea of American troops on
14 the streets of Basra did not go down particularly well
15 in London, but I was also given some surveillance
16 assets. But, most importantly, I was also given
17 significant amounts of American taxpayers' money to
18 spend on the streets of Basra, by the end of which I had
19 spent some \$80 million.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just come back to the attitudes in
22 London, which we were talking about?

23 What alternatives did they see for Basra? If we
24 weren't going to do what you proposed -- I mean, you had
25 to persuade them to endorse it. The situation got

1 thoroughly bad there, the place had fallen into the
2 hands of the militias and we had 200 people on the
3 streets. Were they just going to let it ride like that?
4 We were very concerned about our legacy, we had taken
5 responsibility for the area, so surely doing nothing
6 wasn't an option?

7 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: That was my view. There was
8 no alternative.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you had to persuade people.

10 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You talked about negotiating with
12 General Hamadi and the Basra security committee. Was
13 that the only level at which you had to obtain Iraqi
14 consent, or did you have to obtain it at Baghdad level
15 as well?

16 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, I had to do it. This was
17 a very lengthy, rather tortuous process. Hamadi was
18 very much under the thumb of a number of Sadrists
19 Ministers in Baghdad, and, indeed, very much under the
20 thumb of the militia in Basra and under the thumb of the
21 Sadrists supporters on the Provincial Council.

22 So, having got Hamadi and the security committee to
23 the line of departure in, I think, early to mid-October,
24 preparing to start this operation, at the last minute
25 the Sadrists got at him, Sadrists Ministers got at

1 Maliki. Maliki said he didn't want this operation to
2 proceed, despite, of course, in June and July declaring
3 a state of emergency. So I then went up to Baghdad and
4 got enormous support from General Chiarelli and
5 General Casey, who, again, we briefed Rubaie, who was
6 the national security adviser, got to see Maliki and
7 eventually briefed him and persuaded him that this
8 operation should continue.

9 But it was absolutely non-stop grind trying to
10 get -- for example, the day we were going to fly to
11 Basra, Hamadi refused to get on to the aeroplane for two
12 hours, because he had got a call from a Sadrist minister
13 saying, "This operation isn't to continue". We got him
14 on to the plane eventually, thanks to General Casey's
15 offices, and we got to see Maliki and we got the
16 clearances to continue this operation.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. Now, I interrupted you when
18 you were talking us through this, but it had a number of
19 phases, a number of dimensions, if you could just take
20 us through that briefly from the time --

21 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Effectively, having
22 concentrated as many assets as possible -- and I don't
23 just mean military as well. In a sense, the concept of
24 this -- the mission was to achieve security, to excise
25 the death squads, to defeat JAM, through the

1 synchronised application of what we call kinetic, ie
2 force, and non-kinetic, ie reconstruction and
3 development. This required a very careful planning
4 process in order to ensure that we had the balance
5 right.

6 As a result, though, of the Maliki red light which
7 stopped us initially, I then had to effectively
8 repackage this operation for the security committee and
9 I called it a reconstruction and development operation
10 enabled by MNF and MNF-led security. So the push very
11 firmly was on reconstruction.

12 We continued to go kinetic. Of course we did. We
13 continued to conduct strike operations and detention
14 operations, of course we did, but we tended to separate
15 them out from the reconstruction piece. So what we did
16 was select different areas of the city, and, based on
17 relatively straightforward sort of green areas for
18 consent -- relatively soft areas -- surging with
19 concentration of force, secure the area, put teams into
20 the police stations to go through the police stations
21 with a fine-toothed comb, to establish the state of
22 police stations, bearing in mind that there had been
23 virtually no activity in the previous six months because
24 of the disengagement after the September 2005 Jamiat
25 incident, so many of these police stations had simply

1 not been touched.

2 We surged police training teams in, Royal Military
3 Police and contract policemen from elsewhere. At the
4 same time we conducted a number of pre-planned
5 reconstruction and other projects, everything from
6 levelling football pitches to playgrounds, to
7 refurbishing schools.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You did those -- you said you used
9 American money. Did you also work with the PRT and DFID
10 and other agencies on those projects?

11 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: The PRT was -- we worked with
12 the PRT as much as we could, but bear in mind that the
13 PRT, at that stage, was in some state of disarray, some,
14 you know -- some -- you know, some changes in leadership
15 took place. For example, one area where we did use the
16 PRT was the Danish agricultural adviser was hugely
17 helpful in the work we did to get the date palm industry
18 up and running again.

19 But I think -- your question really gets to the
20 heart of the extent to which there was this
21 intergovernmental piece, and the answer is it had failed
22 by that stage.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: While you are also on that, when you are
24 dealing with the local politics of this, and, indeed,
25 the Baghdad politics, were you doing that in tandem with

1 the consul general when you negotiated with local
2 politicians?

3 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I kept pretty close links with
4 the Consul General and we saw as much of each other as
5 we could. I established a forward headquarters in the
6 palace. I think we had a real problem by being
7 dislocated. The lesson that was clear, absolutely
8 clear, from the moment we arrived, was that we needed to
9 be in each other's pockets. But the Consul General and
10 I spoke regularly. She was hugely supportive and was
11 very much the sort of the diplomatic and civilian
12 front-runner in many areas, but, of course, much of this
13 depended on the security.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I suppose she had a problem, did she, in
15 terms of her own security, in being able to move around?
16 We have heard from the successors how, once the security
17 improved, they could get out and do a job. But unless
18 she had a lot of protection, presumably she was very
19 constrained.

20 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: This goes back to what I call
21 the cycle of insecurity, because security wasn't
22 adequate. DFID couldn't get on to the ground. The
23 Foreign Office couldn't get on to the ground, and
24 clearly there were sort of force protection issues
25 wherever they were involved.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. By October, just on this joined-up
2 aspect, or not very joined-up, most of our civilian
3 personnel had actually been pulled out of Basra or
4 pulled out of the city, hadn't they, in October 2006?
5 Is that right?

6 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think the announcement was
7 made that the FCO, or the Consul General and the consulate
8 was going to close in Basra Palace. My recollection
9 is -- and I'd have to check the details -- that they
10 didn't move out until some time later actually.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you didn't achieve co-location?

12 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Not in my time.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The decision was the result of what? The
14 security situation?

15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes. You have to remember, of
16 course, that, at this stage, the indirect fire attacks
17 from rocket and mortar against all installations, all
18 bases in south-east Iraq was ramping up significantly.
19 An American contractor was -- the American office, of
20 course, was also in Basra Palace. An American
21 contractor was killed in October or November and that
22 sent a strategic message about the state of security in
23 Basra.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: To whom did it send a message?

25 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: The Americans in particular.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As the autumn progressed through this
2 series of pulses you were able gradually to re-establish
3 control of Basra and, having done that, to hold the
4 areas that you had gone back into?

5 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, we were not able to hold
6 the areas, because, as soon as we concentrated effort
7 into one area -- we called it pulsing, surging in.
8 48 hours or so, maybe a little bit longer, of focused
9 project, short-term, long-term in the immediate --
10 short-term in the immediate period, followed by a sort
11 of longer pause, as it were, where longer-term projects,
12 medium-term projects, were brought in, very often under
13 contractors such as electricity, distribution of water,
14 distribution -- some of the longer-term stuff, but, of
15 course, I did not have the force levels to actually hold
16 an area and to maintain troops on the ground in a sort
17 of framework operation format once we had -- once we had
18 moved into an area. So we would pulse in, set the
19 conditions for projects and then we would have to move
20 on to another area with much the same concentration of
21 force.

22 Initially, I had planned to use the Iraqi army in
23 order to do the holding piece. Now, they improved in
24 terms of confidence, in terms of training, immeasurably,
25 I think, during the period of Sinbad, but they were not

1 up to holding in security terms, because, ultimately,
2 however confident they got, you have to remember that
3 the Iraqi army in south-east Iraq were Shia-recruited,
4 locally recruited, they lived on the ground amongst the
5 militia and they were not prepared to fight the militia,
6 because they knew that, if they did, they would come off
7 worse.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: On that, if you had had more
9 resources, you would have needed an awful lot more
10 resources to be able to do this with British troops, the
11 sort of numbers that would be needed to hold these areas
12 would be very substantial.

13 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Three years of hindsight makes
14 it very easy, in a sense, to look back and say,
15 "Wouldn't it have been easier, if it had been
16 different?", but at the time it was clear it was simply
17 not an option.

18 I mean, I remember Governor Wa'ili saying to me,
19 "This operation sounds fine, but you are going to need
20 another brigade in order to do it, aren't you?", and
21 I said, "Well, we probably will, but we haven't got it,
22 so we have to make use of what we have got".

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You mentioned the possibility of
24 American troops. A negative reaction in London. The
25 implication of what you said was that Basra was still

1 seen in some way to be our show and that we didn't, in
2 a sense, want to be seen to be handing over to the
3 Americans. Is that fair?

4 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So although we were trying to
6 establish an improved security position and that an
7 extra battalion or so would have made quite
8 a difference, we would rather cope with what we had than
9 accept American support?

10 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think that's a fair
11 assessment.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What do you think you might have
13 been able to achieve if you did have the American
14 support?

15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: It is a very hypothetical
16 question.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is indeed.

18 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think it would be the
19 subject of an interesting study, but I think -- I mean,
20 clearly there were all sorts of issues in terms of rules
21 of engagement and working out different areas and
22 interoperability in sort of military practical terms
23 which would have needed to be sorted out, but I don't
24 think any of that would have been impossible, and
25 indeed, in subsequent operations, it may well have

1 happened that operationally -- Brits did operate
2 alongside Americans.

3 But there is no question that if we had had
4 a greater ratio -- greater numbers -- a greater force
5 ratio, we could have done much more in terms of securing
6 the ground that in a sense we had pulsed into, and lived
7 among the people and held -- and continued to maintain
8 and establish the conditions for -- within which
9 a secure environment could develop.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you make a firm recommendation
11 to Northwood or to London that this offer should be
12 accepted?

13 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: To be honest, I can't recall
14 the detail of that -- of what happened. I recall that
15 I would go back to corps headquarters to look at the
16 various -- look at options for its use, but looking
17 through my papers, I cannot find out -- I can't see what
18 happened and what the precise response from London was.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When you were describing the effort
20 to persuade the Iraqis that this was a good operation to
21 take forward and the sort of diplomacy you had to engage
22 in, presumably you were getting support from our
23 ambassador in Baghdad and so on?

24 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Absolutely, absolutely.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was there more diplomatic support

1 from London coming in on this than direct communications
2 with Prime Minister Maliki?

3 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Not that I know of.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you had to work it out more or
5 less on your own?

6 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: With General Casey's support.
7 As I said, he went more than the extra mile to support
8 us.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, if we are talking about the --
10 looking at the operation itself, on Christmas Day,
11 British troops captured the Jamiat police HQ in Basra.
12 Can you just take us through the events leading up to
13 that and its aftermath?

14 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, this was clearly
15 a fairly -- a major operation. I stress that this was
16 a -- this was a deliberate operation. Having thought --
17 at the very start of my thinking, it was clear to me
18 that we were going to, as I put it, have to excise the
19 death squads from the streets of Basra, and the
20 specialist police units were as much a part of the
21 problem as the militia itself. Indeed they were
22 significantly infiltrated by the militia and, of course,
23 the linkage between the militia, Iranian-backed,
24 Iranian-equipped, trained, directed in many cases meant
25 that the specialist police units were a serious problem

1 that needed to be resolved.

2 My view was that there could be no security in Basra
3 without doing something about the specialist police
4 units, and, in particular, the so-called
5 Serious Crimes Unit, the SCU. We needed to send
6 a strong signal to the Jaysh Al Mahdi that we would go
7 for them. We needed to send a very strong signal to the
8 people of Basra that we were there to protect them, and
9 bear in mind that these special police units were
10 intimidating, murdering, kidnapping ordinary Basrawis.
11 I was very conscious we needed to send a signal to the
12 Iraqi Government that we were determined to achieve
13 security.

14 I was also very conscious that I needed to send
15 a very strong signal to the Americans that we were
16 prepared to go hard when the time came and when the time
17 was right.

18 I needed to get Iraqi buy-in from the start and
19 I stress this was not an unilateral operation. It
20 was -- I discussed it with the security committee.
21 I told the security committee that my view was that we
22 needed to destroy it and I remember Brigadier Ibrahim,
23 who was one of the security committee, being delighted
24 at the prospect and he said we should establish
25 a market -- no, a garden in its place.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I just interrupt? You must have had
2 considerable concerns about leakage of your planning and
3 buy-in process through the security committee.

4 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: At all stages, there was -- it
5 was a fact of life that everything we did, or were
6 planning to do was going to be, in a sense, passed on to
7 the enemy, the militia. But -- that's a fact of life,
8 but -- I made a virtue out of that necessity by -- in
9 a sense, by posing the threat that if such and such
10 didn't happen, we would do such and such. So they knew
11 we were going for the Serious Crimes Unit.

12 Bulani, Minister Bulani, who was the Minister of the
13 Interior, authorised the disbandment of the
14 Serious Crimes Unit. When we went to see Maliki in,
15 I think it was mid to late October, with the security
16 committee, he directed Hamadi to crush the police death
17 squads. Before the operation, one of the Basra judges
18 issued an arrest warrant for the 62 most wanted of the
19 police. So absolutely, it was sort of open house on
20 that.

21 THE CHAIRMAN: Without wanting to get into any sensitive
22 ground, did you actually want to or found you could
23 compartmentalise bits of the plan?

24 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, I wasn't going to tell
25 them precisely how the brigade plan was going to take

1 place. Of course, we worked with the Iraqi army on
2 this. You know, this was a -- I gave my intent to my
3 subordinate British brigade commander,
4 Brigadier Tim Evans, commanding 19 Light Brigade. It
5 was his tactical plan, and, of course, he worked closely
6 with Brigadier Agil to make it happen.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: That's not a problem in terms of leakage?

8 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Well, it is a fact of life.
9 But they knew we were coming. They didn't know when
10 precisely we were coming, and I suspect they assumed
11 that Christmas eve or Christmas morning we might be
12 concentrating on other things.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So, carrying on.

14 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think it is important to
15 make the point about American thinking here. I remember
16 a conversation with General Chiarelli, bearing in mind the
17 American taxpayers' money we had been spending on the
18 redevelopment, and he said words to the effect of, "You
19 have been waltzing around Basra spending US taxpayers'
20 money, when are you going to do something about the
21 Serious Crimes Unit?"

22 There was also a very clear linkage at that stage --
23 bear in mind that, by this stage, the thinking and
24 planning for Op Zenith, the withdrawal from the city,
25 had been run past the Americans, and he said again

1 something to the effect of, "If you don't do something
2 about the Serious Crimes Unit" -- the exact wording is
3 in one of my letters, but, "If you do not do something
4 about the Serious Crimes Unit, you will be seen to have
5 been bombed out by the mortar men and the rocket men",
6 and, of course, the people of Basra, we had to be clear
7 that this was a -- this was a -- in a sense, a sort of
8 bastion of tyranny right in their midst.

9 They were terrified of what went on in the
10 Serious Crimes Unit. It was seen as a sort of a --
11 a Jaysh Al Mahdi concentration camp. When we went in,
12 we found over 100 people illegally held prisoners, many
13 of whom had been subjected to torture, to gross
14 mistreatment and we had to get on and do something about
15 it.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Why was the political reaction so
17 extreme when you did it?

18 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Well, was it extreme? Maliki
19 was generally supportive, Governor Wa'ili was delighted,
20 the tribal sheikhs within Basra were delighted, the
21 principal cleric of the largest Shia mosque in Basra,
22 with a congregation of 10,000 people on Friday prayers,
23 thanked me for delivering the people of Basra from this
24 nest of vipers.

25 Elements on the Provincial Council weren't happy,

1 but they were not going to be happy because they were in
2 league with the Sadrists. So they saw their power being
3 hit at. They tried to -- they tried to disengage, but
4 Wa'ili was quite clear, there is no quorum for
5 disengagement, and actually it continued -- the pulses
6 for Sinbad continued, the police training continued.
7 There was some delay and it allowed us to continue the
8 process of putting the Iraqi security forces into the
9 limelight.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So from your perspective, it was
11 only the Provincial Council's reaction that was
12 problematic, everybody else was supportive?

13 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: The people of Basra were
14 hugely supportive.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did that then affect the rest of
16 Sinbad?

17 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: As I say, there was some
18 delay. There was a delay over the pulses by two or
19 three days, in the immediate pulse that had been planned
20 following Operation -- Operation Thyme it was, the
21 attack and disruption of the Jamiat, but in the longer
22 term, and, again, you will have to ask my successor, but
23 certainly in the time that I was there up until
24 mid-January there was no significant impact on Sinbad at
25 all. In fact, in a sense it allowed us to continue that

1 process which had begun to develop, but putting the
2 Iraqis more into the lead on Sinbad, which was precisely
3 what we were looking to do to get them to take the
4 responsibility and be seen to be taking up -- this to be
5 an Iraqi-led operation.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Going back to what you were saying
7 before about sending signals to the Americans and the
8 interesting comments you made about perhaps an
9 understandable American frustration with the amount of
10 money we had been spending while our security declined
11 in Basra, did you share this sense that the risk was
12 that the British would look like we were being bombed
13 out of Basra and that it had all just become too
14 difficult?

15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, I did.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you see that there was an
17 objective here for the sort of standing and morale of
18 the British army?

19 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, definitely. The point
20 I made very strongly -- you know, clearly we were given
21 the planning directive for Op Zenith, the withdrawal, by
22 PJHQ, so we got on and did the planning. But the point
23 I made was that, in order to avoid being seen to have
24 been -- been pushed out of the city, we needed to
25 establish the right conditions to withdraw on our own

1 terms at the right time, and the two areas that I felt
2 we needed to ensure -- the two critical pre-conditions
3 were, number 1, that we had removed the running sore of
4 the Serious Crimes Unit, and, number 2, that we had
5 done -- we had reduced the -- we had got the indirect
6 fire threat under control.

7 Now, the latter, of course, we did not do, and
8 I made the point that, in order to do that, and we come
9 back to resources again, this was an occasion -- this
10 was a national strategic issue, we needed to concentrate
11 national strategic assets to ensure that we got out
12 under -- as much under our own conditions and terms as
13 possible. This was going to need artillery, this was
14 going to need attack helicopters, it was going to need
15 fast air -- it was going to need surveillance and, indeed,
16 it was going to need other assets, special forces and
17 the like.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In terms of that -- that's an awful
19 lot. So we were again making more requests for
20 resources or suggesting that your successor was going to
21 need a lot more --

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I certainly -- and again, in
23 my weekly letters, the relevant weekly letters, I made
24 the point that, in order to set these conditions, we
25 were going to need these assets, yes.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What did you see as the major gap in
2 our capabilities?

3 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think the critical problem
4 we faced with Iraq -- the indirect fire was the ability
5 to -- we call it the sensor/shooter link.
6 You know, the ability to see, to identify -- to identify
7 the problem and then to strike the problem pretty
8 quickly, and that requires a series of capabilities
9 which we simply didn't have.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But the Americans did have?

11 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: The Americans had them, and we
12 had them, but we just didn't have them in south-east
13 Iraq.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That includes things like UAVs?

15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: UAVs. We had no UAV capable
16 of flying over Basra. Again, the only UAV I had at the
17 time was an American low level, a small company level
18 UAV which General Chiarelli had sent down. We had some
19 surveillance assets from -
20 which were -- live link thermal
21 image camera from a Sea King helicopter, but we had no
22 UAVs, no.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: UAVs are not Nimrods. Was it that we had
24 sent them all to Afghanistan or we simply didn't have
25 enough or --

1 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: You will see in my first
2 letter, I said it beggars belief that nearly three and
3 a half years after the start of this campaign, we still
4 have no UAV capable of flying in south-east Iraq, in the
5 summer of south-east Iraq.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: After four years?

7 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I was told that no more staff
8 effort could possibly be put in to deploying UAVs to
9 south-east Iraq.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Because we were going to leave?

11 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, I think just because the
12 Ministry of Defence was incapable of generating the
13 drive and energy to deliver them, and I contrasted them,
14 for example, with the Australian task force, that, in
15 eight weeks, or ten weeks, had drawn up the requirement,
16 gone to a contractor -- I can't remember who it was --
17 and deployed UAVs up in Muthanna province with
18 contractors actually flying them for the Australians.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you give us any other examples
20 of similar sorts of frustrations that you faced in
21 getting equipment?

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, I would -- I mean -- yes,
23 I'm in danger of -- sort of appearing with a long whinge
24 list. I would set against that, you know, there was
25 a lot of hard work, a lot of energy went into procuring

1 protective mobility, Bulldog made its appearance on the
2 scene, and that was the result of a lot of hard work
3 by --

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can you explain what --

5 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Bulldog was a revamping of
6 a very elderly armoured vehicle, an armoured personnel
7 carrier called an FV432, which had a new engine, a new
8 gearbox, considerable protection added to it, and
9 actually it proved to be a very useful vehicle in the
10 conditions of Basra.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In the sense of Operation Zenith --
12 I mean, obviously this was carried out after you had
13 left, but you began the planning for that. When did you
14 first get the sort of planning instruction for that?
15 You mentioned that you had received it. When was that?

16 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: My recollection is probably
17 around November, some time in mid-November was the first
18 indication of the -- and that was following discussions
19 clearly with PJHQ.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you weren't surprised?

21 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, I wasn't surprised. The
22 PJHQ line very much was that, having persuaded them,
23 they were entirely supportive of Sinbad, but the
24 judgment was that I think that -- quote, unquote, once
25 Sinbad has concluded, the law of diminishing returns

1 will apply.

2 Of course, we shouldn't forget that, at that stage,
3 it tied in with the American-led bridging strategy,
4 transition bridging strategy, which saw a withdrawal
5 from centres of population and an increasing use of
6 Iraqi army and Iraqi security forces.

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just to be clear on Zenith for lay
8 purposes, this was the name given to a programme
9 designed at drawing down our forces?

10 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: This was the operation to
11 extract British forces from Basra City.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was the time that the American
13 surge was being announced?

14 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: My recollection is the
15 first -- I mean -- I had discussions with
16 General Chiarelli about -- and I was directed by my corps
17 commander to back-brief him on my concept of operations
18 for the implementation of the corps transition bridging
19 strategy, which, of course, tied in completely, in
20 early December or late November, with the PJHQ direction
21 for Op Zenith.

22 But, by the middle of December, I think we began to
23 see the first indication that actually American minds
24 were changing and they were looking to what eventually
25 became the surge operation. So there was the beginning

1 of a sort of bifurcation between the British approach
2 and the American approach.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you suggest that perhaps it
4 might be sensible to see if we could work with the
5 Americans? Was there a possibility of a British
6 surge --

7 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, it was quite clear to me
8 that, once Sinbad had run its course, there was no
9 appetite for any further plan, any further surge, and
10 that actually the law -- that actually Op Zenith was the
11 only show in town. So in a sense that was the direction
12 from London, so that is what I got on with.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally, you have mentioned
14 earlier the importance of roles of reconstruction of
15 DFID and so on. What was your view on the problems of
16 bringing the different elements of government together
17 to apply them in a place like Basra?

18 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Well, it all came down to
19 a lack of unity of purpose, and I mean, ideally, unity
20 of command as well. But fundamentally, with the
21 mal-location of the diplomatic and DFID elements,
22 reconstruction specialists, the PRT sitting in
23 Basra Palace, the Divisional Headquarters and the
24 Brigade Headquarters, sitting in the contingency
25 operating base, the COB, the difficulties of getting

1 together --

2 THE CHAIRMAN: It wouldn't have mattered, but for the

3 security problems? It wouldn't have mattered so much?

4 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think it does matter,

5 because, if you live together and work together, you

6 establish -- people of common sense get on and work out

7 their differences together, but, because we were

8 separated completely, it meant that it was extremely

9 difficult to bring -- we had the planning energy, they,

10 in a sense, had the expertise. What we needed to do was

11 bring it together into what I call a combined joint task

12 force idea, the idea that there should be one individual

13 responsible -- now, this is responsible -- one

14 individual in command and one individual driving things

15 forward. Indeed, I proposed to London that, you know,

16 for my successor, such an organisation should be put in

17 place.

18 Now, this was sort of desperate times and desperate

19 measures. I'm not sure I would necessarily propose the

20 same solution today. There are other ways of achieving

21 it. But at the time, it seemed to be the only way of

22 doing it.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Whom did you propose it to?

24 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I proposed that my successor,

25 General Shaw, should be in charge of it all.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: But you proposed that in follow-up to the
2 Prime Minister's visit of 17 December, is that right?
3 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.
4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: In a letter to the Prime Minister?
5 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.
6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What reaction did you get to that?
7 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I don't think I saw any formal
8 reaction. I think CJO said he understood where I was
9 coming from, but our role should be to lead from behind
10 rather than to take the lead up front, but I think there
11 was very little reaction from Whitehall at all on that.
12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you observe after you departed that
13 we had moved towards a comprehensive approach, unity of
14 purpose, single command, all the things you recommended?
15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I only went back to Iraq twice
16 afterwards to see people who were under my command, and
17 I can't comment on what happened subsequently.
18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Clearly by the last year of our
19 involvement there, these things were happening, as we
20 have heard from others, obviously hugely facilitated by
21 an improvement in the security situation, but you were
22 recommending this at a time when it was visibly absent?
23 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.
24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You say that, after Sinbad, the law of
25 diminishing returns set in. Essentially, Sinbad was

1 a tactical success, but we were still within the
2 strategy that you had described as an exit strategy
3 rather than a winning strategy, and, therefore, Sinbad
4 was treated as another step towards the exit rather than
5 as something that should have been followed up in
6 a different kind of way to ensure the strategic success
7 of our mission. Is that a correct interpretation?

8 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I felt -- there are a number
9 of issues here. Let's unpack it a bit. I think Sinbad,
10 success or not, it failed to achieve the security which
11 was the original genesis of the plan, but it achieved
12 other things. I think it achieved an increased
13 confidence among the Iraqi army. It certainly achieved
14 a better standard, generally speaking, of Iraqi police,
15 in terms of the mechanistic boxes that needed to be
16 ticked before provincial Iraqi control should be
17 established, and, generally speaking, across the city,
18 the police were at a higher transition readiness
19 assessment level, as it was called.

20 It sent the message, I think, to the people of Basra
21 that there was a coherent programme and a coherent
22 approach, and I think in terms of the sort of short-term
23 I think it had an economic effect. I mean just under
24 25,000 people short-term employment. A drop in the
25 ocean in a city of 1.3 million, but better than nothing,

1 and certainly some impact on the longer-term
2 infrastructure in terms of the electricity distribution,
3 water distribution and agriculture stuff.

4 But my overall assessment was that all Sinbad could
5 do was create an opportunity for -- and that opportunity
6 needed to be filled by massive economic impact. What we
7 were incapable of doing was really delivering
8 a genuinely big idea and that was what was needed to
9 really set Basra in the right direction, whether it was
10 port reconstruction or, you know, redoing town planning
11 or clearing the canals or something, and my
12 recommendation was that there should be what I called an
13 a Rooseveltian new deal for Basra to really sell the
14 fact that -- get the economy kick-started big time.
15 This was going to need Iraqi money as well as external
16 expertise.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As well, presumably, as security, which
18 our aim was to have provided by the Iraqi troops that we
19 were training up. Were they anywhere near the point at
20 which they could begin to take over the areas that we
21 had re-established control over?

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, they weren't. The --
23 despite the increased confidence, despite the improved
24 training, despite the much better planning and command
25 and control that Sinbad generated, we came up with -- up

1 against this fundamental blockage that, with
2 Shia-recruited, locally-recruited Shia soldiers, whose
3 homes were next door to militant militia men --
4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We are talking about the Iraqi
5 10th Division here, are we?
6 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, we are, which had been
7 recruited as a National Guard Division. There was no
8 way they were prepared to really get stuck in and fight
9 against the Jaysh Al Mahdi, for understandable reasons,
10 and I think it was only when Iraqi troops from outside
11 the Shia south came in that you were able to really
12 begin the process.
13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was the Charge of the Knights?
14 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Charge of the Knights, yes,
15 absolutely. 14 Div, yes.
16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I ask you one follow-up
17 question? You did speak of this idea of unity of
18 command, and I'm just unclear about how unity of command
19 can work. It suggests that diplomats and development
20 experts and so on are in the military command. Is that
21 the basic idea?
22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I don't think it can work like
23 that, and in my current job we have done a great deal --
24 and I'm sort of diverting away from Basra now.
25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But it is relevant?

1 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: It is relevant. My idea is
2 that civil/military integration can take place. We have
3 been very successful in doing this on a number of recent
4 exercises within my headquarters, most recently
5 in November, where we had huge support from the
6 Foreign Office, huge support from DFID, embedded
7 civilian planning teams, an embassy working alongside us
8 and -- together with multinational diplomats from
9 other -- diplomats from other nations and aid agencies
10 from other nations as well.

11 So I don't think you can go for the sort of unity --
12 straight unity of command piece, but what you can do is
13 genuinely integrated planning based on trust, on
14 confidence, on knowing each other and on building good
15 relations, and on training together actually.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks very much.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Since this Inquiry is in the lessons learned
18 business and your own both weekly reports and your
19 drawdown report are full of things to take note of, and
20 we have, but there was a couple I would just like to
21 develop a little bit.

22 One goes back to this great problem at the time in
23 that place of lack of co-location and the problem of
24 getting to know each other between the different
25 elements, civilian military, whatever.

1 Another aspect of that which has come through time
2 and again in the evidence is tour length; that the
3 six-month tours are just too short to form those
4 relationships you described a little while ago. Do you
5 have a firm view yourself on that issue?

6 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think that divisional
7 commanders must do more than six months. So senior
8 commanders have got to do much longer, because, just as
9 you are getting up to speed, just as you are
10 establishing trust, confidence, with all your
11 interlocutors, it is time to pull out, and, of course,
12 your interlocutors have to start all over again, but
13 I think we have to remember that for the soldiers
14 fighting on the ground, six months is a hell of a long
15 time. It is hard, dangerous fighting, and, in the sort
16 of temperatures that we were experiencing on a regular
17 basis in the summer in south-east Iraq, six months is
18 about right.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Which implies up to, I don't know, battle
20 group level or battalion level or whatever it is,
21 including their commanders, the six-month rotation is --

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: I think for the tactical
23 formation, bearing in mind that a brigade is a cohesive
24 group that fights and trains together before it comes
25 and works together, and is a combined arms grouping, six

1 months is about right, but for any headquarters above
2 that, I think you have got to look at much longer.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: One other thing. Just drawing on something
4 you said some while back now, you managed to pull down
5 from corps headquarters, not merely assets and support
6 but also about \$80 million, I think you said.

7 What kind of feedback was required from that
8 expenditure from corps level? Did you have to give them
9 a reassuring sense that it was being effectively spent,
10 or was it just washing down the stream and that was it?

11 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: It was coming downstream, but
12 I was giving them a very reassuring feedback that it was
13 being properly spent.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: It was?

15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Within the Sinbad envelope? It was possible
17 to pulse into a particular area of Basra City, clear it,
18 hold it for a little time and get some projects going
19 but then you would have to move on. You said I think,
20 that, in effect, couldn't guarantee to hold on to that
21 ground and that area, but projects survived and came
22 through?

23 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, they did because we
24 employed Iraqi contractors, and, of course, we didn't
25 pay them until the job had been done properly.

1 Interestingly enough, in terms of lessons learned,
2 one of the ways we established that the job had been
3 done properly, without having to go in ourselves
4 necessarily, was to use some of the better private
5 security companies like Aegis and others, and that
6 worked very well.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Martin?

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes, you mentioned that the people of
9 Basra were hugely supportive of what was achieved in
10 Sinbad. I wonder if you could say something about your
11 own relations with Governor Wa'ili and with other
12 Iraqis, and also that of your officers and men with the
13 regular Basrawis. Did they see us somehow now as
14 liberators rather than as occupiers?

15 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: My relations with Wa'ili were
16 very good. I mean, he is -- he will survive us all,
17 I suspect. He is a born survivor and a born politician.
18 But he was the governor and he was a man with whom one
19 could do business actually, although I'm not sure his
20 bank account or dealings on oil would necessarily stand
21 up to too much scrutiny from the law enforcement
22 agencies.

23 But one had to work very closely with all the key
24 leaders within Iraqi -- within the Basra -- in fact in
25 all the provinces clearly. So one had to establish

1 a basis of trust, and, generally speaking, you know,
2 I found the more one spent time with them and the more
3 one talked to them, the more one was able to do business
4 with them.

5 As far as the broader piece behind your question,
6 generally speaking, the vast majority of the people at
7 Basra were very supportive of what we were doing. They
8 did not want us to leave the city. They wanted us to
9 continue to take action against the militia, they wanted
10 us to be there in presence, in force, but they also
11 felt, "You have been here for three and a half years,
12 what have you achieved?"

13 So there were, inevitably, different strands to this
14 relationship and some of that certainly came towards --
15 went towards the end of the spectrum that said, "You are
16 not an army of liberation, you are an army of
17 occupation, and actually you are not helping".

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The various projects, although done by
19 Iraqi contractors, were they seen as something that we,
20 the United Kingdom, were doing as a contribution to
21 their wellbeing?

22 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Yes, and we were --
23 underpinning everything we did on Operation Sinbad was
24 what we call an information operation. Again, a lot of
25 the American money that we got was spent on making -- on

1 advertising, on making TV films that appeared on
2 terrestrial TV in Basra homes, and our strapline was
3 that MNF is here, Multi-National Forces, in support of
4 the provincial Government of Basra, is here to improve
5 things for the people of Basra, and that went down
6 pretty well.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Richard, any final comments? We have got
9 access to your reports from the time of your tour there
10 and we have talked this afternoon already about some of
11 your conclusions. Is there anything else you want to
12 say that we haven't covered that you would have liked to
13 have got on the record?

14 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: No, thank you.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: In that case, thank you very much. We will
16 break now until 3.20 pm, and then we will be taking
17 evidence from Major General Jonathan Shaw, your
18 successor.

19 LT GEN SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF: Thank you very much.

20 (3.07 pm)

21 (Short break)

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