

Monday, 8 March 2010

(9.00 am)

RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning.

RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome everyone and welcome to our witness. We are taking evidence this morning from the Rt Hon David Miliband MP. You have been Secretary of State of Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs since June 2007.

We are going to ask questions about policy decisions taken from the time you took up office to the end of July 2009 when our terms of reference expire and about the implementation of those policy decisions in Iraq.

You became Foreign Secretary at the same time as the two witnesses we heard from on Friday, the Prime Minister and the International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander. At this point, the United Kingdom's responsibility for security in southern Iraq was drawing to a close, and we would like to ask about the UK Government's strategy for achieving that and the effect on wider foreign relations.

There have been, of course, national elections in Iraq over the weekend. The remit of this Inquiry

1 extends only to the end of July last year, so it would
2 not be appropriate for us to ask you to comment in
3 public so soon while these elections have been taking
4 place, but, clearly, their success and the way a new
5 Iraqi Government comes to be formed will be an important
6 indicator of political progress in Iraq.

7 With that by way of preliminaries, we recognise that
8 witnesses give evidence based, in part at least, on
9 their recollection of events and we cross-check what we
10 hear against the papers that we have access to.

11 I remind every witness that they will later be asked
12 to sign a transcript of evidence to the effect that the
13 evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

14 With that, I'll turn to Sir Roderic Lyne. Roderic?

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Foreign Secretary, good morning.

16 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Good morning.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have had, in the course of hearing
18 evidence, effectively three rather different
19 explanations as to why we took military action against
20 Iraq in 2003. Mr Blair, who had, of course, spoken
21 publicly in favour of regime change, put a lot of
22 emphasis on the risk that weapons of mass destruction
23 and international terrorism would come together in Iraq
24 and the necessity of warding off that risk.

25 Mr Straw, in contrast, said that regime change would

1 have been an improper and, indeed, illegal objective for
2 British foreign policy and that the only
3 justification -- he was very emphatic about this -- was
4 Iraq's presumed possession of weapons of mass
5 destruction.

6 Then, on Friday, Mr Brown put his emphasis on the
7 fact that Saddam Hussein had been in defiance of
8 14 UN Resolutions, in defiance of international law, and
9 it was necessary to show that a dictator could not go on
10 defying international law and to send a message to other
11 states by taking the action we did.

12 Now, why did you vote for the conflict in the House
13 of Commons on 18 March 2003?

14 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well, first of all, I don't see
15 the inconsistency in the three sets of evidence that you
16 have described. I have read the evidence of the three
17 witnesses and what I have seen is a consistency on
18 a number of points.

19 First of all, the emphasis on the dangers posed, as
20 the Prime Minister put it -- the current Prime Minister
21 put it -- between a country with a history of violent
22 action in its neighbourhood in the context of the
23 dangers of international terrorism. Those were the two
24 themes that he emphasised. But he also made the point
25 that the successive resolutions put through by the UN

1 since 1991 failed to bring Saddam to heel, and it is
2 that that Mr Blair emphasised, not just in his evidence
3 here, but, as we may get a chance to talk about later,
4 in the Azores meeting, which was the last international
5 meeting before the conflict, he put great emphasis on
6 the UN, and re-reading his speech to the House of
7 Commons as well, just before the war, he also went
8 through the litany of defiance of the UN and emphasised
9 that it was no good the UN passing strong resolutions if
10 it was then feeble in its follow-up.

11 First of all, I don't see the inconsistency that you
12 describe. I voted for the war because I think that the
13 defiance by Saddam of the UN was itself a danger to
14 international peace and security and the authority of
15 the UN had to be upheld. I think it was very difficult
16 to support Resolution 1441 but not follow it through.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you see Saddam as representing a real
18 and present danger through his possession of weapons of
19 mass destruction?

20 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well, one of the things that
21 I did, I remember, before the vote in 2003, was to go
22 back through the Blix report, or one of them, because
23 there were a number of Blix reports, but one important
24 one was he issued, I think, a 174/175-page report which
25 detailed the extent of unaccounted for WMD. That was

1 important in my mind, because, as I think all three
2 witnesses that you have described explained, we knew
3 what the stocks were in 1991. We had had successive
4 engagement through UNMOVIC and other inspectors to try
5 to get to the bottom of what was left. Saddam certainly
6 went to no lengths to try to deny the existence of WMD,
7 for reasons that we might discuss, and so I think it was
8 clear to me that there was a prima facie case that he
9 continued to have the --

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: A prima facie case, but did this add up
11 to a real and present danger?

12 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: For me, as then a junior minister
13 of the government, there was a prima facie case. We
14 knew from his history the dangers that he posed to the
15 region. I obviously wasn't privy to the detailed
16 presentations that were given to senior ministers at the
17 time, and the Prime Minister obviously, from the
18 security services, but I had watched Tony Blair, from
19 the late 1990s, talking about the danger that Saddam had
20 posed and I was confident that he would not have
21 described them in the terms that he did if he was not
22 convinced by the evidence that had been given to him.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: As Foreign Secretary, do you share your
24 predecessor, Jack Straw's, view that regime change is
25 an improper and unlawful objective for British foreign

1 policy?

2 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that, as someone said to
3 this Committee, I'm not a lawyer and I'm certainly not
4 an international lawyer, so I wouldn't want to --

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have very good international lawyers
6 advising you.

7 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I have very good international
8 lawyers advising me and certainly there was no current
9 case where we are pursuing regime change as a matter of
10 military policy.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, if the United States and the
12 United Kingdom had not invaded Iraq in March 2003, do
13 you believe that we would now be facing a situation
14 where Iraq would be competing with Iran, both on nuclear
15 weapons capability and in support of terrorist groups?

16 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: That's obviously a very, very
17 important question and an unanswerable one. I think
18 that there are two things that weigh on me on the --
19 well, three actually. Three things that I think are
20 important in this regard.

21 One, the authority of the UN, I think, would have
22 been severely dented. If the hypothetical case that you
23 are putting is that we had marched to the top of the
24 hill of pressure and then walked down again without
25 disarming Saddam, then I think that would have been

1 quite -- really quite damaging for any of the
2 multilateral aims that we have that need to be pursued
3 through the UN.

4 Secondly, I think that Saddam had a history of
5 destabilisation in the region. As we might come on to
6 later, I think that both Iraq and Iran had other fish to
7 fry seven years ago than each other, if you like, and
8 I think that the argument that Saddam was the best
9 bulwark against the Iranians and that the Iranians were
10 the best bulwark against Saddam I don't think is
11 a terribly strong case. However, I think Iraq had shown
12 itself to be a potential danger and certainly the
13 irrationality of what quite a lot of --

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: A potential danger in terms of terrorism
15 as well as weapons of mass destruction?

16 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: One has got to be precise here.
17 It is important to say that I have never seen any
18 evidence of Al-Qaeda linked up to Saddam Hussein or to
19 Saddam's regime. I don't agree with the allegations
20 that were made, I think, notably by
21 Vice-President Cheney in 2003 that -- I can't remember
22 the exact word he used, but I think he referred to an
23 epicentre of global terrorism. That's not quite the
24 right word, but I remember an interview he did on one of
25 the Sunday morning American shows.

1 But nonetheless, the basic case, that the
2 combination of countries that have both large stocks of
3 WMD, or we fear have large stocks of WMD, that are
4 themselves regimes that try to control things very, very
5 tightly, but nonetheless are quite fragile, and, on the
6 other hand, the growth of terrorist groups on the other
7 is a particular and new kind of danger.

8 I think there is -- to finish my narrative, the
9 third aspect is obviously Iranian behaviour. I think it
10 is very hard to make the case that Iranian support for
11 Hezbollah or Hamas would somehow be affected by the
12 presence or absence of Saddam. I think a lot of the
13 debate with about Iran's role in the Middle East, which
14 tries to pivot on the idea that a constraint on Iran has
15 been removed by the removal of Saddam, doesn't really
16 add up.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you take about the new kind of
18 danger posed by regimes trying to develop WMD, on the
19 one hand, and non-state actors with international
20 terrorist objectives, on the other, the question is: did
21 Iraq represent this kind of danger in March 2003?

22 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that the -- first of all,
23 all the intelligence agencies of the world thought that
24 he had the material to be a danger. He had the material
25 to be a --

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He had the capability.

2 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well --

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He had the intent, rather. Did he have

4 the capability to be a threat in March 2003?

5 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Let me say, first of all, he had

6 the material. You can't be a threat --

7 SIR RODERIC LYNE: He was presumed to have the material.

8 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: According to all the intelligence

9 agencies in the world. So we were advised --

10 SIR RODERIC LYNE: With the possible exception of the

11 Russians.

12 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I understand that there was very

13 strong unanimity about the danger that he --

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: President Putin publicly said the

15 opposite, but, other than him, yes, there was that

16 perception which Blix had enhanced.

17 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: He had the material. He had the

18 record, which I think is an important part of this. As

19 for motivation, his primary motivation was obviously the

20 strength and defence of his own regime, but he had shown

21 a willingness to abuse his region in defence of that,

22 and, of course, he had also shown a willingness to

23 attack his own people.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, he had the intent, he was presumed

25 to have some material, his capability had been hugely

1 constrained since 1991 by a range of measures, not just
2 by trade sanctions, but, much more importantly perhaps,
3 by an arms embargo, by deterrence, by No Fly Zones, by
4 a Naval embargo.

5 Was military action, in March 2003, the only way of
6 continuing to contain this intent, this threatened --
7 this desire of Saddam Hussein, to become once again
8 a potential aggressor?

9 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that, first of all, the
10 sanctions regime, while you say it had done a huge
11 amount of damage, it had also shown its own very severe
12 limitations, some of which you have discussed.

13 Secondly, the record, since 1991, had shown severe
14 limitations in the UN's willingness to follow through on
15 the demands that it had made, and one of the striking
16 points of the time is that, the longer the UN fails to
17 impose its will, the harsher the measures required when
18 it finally does impose its will.

19 So 12 years after the 1991 war, the scope for new
20 kinds of sanctions, new kinds of engagements, was
21 severely limited. So I think that is the context in
22 which one has to understand this, that the authority of
23 the UN was significantly being undermined by its
24 inability to impose or enforce its will. The bluntness
25 of the -- or the limitations of the sanctions and trade

1 mechanisms you mentioned, I think constrained
2 significantly the number of choices that were available,
3 in the context, where there was this very high degree of
4 international belief, that he had WMD on a very large
5 scale, 174-page scale, as Blix showed.

6 One of the questions that I think is very hard to
7 answer is why Saddam did not do more to show that he
8 wasn't actually the mass possessor of WMD that he had.
9 The answer to that, I think, is that he didn't actually
10 believe that the UN would follow through, which rather
11 makes my point that the successive failures of the UN to
12 follow through on its commitments had weakened it in
13 a rather profound way.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have referred twice now to the
15 authority of the UN. Was the authority of the UN
16 enhanced by two members of the Security Council deciding
17 to take military action at a time when they had failed
18 to get the support of the Security Council for doing so?

19 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I just want to refer to my notes.
20 The Azores declaration, listed as the second aim of the
21 countries that -- I quote -- "to secure compliance with
22 UN Resolutions". So it is an interesting question
23 whether or not the determination to secure the ends of
24 compliance with UN Resolutions justifies the means of
25 the -- that you describe.

1 Now, there is no question that division in the UN --

2 I know you used the word "authority".

3 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You used the word "authority".

4 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I used the word "authority" and
5 then you used the word "authority" in your question.

6 Divisions in the UN were exposed by the vote, or by
7 the run-up to the vote and then the absence of a vote,
8 and then divisions in Europe were exposed and divisions
9 in the western alliance were exposed. I think that,
10 given the Kosovo precedent, and the fact that there had
11 been 12 or 14 resolutions based by the UN to get us to
12 the point where we were, notably Resolution 1441, it
13 limited the extent to which the authority of the UN was
14 undermined by the action.

15 Secondly, the fact that the argument was made very
16 clearly, notably in this country, that feeble
17 follow-through undermines strong words, I think is
18 significant, and that speaks to this quotation "to
19 secure compliance with the UN".

20 Finally, I think it is worth saying that I don't
21 feel today, in the work that I'm doing and that the
22 Foreign Office is doing in the UN, that Iraq is thrown
23 at us as a means of debating points or of undermining
24 the work that we are doing, and I think it is quite
25 striking the extent to which the waters in New York

1 close over and work carries on.

2 What I think is significantly up for grabs is the
3 extent to which commitments like the responsibility to
4 protect are going to be anything more than words on
5 paper.

6 In all the debates about the UN and its role and its
7 reform, I think this fundamental question about what the
8 rights of sovereign powers are and the extent to which
9 they extend into the territory of others, is still very,
10 very contested in the international system. It was
11 contested before 2003 and it remains contested today,
12 and it pivots on this notion of the doctrine of
13 non-interference and the Westphalian settlement, which
14 significant numbers of countries in the international
15 system adhere to, both for reasons of philosophy and
16 vested interest, and other countries, including ours,
17 believe is not a sufficient basis for foreign policy and
18 international relations in an interdependent world,
19 and this is a very fundamental point.

20 SIR RODERIC LYNE: While we are just looking at this broad
21 strategic context, in a minute I want to come to the
22 very narrow, or narrower, context of Iraq in 2007.

23 In his evidence on Friday, the Prime Minister made
24 frequent references to "rogue states" and "aggressor
25 states". Which are the rogue states and the aggressor

1 states and are they the same thing or are they
2 different?

3 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that he used the
4 reference to "rogue states" particularly in respect of
5 Iraq in the 90s. I think, if we are discussing this at
6 the rather broad level, rather than the detailed level
7 of Iraq, I'm very taken that the twin challenges of the
8 international system today are, first, ungoverned space,
9 where there is insufficient state power, and then spaces
10 where there is overly strong state power; overly strong
11 in terms of its own people or overly strong in terms of
12 the international system.

13 I cannot claim authorship of this concept, but
14 someone you know well, Robert Cooper, has written widely
15 about the three distinctive geographical parts of the
16 world, places like Europe where, in fact, we have
17 positive sum international relations, but then the rest
18 of the world, significantly being defined, either by
19 ungoverned space and the foreign policy challenges that
20 are associated with it -- and places like Afghanistan,
21 Somalia and Yemen come to mind -- but also states that
22 are strong enough to test the authority of the
23 international system. That is clearly happening in
24 respect of the Non-proliferation Treaty and Iran's
25 nuclear weapons programme.

1 I don't call -- just for the avoidance of doubt,
2 I do not sit here today calling Iran a rogue state, but
3 it is a state which is seeking to defy the rules of the
4 international system and I think that's quite
5 a significant thing.

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If one of the important reasons for
7 acting in 2003 was, as you have said, and as the
8 Prime Minister said on Friday, to deal with the
9 situation in which the state was defying UN Resolutions,
10 to send a message to what you might call this ungoverned
11 space --

12 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: No, Iraq is an example, not of
13 ungoverned space, Iraq is an example of a state that's
14 too strong --

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Ungoverned space or overgoverned space,
16 but to send a message, to what the Prime Minister called
17 the rogue states and aggressor states, that this would
18 not be allowed. Has it had that effect? Has Iran, for
19 example, become a more compliant member of the
20 international community as a result of the message sent
21 by the action in Iraq?

22 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: There is one very powerful
23 example on this, and that is Libya, a very, very
24 powerful example indeed. If you talk to anyone who was
25 involved in the Libyan decision to come to terms with

1 the international testimony, to effectively disarm after
2 2003, there is no question that the Iraqi example played
3 an important --

4 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Are there any other examples?

5 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Hang on --

6 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We had the Libyan example.

7 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: It is not an irrelevant
8 example --

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is not unimportant, but --

10 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: -- it speaks directly to the
11 question you asked. You specifically asked about the
12 Iranian example. I think that the Iranian example is
13 affected by many aspects of international relations.
14 Remember, it is only since 2003 that the engagement with
15 Iran has really been tried in a significant way, and it
16 is only since 2009 and the arrival of the Obama
17 administration that the US has been fully engaged in the
18 engagement track with Iran.

19 I don't think that one can complain either way the
20 Iranian case today by the actions of the UN in -- by the
21 actions in 2003. We will come, maybe, to the wider
22 regional scene and the extent to which it changed
23 things. You can make a quite interesting case that the
24 religious authority invested in Qom is, for the first
25 time, being challenged by Ayatollah Sistani and his

1 followers in Najaf, and that is quite a big shift within
2 the Shia world.

3 So it is a very, very complicated picture, but
4 I don't think you can say that Iran is in defiance of
5 the NPT today because of what happened in 2003.
6 Equally, I can't say that Iran has been brought to heel
7 by what was done in 2003.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you became Foreign Secretary
9 in June, I think it was, 2007, you inherited what your
10 former Political Director Mark Lyall Grant has described
11 to us as a transition strategy. That's effectively
12 a strategy that was already by then geared to the
13 objective of drawing down our forces.

14 Was this a strategy which was reviewed under the
15 reformed government of which you were a part as Foreign
16 Secretary and was it a strategy in which we had any
17 alternatives at that stage?

18 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well, it wasn't -- there wasn't
19 a capital R review, if that's what you are asking, but
20 of course, as new ministers, one surveys sort of lower
21 case reviews.

22 Just to step back for a minute, when I arrived in
23 office in June 2007, I saw Iraq as, first of all,
24 a responsibility; secondly, a problem; and, thirdly, an
25 opportunity. As I prepared for this hearing, it is

1 those three themes of our responsibilities in Iraq, the
2 problems notably around security in Iraq and the
3 opportunities, political, as well as economic, that have
4 framed my thinking.

5 The responsibility is obvious: we were party to the
6 war, so we had to be party to the peace, and we also had
7 significant responsibilities to our own people as well
8 as to the Iraqi people.

9 The problem was potent. The day after the
10 government was formed on, I think, Thursday,
11 28 June 2007, we had a Cabinet meeting on Friday,
12 29 June, and the Defence Secretary reported that three
13 British service personnel had been killed the day before
14 in Iraq. So the problem of Iraq was very, very clear.

15 Equally, however, it was also a part of our
16 thinking -- small in June, but growing since then --
17 that Iraq was a potential opportunity, and it was
18 a potential opportunity because it had the potential to
19 become a relatively wealthy, relatively pluralist
20 society in the heart of the Middle East.

21 It also was an opportunity -- and I think this is
22 something that Mark Lyall Grant, Christopher Prentice
23 and others have mentioned and I think it is very, very
24 important. It was an opportunity because it opened up
25 the possibility of a north-south axis through the

1 Middle East, stretching from Turkey through Iraq down to
2 the Gulf.

3 Now, since it is the policy of the government that
4 Turkey should become a member of the European Union, we
5 are looking at Iraq one day being on the borders of the
6 European Union, and my immediate priorities in --
7 priority number 1, in 2007, was not Iraq, it was
8 Afghanistan and Pakistan, and it was to Afghanistan and
9 Pakistan that I went on my first visit, and I should be
10 absolutely clear about that with you.

11 But the second place I went to after -- on taking
12 office, was Turkey and -- an important part of that
13 visit was a speech I did about British support for
14 Turkish membership of the EU, but it was also the case
15 that Iraq was in my mind, because I knew there would
16 never be this north-south axis unless the Turkish/Kurd
17 issue was addressed.

18 So -- something we will come to later, I'm sure --
19 I spent quite a bit of time on this Turkish/Kurdish
20 question. So that's a rather a roundabout way of saying
21 that's the scene as I saw it, but I do think this notion
22 of the responsibility, the problem and the opportunity
23 and how we moved from a focus on the problem -- the
24 security problem in Basra was the focus and it shifted
25 over time to becoming a comprehensive focus on our

1 economic, political and military and cultural engagement
2 with Iraq across the whole country.

3 So in that sense I can see two phases to the period
4 that you are studying, the 2007 to 2009 period, a phase
5 when the military focus on Basra was pre-eminent. It
6 wasn't absolute. We had the embassy in Baghdad, we had
7 the consulate in Erbil, but it was the predominant
8 focus, and I think, if we are honest, it was MoD-led,
9 this phase, because the focus was on security in Basra.
10 But, today, the predominant focus is on our whole Iraq
11 relations on a comprehensive basis. So that's much more
12 FCO-led.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we just look at that focus on security
14 in Basra, the situation at the time that you became
15 Foreign Secretary was, effectively, that we had lost
16 control of security in Basra, we were on a strategy
17 geared towards drawing down. The first stage of this
18 was to withdraw from the city to the COB, and that, with
19 slight variations on the timeline, was the path we then
20 pursued to 2009.

21 Now, did you feel at the time, you and your
22 colleagues -- obviously the Defence Secretary in
23 particular -- that we did have any alternatives? Was
24 there an alternative option of bringing in additional
25 forces to re-establish control of Basra before we

1 continued with the drawdown and Provincial Iraqi
2 Control and so on?

3 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: That wasn't really a sensible
4 option. You say we, quote, unquote, "lost control" of
5 Basra. That's quite a pejorative way of putting it.

6 We had, first of all, trained up the 10th Division
7 of the Iraqi army and we were beginning to train up the
8 14th Division of the Iraqi army. Iraqi politics was
9 beginning to germinate and the -- by December, there was
10 the -- "famous" is the wrong word, but the important
11 declaration of the different Shia groups about their
12 commitment to the democratic process. That didn't come
13 out of thin air, that was in germination by the summer
14 and autumn, and the -- those are factors.

15 I think that the Chief of the Defence Staff has said
16 to you -- the current Chief of the Defence Staff said to
17 you in his evidence that he went to Iraq in 2006 and
18 reported back to the government then that -- his exact
19 words were that there was an increasing risk that we had
20 become part of the problem rather than the solution, and
21 he had sensed that since then.

22 So I don't think it is quite right to say we, quote,
23 unquote, "lost control". I think it is more that we
24 were on a course that would lead to better security in
25 Basra and we had never want to be there as a colonising

1 force, we had always wanted to be there as a force that
2 created a -- helped create an Iraqi set of institutions,
3 military as well as political, that could do the
4 business themselves.

5 So I think, if I may say so, that's the right way to
6 see it. But as far as I was concerned -- I'm sure,
7 I think, as well as the Prime Minister and the
8 Defence Secretary were concerned as well -- the path
9 that had been set out by Tony Blair in February 2007
10 leading eventually to Provincial Iraqi Control was one
11 that we were determined to make work.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think Sir Lawrence would like to talk
13 to you in more detail about Basra in a minute, but what
14 I had in mind were things like the evidence we had from
15 General Shirreff, who said that:

16 "We had, in a sense, an exit strategy rather than
17 a winning strategy. A winning strategy was going to
18 require significant additional resources", and it was
19 that comment that I had in mind.

20 Just finally from me, what were the criteria that
21 were governing the timeframe for our withdrawal at this
22 stage?

23 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Oh, it was very formal and laid
24 out, as I'm sure has been said to you. The criteria for
25 PIC, for Provincial Iraqi Control, are public and

1 well-known in terms of the security situation, the
2 ability of the institutions -- I haven't got them in
3 front of me, but there were four or five very clearly
4 set out.

5 It was a decision that required, first of all, the
6 MND South East to take a view, then the Iraqis to take
7 a view and the Americans to take a view. So there was
8 a triple lock on PIC and there was no way in which it
9 wasn't going to be conditions on the ground that were
10 absolutely key. Those were pre-eminently, predominantly
11 the security conditions, but the political conditions
12 were part of it as well.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Lawrence?

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just following on from this last
16 point on the situation of August -- summer of 2007 in
17 Basra, General Binns told us:

18 "Every move outside our bases required detailed
19 planning and was high risk. I thought we were having
20 limited effect on improving the security situation in
21 Basra. 90 per cent of the violence was directed against
22 us. Politically, there was no contact between us and
23 the local provincial government, and the coalition
24 sponsored reconstruction had almost ceased. I think it
25 is fair to say that the security situation was such that

1 we spent a lot of time protecting ourselves."

2 That's a pretty grim description of where we had got
3 to four years after entering Iraq.

4 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: It certainly was dangerous,
5 I think, rather than grim. I think that -- in a way
6 that speaks to my point, that we didn't go there as
7 a colonising force and we weren't wanted there as
8 a colonising force. We were there to help nurture Iraqi
9 institutions that could defend their own country and
10 their own city.

11 Now, the attacks that were made, including on the
12 convoys that were supplying the Basra Palace, were
13 severe and dangerous and, as I said, three soldiers were
14 lost, I think, the day the government was formed
15 in June 2007.

16 But I think that the commentary -- but in a way our
17 objective was not to be there forever in a way that made
18 us safe; our objective was to deliver Basra in a way
19 that made the Basra safe. So that is the test. I think
20 the fact that the Iraqi institutions, the 10th Division,
21 the 14th Division, were strong enough to carry through
22 the Charge of the Knights is quite significant.

23 Remember, you have been through, I think, the
24 history of what was originally Operation Salamanca and
25 became Operation Sinbad, and the insight behind the

1 Charge of the Knights that a real push was needed was
2 not one that was completely foreign or alien to British
3 commanders in Basra; in fact, quite the opposite.

4 Now, there is an argument about whether or not
5 Operation Salamanca led by British troops would have had
6 the same effect as an operation Charge of the Knights
7 led by Iraqi troops, but the notion of how, in fact,
8 a security ring would be established in Basra was one
9 that we had been -- that my predecessors had looked at
10 very carefully.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm just trying to get a sense of
12 where we were at this time. You mentioned the Charge of
13 the Knights, which took place in 2008. This was --
14 although we had been involved in discussions not that
15 far removed from what actually happened, nonetheless
16 this happened without us being forewarned. The
17 Iraqi Government didn't really feel the need to tell us
18 what it was going to do. Was that a surprise to you the
19 way it happened like that?

20 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Yes, absolutely. It was as much
21 of a surprise to me as it was to Condoleezza Rice or to
22 the other Americans. It reflected the pressure that
23 Prime Minister Maliki was then on and the pressure that
24 he wanted to enforce in Basra. It reflected quite a lot
25 of internal relations in the Iraqi authorities between

1 Basra and Baghdad and I think that's relevant to this.

2 It was a very -- it was a very bold move, I think
3 would be the diplomatic way of putting it.

4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Courageous. One of the reasons that
5 one hears as to why Prime Minister Maliki did not feel
6 the need to inform us -- because it was, after all, in
7 the area where we had responsibility for security -- was
8 of concern about the relationships that we had developed
9 with the militias, or that we had, in effect, handed
10 over Basra to the militias, a very common complaint.
11 Were you aware of that concern?

12 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well, yes, I mean I think you
13 have seen some of the -- well, you have seen all of the
14 e-grams, and some of them refer to conversations that
15 our Ambassador had with Prime Minister Maliki, including
16 after the Charge of the Knights, and I think it is very
17 important to put on record that the chatter or the
18 rumour mill that you referred to was not a fair
19 representation of what had happened.

20 General Wall has been through the facts, but I think
21 it is also fair to say that you will know from the
22 report that Christopher Prentice did on his meeting with
23 Prime Minister Maliki relatively soon after Charge of
24 the Knights. Prime Minister Maliki came to Basra and
25 then returned to Baghdad, and Christopher Prentice went

1 to see him. I think that Christopher laid out, in
2 a 90-minute meeting -- which is quite a lot for an
3 Ambassador to have with a head of state in the middle of
4 a very, very dangerous mission -- the series of
5 positions that Prime Minister Maliki had been told by
6 his advisers and what the actual facts were, and the
7 actual facts were very different from the rather -- from
8 the very prejudicial description of what Britain was
9 doing, that he had been given, and I think
10 Prime Minister Maliki accepted that.

11 I was in Iraq in April 2008. I think it was -- yes,
12 it was -- I think it was late April 2008 and I had
13 a pretty -- no, I beg your pardon -- yes -- and the
14 meeting with Prime Minister Maliki was quite a difficult
15 meeting, because there was still a residue of distrust
16 or of competing claims that were being made by some of
17 his advisers and what we were saying was the actual
18 situation.

19 But I think that Christopher did a good job in
20 realigning that. So by the time I was back in touch
21 with Prime Minister Maliki and back in Iraq
22 in February 2009, he was complaining that the British
23 weren't sort of mercantilist enough and commercial
24 enough and wanted us to have more of a share of the
25 future of Iraq. So I think it was a high pressure

1 period, but I think it is one where -- actually the
2 facts were on our side.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just, also, over this period, in
4 terms of the relationship with the United States, when
5 we went into Iraq in 2003, this was a time of shoulder
6 to shoulder with the United States. We were
7 a significant part of the coalition, we moved quite
8 effectively into Basra and so on, and there was talk
9 then of exemplary performance that we would have to make
10 Basra a showcase of some sort and a lot of discussion
11 about how good we are at counter-insurgency and
12 stabilisation operations and so and so forth.

13 Then you fast forward to the summer of 2007 and it
14 doesn't really look quite as good. The Americans are
15 moving into a surge, being prepared to commit much more
16 to the future of Iraq. We understand the difference in
17 the security situation, but nonetheless, the sense was
18 that we were just looking to get out and that the
19 position that we would be leaving would be one that was
20 not desperately one to be proud of in terms of the lack
21 of economic development in Basra and the poor security
22 situation.

23 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: The intra-Shia fighting was
24 profoundly destabilising. It was very different from
25 the situation in Baghdad, obviously, but it was very,

1 very dangerous and difficult.

2 I think that the American administration -- that
3 General Petraeus -- have said publicly that they learned
4 from how things transpired in Basra -- I'm not saying
5 they copied us. I'm saying they watched what we did,
6 they saw the strengths and weaknesses of it and then
7 they helped develop their own ideas. Certainly the
8 concepts of protecting the local population, engaging
9 with the local population, is something that they built
10 on.

11 I think that on all sides, after 2003, there was
12 quite a lot of talk, sort of happy talk, about how the
13 peace-building would go, and that was shattered pretty
14 quickly. Look, after a war that turned out to be very
15 short, but which had been built up as being very, very
16 dangerous, there was relief in the media, as well as in
17 political circles everywhere, and that obviously
18 underestimated the pressure cooker that was there.

19 I think that you have been through the military
20 decisions and the difficulties that did emerge. I think
21 that there was less sort of vainglorious boasting by
22 British military or politicians than is alleged in some
23 of the American reports of it, but, equally, the
24 Americans were determined to learn the lessons of what
25 had happened in Basra.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you think this affected your
2 influence with the Americans?

3 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: We were in a shared project and
4 the point about a partnership is that you don't
5 obfuscate about what goes right and what goes wrong, you
6 actually have to engage seriously on it, and I think
7 that that's what we did.

8 I think the scale of the engagement was very, very
9 different. We had 8,000 and then 4,000 troops in Iraq
10 and the Americans had over 100,000. So there is
11 a difference of scale that is very, very profound, but
12 I think that if you talk to -- if you talk to the
13 Americans, they will -- they said to me that we had
14 a degree of political engagement as well as military
15 engagement that was important, and that's why I come
16 back to this point: that we were transitioning, not just
17 to Provincial Iraqi Control, we were transitioning from
18 a Basra military focus for British engagement to a whole
19 Iraq, political, economic, cultural as well as military
20 focus, and that is a -- that was significant, and the
21 normal relationship that we want to have with the
22 Government of Iraq needs to be a productive one for both
23 sides and I think it can be.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just a final couple of points: when
25 you came in, what was the assessment in the

1 Foreign Office of the likely success of the surge?

2 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: It was probably rather more
3 positive than it would have been six months before
4 because by June, July, 2007, things were moving in the
5 right direction. That was the period in the immediate
6 run-up to the Petraeus/Crocker hearings.

7 The Prime Minister and I went to Camp David at the
8 end of July, and I remember talking with
9 Condoleezza Rice then about the situation, and it was
10 clear that, while there were problems in managing the
11 Petraeus/Crocker hearings, that Congress had set
12 benchmarks that probably wouldn't be met, the overall
13 trend was significantly in a much more positive
14 direction. Significantly.

15 So I think there was a sense, in 2007, that, while
16 Iraq was a problem, as I have described, as well as
17 a responsibility and an opportunity, it was one that was
18 containable.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just the final question on all of
20 this: would it be fair to say that the fact that we were
21 able to get out of Iraq in the way that we did was, in
22 a sense, due to policies taken by the United States in
23 helping to stabilise Iraq as a whole, via the surge, and
24 then, with the Charge of the Knights, as led by Maliki,
25 and that to some extent we had become rather dependent

1 upon those other developments that, by ourselves, our
2 options were really very limited?

3 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think you can actually make the
4 opposite case, because the Provincial Iraqi Control
5 decision that we referred to earlier was quite
6 a self-contained process and different -- remember, our
7 responsibilities for Basra had previously been
8 complemented by other responsibilities in MND South East
9 and other provinces had been handed over.

10 What is remarkable about Basra -- 95 per cent
11 Shia -- is quite how different the issues were there
12 than in Baghdad or in -- I mean, the north is
13 a different case altogether. So I actually think you
14 can almost make the opposite case.

15 When you say "get out", I assume you mean in
16 a military Basra sense. Our ability to play
17 a political, economic, et cetera, role in a new Iraq is
18 obviously completely dependent on how the whole country
19 went, but that is a rather different point and I don't
20 know -- we are obviously not banned from mentioning the
21 events yesterday, but we are not here to particularly
22 talk about the events yesterday. But 38 people were
23 killed on election day. So that doesn't make it an
24 ordinary exercise of democratic politics and one has to
25 be very, very open about that.

1 Equally, the determination of millions of Iraqis to
2 vote and the sense during the election campaign of
3 politics being fought out through words rather than
4 through bullets and bombs is very significant indeed.
5 I spoke to the Iraqi Foreign Minister on Saturday as
6 part of normal relations, I guess one would say, and the
7 sense of pride, but also excitement, that he felt, as an
8 Iraqi, at the way his country was trying to -- his
9 countrymen and women were trying to build a future for
10 themselves, I think is very, very profound and reflects
11 that.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just going back to this period, we
13 left Basra City before handing over provincial control.
14 That came later. Then the Charge of the Knights was
15 after we had handed over provincial control. So the
16 point really being that we hadn't handed over a city
17 that was secure.

18 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well, I think the Charge of the
19 Knights reflected quite a lot of tension between the
20 generals in charge of Basra and the central government.
21 I mean, one of the fears, or one of the allegations at
22 the time of the move out of the Basra Palace, was that,
23 if you move out of Basra Palace on a Sunday, the JAM
24 flag will be flying on the Monday. That wasn't actually
25 what happened.

1 So there undoubtedly remained serious security
2 issues. There was a mixture of intrasectarian, but also
3 criminal violence that was taking place in that city.
4 Equally, our work in the -- at the airport, the training
5 work that was done for the 14 Division of the Iraqi
6 army, I think was not insignificant. I'm not -- you are
7 more -- you are a military historian and will be able to
8 judge this against other cases, but I think that the
9 training work that was done for the Iraqi army, I'm told
10 by those whom I have a lot of faith in was of
11 a significantly high order and something that made
12 a genuine contribution.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Let's turn to another aspect. Usha?

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you. Mr Miliband, I want to
16 talk about the effectiveness of the FCO's operations in
17 Iraq. Now, during this period, both FCO and other
18 government departments maintained quite a significant
19 presence in Iraq. I think you have members in Baghdad,
20 Basra and Erbil. I think, due to the security
21 situation, the cost was quite high, but what were the
22 main tasks of our representatives in Iraq at this time?

23 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: It is the as normal as possible
24 pursuit of political, economic, cultural, educational
25 relations. It was different in different parts of the

1 country. In Baghdad, Christopher Prentice was one of
2 the main players in discussions about a whole Iraq
3 policy. In Erbil -- we haven't really had a chance to
4 talk about the north yet, but --

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I'm going to come to that later.

6 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Okay.

7 THE CHAIRMAN: We would like to hear about it from your
8 perspective.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In response to Sir Roderic Lyne you
10 talked about three things: responsibilities, problems
11 and opportunities. What were the opportunities and
12 challenges and problems that they were facing, and how
13 far were we able to make a common cause with the
14 United States to achieve ...

15 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: The problems were evident there.
16 The security ones that we have just been talking about,
17 those were the overriding problems. I will never forget
18 talking to our locally-employed staff in Baghdad in the
19 embassy in December 2007 and hearing about their fear of
20 going home, going to work, going about their business.

21 Part of the fear was that they would be labelled as
22 targets because they were working for us. So it is
23 a palpable example of the sort of extraordinary
24 circumstances that our locally-engaged staff were
25 working under, and obviously, for our UK-based staff, it

1 is not normal diplomatic training to go around in flak
2 jackets or practise to go around in flak jackets and to
3 be in a Green Zone, but that's the way that they had to
4 do their work and that's the biggest problem.

5 The opportunity was always that Iraq should be
6 a relatively wealthy, relatively pluralist part of the
7 Middle East and it should be a country which, because it
8 sits on this Arab/Persian divide and on the Sunni/Shia
9 divide, it has a remarkable potential to be a place that
10 does not conform to some of the stereotypes of the
11 Middle East.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were there particular challenges in
13 Baghdad itself?

14 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Yes, the bombings of the
15 Green Zone were obviously a permanent presence, the fact
16 that you couldn't go out into the city was a permanent
17 factor, although I do emphasise the role of our locally
18 engaged staff is important in all posts. It is
19 important in the most peaceful areas, but in a conflict
20 zone, the fact that you have got people going out into
21 the city because they are Iraqis is a vital source of
22 intelligence¹ and insight into what is actually going on.
23 So that is extraordinarily difficult.

24 I mean, there was no question, in my mind, a real
25 esprit de corps that existed there. It is remarkable to

¹ The Foreign Secretary has asked that the word 'intelligence' be replaced with the word 'information'.

1 me that job openings in Basra and Baghdad were
2 oversubscribed in the Foreign Office at the time.
3 That's a remarkable testimony to public service and to
4 public spirit.

5 There was also a real sense that, while, of course
6 there, was a Petraeus/Crocker partnership that was very,
7 very strong, the British military and British political
8 engagement was of a very, very high order.

9 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I just develop Baroness Prashar's
10 question? Looking at Baghdad and the challenges and,
11 indeed, opportunities that we faced then, how critical,
12 as a catalyst for continuing political development, was
13 our mission's contribution in terms of Iraqi political
14 development?

15 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: It is a very hard question to
16 answer, because these were independent political actors
17 responding to pressure from their own people. So
18 I don't think we should overemphasise that.

19 However, I know that we argued very, very strongly
20 for the provincial elections to take place, if not
21 exactly on time, but in January 2009 -- in February 2008
22 there was the significant Justice and Accountability
23 Law, there was the Provincial Powers Law, but there was
24 also the Provincial Elections Law, and I would say that
25 there was a distinctive British position about the

1 importance of provincial elections and why they were
2 part of the rebuilding process.

3 That's not to say that there wouldn't have been any
4 elections without us, but I think that we were making
5 a distinctive and signal contribution on that issue.
6 That wasn't the only issue where we were able to make
7 that sort of diplomatic contribution.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were we making a common cause with
10 the United States?

11 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: We always try to work with them
12 in a very, very cooperative way. I think it is fair to
13 say that there was a healthy debate about the provincial
14 elections issue and exactly when they should happen, but
15 I'm pleased to say we reached a common cause.

16 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I then move to the south?
17 Because the limitations of the security situation in
18 Basra and the move to the airport put the FCO's ability
19 to deliver its objectives, particularly on economic
20 object development -- I mean, can you say a little bit
21 more about that?

22 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: It is extremely constrained if
23 you are not able to have free access around a city to
24 its people. So obviously that is an important
25 limitation. I think you have talked with

1 Douglas Alexander in detail, about Michael Wareing and
2 his efforts, the Basra Development Corporation,
3 et cetera. I think that was something where we were
4 seen to be playing a particularly important role.

5 One of the things that I tried to do, and I think
6 without enormous success, was to bring Kuwait into the
7 Basra equation because of the trading -- the importance
8 of trading. It is the obvious way of getting goods out
9 and it is very, very blocked. At successive so-called
10 neighbours conferences I was trying to bring the
11 Kuwaitis and the Iraqis together. We didn't do that on
12 our own, the Turks established a consulate in Basra,
13 which was extraordinary and important, but of course you
14 are constrained if you are living in a war zone and we
15 have a duty of care to our people. It means that
16 everything takes five times longer than it would do in
17 a normal situation and obviously there are limits on
18 where you can go. People nonetheless did want to come
19 and talk to us and they saw us as being an important
20 part of the equation.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Other witnesses have talked about
22 the fact that there were some advantages of being
23 co-located in Basra Airport, which meant that the DFID
24 staff, the MoD staff and the FCO staff could actually
25 work together.

1 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Of course that's right. I'm in
2 favour of co-location everywhere, not just in conflict
3 zones. It must make sense that we have a British team
4 and clear government policy that then all the different
5 distinctive parts of British Government are contributing
6 to.

7 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you find that people wanted to
8 come and talk to us? Did the local politicians come to
9 Basra Airport to talk to staff?

10 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Yes, absolutely. I remember
11 I was actually in Basra on the day of PIC, of Provincial
12 Iraqi Control. There was a great gathering of the
13 tribes at the airport for this occasion. General Binns
14 made a fantastically impressive speech. It is worth
15 looking at the speech he made, if you're interested, on
16 the day of PIC. Govern Wa'ili, all of them, would come
17 and talk to us.

18 It was only on my third visit to Basra
19 in February 2009 that I was able to walk down the
20 Shatt Al Arab waterway and talk to the Iraqis who were
21 out selling, walking, et cetera. But that's the shift
22 that has gone on and, of course, we are far better able
23 to do the economic, political, educational outreach with
24 that sort of ability.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I now move on to another issue,

1 which is the question of the Kurds? Because you said
2 earlier, that your second visit, when you became Foreign
3 Secretary, was to go to Turkey, because Iraq was on your
4 mind and given the importance of the Kurdish unity.
5 I mean, of course one is aware of the tensions between
6 Arabs and Kurds.

7 How far do you think these tensions still impact on
8 Iraq remaining one state with the same borders?

9 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Well, I think that the integrity
10 of Iraq and its territorial integrity is not something
11 that is fundamentally at issue. I think that's not
12 where the debate is. The debate is about whether or not
13 the obvious gains from cooperation between Turkey and
14 northern Iraq -- gains in trade, but also gains in
15 security -- can be realised through political
16 cooperation.

17 You obviously have the Kurdish regional government
18 based in Erbil, but you also have continuing remnants --
19 2,000 or 3,000 probably -- of the PKK, of a Kurdish
20 terrorist organisation. On my first visit to Erbil, on
21 the day I was flying in, I was also speaking to the
22 Turkish Foreign Minister about fighting that was going
23 on, and that is a real issue.

24 You have also got -- the third part of the equation
25 is obviously there is a very significant Kurdish

1 minority in Turkey which wants to have its rights
2 respected and actually extended. That's cultural rights
3 as well as social rights. So there is internal Turkish
4 reform that is part of this. It is not just about
5 reform in Iraq or cooperation with Turkey, it is about
6 internal reform within Turkey.

7 I nonetheless think there has actually been
8 significant progress in the last two or three years on
9 this. When I first went to Erbil on December 2007, we
10 were ploughing a relatively lonely furrow in talking
11 about Turkey and the Kurdish regional government working
12 closely together. But we had a particular advantage
13 with the fact that we were seen by the Turks as being
14 supportive of their European aspirations, and we were
15 seen as being supportive of the Kurds, partly because of
16 what happened in the early 1990s, but also because of
17 Frank Baker's distinctive links into the leadership of
18 the Kurdish regional government.

19 So we were able to be discussing, in a very honest
20 and open way, with both sides, their responsibilities.
21 We were able to discuss what words each of them would
22 use to help build confidence with the other, and I think
23 the fact that now you have increasing isolation of the
24 PKK is significant. There is a separate issue about
25 Kurdish/Arab relations and relations between Erbil and

1 Baghdad, which are obviously in some ways stuck.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Is it your assessment that the Kurds

3 are reconciled to a unified Iraq now?

4 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that you should look at

5 the words that they used, because "reconciled" is

6 a -- is quite a loaded term. They are certainly not

7 seeking to break up Iraq and they are seeking to make

8 the most of their autonomy within an Iraq whose

9 territorial integrity is not affected, and that is very,

10 very important.

11 After this election, the Kurds, the Kurdish block,

12 will be absolutely key to the new coalition formation,

13 and not just that, but to the passage of legislation

14 thereafter. So, you can see exactly what

15 Massoud Barzani, President Barzani, has said, you can

16 see exactly what now Prime Minister Barham Salih, the

17 Prime Minister of the Kurdish regional government, has

18 said. They are people absolutely committed to the

19 success of Iraq and to the success of Kurds within the

20 new Iraq.

21 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Is there more that we should be

22 doing?

23 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: You have got to tell -- you are

24 learning the lessons, not me, but --

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You must have a view.

1 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: My view is that government
2 ministers should never give themselves an A plus and
3 say, "There is nothing more", to use your phrase, "that
4 we could do". Of course one always wants to do better.
5 I don't know about more, but you never say, "It is all
6 going so swimmingly that there is no way we could do
7 anything more or better".

8 We have got an active mission many Erbil, which
9 I think is good, and I'm pleased that we have taken the
10 decision to keep a third mission. I think for a number
11 of countries, maybe for a number of people, they would
12 see that as maybe idiosyncratic or unusual. I think it
13 is a very, very important part of a whole Iraq policy
14 because we have to respect the devolution that is
15 necessary in that country. I also think that it has
16 benefits for our relations with the Turks, because
17 I think we can play an important role there, and it is
18 very interesting to be trusted by both sides. That is
19 a profoundly impressive situation to be in, and I think
20 that the activism that we have got there is good.

21 I know that John Jenkins, who is one of our leading
22 Arabists, will take that forward.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: My final question is about hostages,
24 because a particular challenge has been the risk to UK
25 nationals in Iraq being taken as hostages. Looking

1 back, are there lessons to be learned as to how we deal
2 with hostages?

3 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Look, I'm very glad you mentioned
4 that, because I notice at the end of all these sessions
5 you say, "Is there anything else you'd like to say?" and
6 I was going to raise this issue. So I do thank you for
7 raising this.

8 I think all of the witnesses have paid tribute to
9 the work of our armed forces, and the devastation for
10 the nearly 200 families who have lost a loved one here,
11 never mind been injured, is profound, and all of us
12 think about that, never mind the very significant number
13 of Iraqis who have lost their lives, but there is also
14 the case of the five hostages, which has weighed
15 significantly on me in terms of time and effort, but not
16 one hundredth or thousandth as much as it has weighed on
17 the families.

18 You know the situation, that one of the five
19 hostages has returned, thankfully alive, but three have
20 been killed, and there is the continuing agony in
21 respect of Alan McMenemy, and that is something I think
22 it is important that is on the record in a case like
23 this.

24 I know that Foreign Office staff, but also staff
25 from other government departments, never mind Iraqis,

1 have really strained every sinew in trying to get
2 a successful rescue or release of these five innocent
3 people and it is the human cases in a way that bring out
4 the -- some of the big discussions that one can have
5 about this.

6 We have a very, very clear policy, that we will not
7 make substantive concessions to hostage-takers and
8 I don't think that a -- any lesson of this affair should
9 be that we should change that policy. I think that we
10 have worked very, very hard in terms of our engagement
11 with all those -- and I emphasise all those -- who might
12 have a way of helping exert pressure or incentive for
13 release, and tragically, in three, I think four, of the
14 cases it has not been successful. It is worth saying
15 that the COBR system, the emergency system at the heart
16 of government, which is able to link people up from
17 around the world and bring people together on
18 a cross-departmental basis at a very short notice and
19 which ministers engage in, in my experience has worked
20 extremely actively in the last three years and can
21 summon all sorts of expertise to look at opportunities
22 that might arise.

23 So I think that it is something where it is
24 obviously a unique case because hostage-taking in Iraq
25 is different from hostage-taking in Yemen or elsewhere

1 where we have issues, but we are still having to work
2 very, very hard on this outstanding case of Mr McMenemy
3 and we try to stay in touch with his family about it.

4 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I hear that you don't want to make
5 any concessions to hostages, but have any lessons been
6 learned in the way you have gone about identifying
7 hostage-takers?

8 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I don't think we have much
9 trouble in identifying -- we were able to identify the
10 group who took them, because they were broadcasting it
11 pretty clearly. The detective work is obviously to see
12 if one can find out where the hostages are and where the
13 hostage-takers are, whether they are together. There is
14 a lot of disinformation.

15 Look, in any of these hostage negotiations, you need
16 local expertise that gets you into the networks that
17 matter, and this was -- this was a very, very difficult
18 case because it obviously involved groups that had links
19 outside Iraq as well.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You said you keep in touch with
21 families, but when we have talked to the families of
22 hostages, they have complained to us about lack of
23 information in the context of the FCO. Have you any
24 comments on that?

25 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I would like to see some details

1 of that really, because we have a consular team that
2 works very hard on this. Sometimes families want to
3 talk to ministers, sometimes they don't, and that is
4 respected. On one occasion, they met the Prime Minister
5 and myself together.

6 Look, if the families of those taken hostage have
7 ideas or complaints, then we want to know about them
8 because we will obviously -- we must -- we must be
9 guided by their needs. Equally, there are some things
10 we can't tell them because we may not know the facts and
11 that is a difficult position to be in, but we have
12 always been open with them about what we don't know, and
13 that can be frustrating, but if you have -- I mean,
14 I will -- as a result of what you have said this
15 morning, I will make sure that our consular team make
16 enquiries, because if you are saying that there are
17 current concerns -- is that what you are saying? There
18 are current concerns?

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When we met them some months ago,
20 yes, there were some concerns.

21 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Let me look at whether that was
22 before or after some of the recent developments in this
23 case, but I will certainly ask my team to investigate
24 that.

25 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Could we spend a moment on time
2 management? We have agreed that this session will go on
3 until 10.30. I think you have travel commitments to
4 come. If you have a little elastic, we could take
5 a very short break, or would you rather run right
6 through?

7 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: For me, if we went through,
8 because I know that the Prime Minister has a meeting
9 I need to attend at 11.00 this morning.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: We'll go straight on then. Turning to
11 Sir Roderic?

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to go back to the whole Iraq
13 strategy which you have talked about. We had heard
14 about this also from earlier witnesses, from
15 Mark Lyall Grant and Frank Baker, both of whom told us
16 that the Foreign Office began to work on an Iraq
17 strategy from the end of 2007. Frank Baker said that
18 this work was then parked for three or four months in
19 early 2008 and then they returned to it in the autumn.

20 By October 2008, you were talking about it to the
21 Foreign Affairs Committee. You described
22 a security strategy and an economic and political
23 strategy for the whole of Iraq, much as you have done to
24 us this morning, and then, as I understand it, you
25 actually put this strategy to the Prime Minister

1 in January 2009. With all the benefits of hindsight, is
2 this something that we might have done sooner, and why
3 did it get parked in the middle of 2008?

4 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I remember being at Erbil Airport
5 in December 2007 and saying to Christopher Prentice,
6 "Your big strategic job in 2008 is to shift from
7 a Basra-focused military strategy to a whole Iraq
8 strategy", and there are actually papers, I think
9 from March 2008, that were circulated.

10 So I think it wouldn't be right to say -- I was
11 actually quite surprised when I went back through the
12 papers that it was only formally, finally signed off at
13 the NSID meeting in January 2009. I was very surprised
14 about that, because, actually, if you look at the
15 papers, they were pretty consistent from,
16 actually, October 2007, certainly in the spring of 2008,
17 and we were, frankly, putting into practice the
18 strategy. I think what was signed off in January 2009
19 was the final decision about having three -- an embassy
20 and two consulates in -- that was the -- the formal
21 decision on that.

22 SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was part of the strategy?

23 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I mean, the parking for -- was --
24 in the wake of the Charge of the Knights.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, I mean Mark Lyall Grant said there

1 wasn't real engagement at a senior level in Whitehall
2 until nearly a year later, but perhaps he is referring
3 there to getting the formal, final decision on what you
4 were already doing.

5 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I remember saying to
6 Christopher -- I met him last week to talk about this --
7 that that was the job for 2008. There was this sort of
8 interruption or hiatus surrounding Charge of the
9 Knights. But, look, it was obviously what we needed to
10 try to do. We needed to make sure that the military
11 focus was replaced with a political, economic -- I keep
12 mentioning a cultural/educational. I think the
13 educational side of this is not to be underestimated.
14 It is part of this, but the politics meant we needed
15 active diplomats around the country.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: On the political side, obviously part of
17 the objective was to try to persuade the
18 Iraqi Government themselves to take a whole Iraq
19 strategy, rather than to put the emphasis more on
20 sectarian interests. Do you feel we have been able to
21 to have a helpful influence in that respect?

22 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I remember asking
23 Prime Minister Maliki about this and he told me he
24 looked forward to the day when there were
25 cross-sectarian lists and, of course, the way in which

1 the multitude of parties have teamed up in these
2 elections yesterday does conform to that aspiration,
3 although the individual lists themselves remain
4 sectarian. There are coalitions who are in the main
5 non-sectarian.

6 I think that, as in any normal diplomatic
7 relationship, which you know about, there is a lot of
8 talking for a little bit of inching forward, and we are
9 dealing with politicians in a country which treasures
10 its independence, as you can see from the whole
11 discussion about the transition from a chapter 7
12 resolution to SOFA military agreements. It is a country
13 which hated the idea of being governed by someone else.
14 The whole purpose of this, what they called the, quote,
15 unquote "liberation", was to run their own affairs.

16 So I think one has to be careful sitting here
17 saying, "Yes, we were responsible for this development
18 or that development", although I made the point about
19 the provincial elections, which I think are important.

20 I think we are playing a part, a significant part,
21 in the diplomatic efforts. The diplomatic efforts are
22 secondary to the pressures from -- on politicians from
23 within their own communities.

24 SIR RODERIC LYNE: We also tried to make a big effort on the
25 economic side -- we have talked to the Prime Minister

1 about this -- and we were looking to improve the
2 landscape for investors, to do things that would help to
3 increase employment and very much to help redevelop the
4 hydrocarbon industry, which is a matter both of
5 production and of law.

6 Hydrocarbon productions still have not got much
7 higher than the level they were at under Saddam Hussein.
8 How are we doing on the economic front at this moment,
9 do you think?

10 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: How are they doing is the mindset
11 I keep trying to get myself into. Because it is their
12 economy, not ours. I think we are doing better in our
13 contribution to their efforts to restore their economy.

14 As I say, when I saw Prime Minister Maliki, he knows
15 that Britain -- commercial diplomacy is an important
16 part of British diplomatic activity. About 15 per cent
17 of Foreign Office time is spent on commercial diplomacy,
18 but we are not mercantilist in the way we go about our
19 foreign policy. We do things because we think they are
20 right and we try to reap commercial benefit in parallel.
21 We are quite leery of tying the two together.

22 However, I think the Prime Minister's personal
23 engagement has been important. The Basra focus of
24 Michael Wareing was referred to. When I talked to
25 people, they told me it was important. The London

1 Investment Conference on 30 April last year was
2 significant because no one else has done it, not least,
3 and it is a confidence-building exercise, and the fact
4 that hundreds of international businessmen, business
5 people want to come and engage with the Iraqi
6 authorities I think is important.

7 I also think the amount of effort we are willing to
8 put into it is a marker for the Iraqis, obviously key is
9 our own businesses, or businesses that are British, who
10 are doing a bit better, but it is also that we haven't
11 forgotten them.

12 One of the challenge for me in Iraq,
13 in February 2009, on my last visit, was to say that the
14 British military may be more or less leaving Iraq, but
15 the British are not leaving Iraq. In fact, we are
16 reinvesting in Iraq in our political, economic,
17 cultural, educational engagement. So that's an
18 important part of this.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

20 THE CHAIRMAN: Foreign Secretary, I have a couple of
21 questions. The first one is really reputation. We
22 heard from Mark Lyall Grant who said two things
23 essentially: that we took a reputational hit in 2003,
24 we, the United Kingdom, but also that we recovered from
25 it completely, maybe not.

1 Simon MacDonald said that actually we had won
2 a certain respect in the region from doing what we did,
3 from being active and unafraid of action. So I just
4 wonder what the sort of reputational sum is now in 2010
5 in your judgment.

6 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that -- there is no
7 question that a lot of people thought we were wrong to
8 have launched the war. That's not just true about the
9 region, though, that's true here too.

10 Equally, I think that -- so in that sense, people
11 said, "We were a bit surprised that Britain went along
12 with this, given how much you know about our region and
13 the difficulties of it". Equally, I do think people in
14 the region do respect those who are willing to see
15 through what they say they favour. Even those who
16 disagree with it would say to me, "You have sent
17 a message that, when you say something, you actually
18 mean it, and if you say something is the last chance, it
19 is a last chance".

20 So I think that -- I wouldn't agree that it is as
21 simple as saying we took a hit and now we have made up
22 for it. I think in some quarters people were very
23 disappointed or surprised about the decision, but,
24 equally, some of them recognised its value.

25 I think, secondly, people know that we have a close

1 partnership with the United States and they -- some of
2 them felt we could have been more successful in
3 persuading the Americans to do something different.
4 Equally, others recognise that the UN route was pursued
5 in significant part because of British engagement, as
6 you have heard from the former Prime Minister and
7 others. I think it is interesting that, even among
8 Democrats in the States who opposed the war, there is
9 a recognition that Britain is a staunch ally and that,
10 again, balances out that part of the equation.

11 I can honestly say to you, thirdly, that in the Arab
12 world today, I don't believe that the Iraq decisions
13 have undermined our relationships and our abilities to
14 do business. Actually, some of our ambassadors say that
15 we are in a strong position in various ways at the
16 moment.

17 THE CHAIRMAN: Just to conclude on that, you mentioned
18 earlier the obviously extremely important case of Libya.
19 Take another country, though, where our interests
20 haven't been wholly aligned with that country, say
21 Syria. Has what happened in 2003 and all that has
22 happened since and all we have done since, as it were,
23 conditioned that particular relationship or other
24 relationships in the region?

25 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I wouldn't say it has conditioned

1 our relationship with Syria. I have visited Syria, the
2 Syrian Foreign Minister, Mr Mualem, has visited here.
3 We must have had half a dozen or more meetings. Iraq is
4 an item on the agenda that we talk about. I talked to
5 him about the flow of foreign fighters from Syria into
6 Iraq. He says, "But we are doing a lot to reduce that".
7 I say, "Yes, the numbers have gone down since 2007, but
8 we need them to go down further, or Iraq needs them to
9 go down further". So I think it is an item on the
10 agenda. It's not a conditioning factor in our relations
11 with Saudi Arabia.

12 I have been saying to the Saudis for some time,
13 "Look, opening an embassy in Baghdad will be a good
14 thing. It's not a loss for you and it is not a betrayal.
15 It is actually a good thing for you to have an embassy
16 in Baghdad". It saddens me that they don't, but that
17 speaks to the relationship that they fear between Iraq
18 and Iran, and that's maybe something that we will come
19 on to.

20 It is not that the waters have closed here, but
21 I can only tell you, in my experience, no one says to me
22 "Because of what you did in Iraq, we are not going to
23 listen to you. Because of what you did in Iraq, we take
24 with a big pinch of salt what you say". That has not
25 been my experience. Equally, people don't say that they

1 all agree with us.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: You mentioned Iran/Iraq and I do want to
3 close my set of questions really by returning to the
4 relationship. We had two arguably contrasting opinions
5 from Mark Lyall Grant, on the one hand, and
6 Simon MacDonald on the other. Mark said that, in his
7 view, the UK saw Iran as primarily, or potentially,
8 a malign actor in terms of Iraq and that that was,
9 therefore, something that had to be factored into the
10 Anglo-Iranian relationship and its conduct. But
11 Simon MacDonald said, in his view, our presence in Iraq
12 really made no difference to the way we handled the
13 Anglo-Iranian relationship. Are the two antithetical or
14 are they just different deductions?

15 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think someone said to you that
16 Iran lost an enemy and gained a potential ally in the
17 removal of Saddam. As I said earlier, I don't buy the
18 thesis that the removal of Saddam released Iran to do
19 its ill around the region, because I don't think Saddam
20 was the constraint in the '90s, or after, that was said.

21 I also think that -- I read John Jenkins's evidence
22 and he made a really profound point. He said there was
23 a lot of bad feeling among all communities about the way
24 Iran tried to exploit the situation after 2003. I think
25 that is a profound point. This notion that Iran has

1 misplayed its hand and underestimated the extent of
2 Iraqi nationalism among the Shia of Iraq. There is
3 this -- John said to me last week, no one should
4 underestimate the humiliation of being an Arab Shia in
5 Iraq, where some of these people spent their -- spent
6 the 90s --

7 THE CHAIRMAN: We also heard evidence, of course, that the
8 result of the provincial elections, particularly in the
9 southeast in 2009, really was a reflection of Iraq's
10 resentment over Iranian --

11 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I was going to say I think that
12 is quite interesting. In the rejection of Iranian
13 entreaties in respect of the SOFA with America, you see
14 Iraqi nationalism, not fealty to Iranian Shia-ism. In
15 the arming of the Shia killing machines, Iran did itself
16 huge damage in the eyes of the Iraqi people.

17 In the decision of ISCI to focus its loyalty on
18 Ayatollah Sistani, you see this point about the
19 religious pole of Najaf coming through quite strongly.
20 I think that is one of the things I'm probably least
21 expert on, but I think it is most interesting, this
22 notion that Najaf is going to become a pole of Shia
23 thinking.

24 I think the point about the open lists is
25 interesting as well and that was against the Iranian

1 view, and Charge of the Knights was not done at the
2 behest of the Iranians at all. If you want evidence
3 that this is not a government beholden to the Iranians,
4 Charge of the Knights is pretty good evidence in that
5 respect.

6 Now, that's not to say that Iran -- it is an
7 important neighbour, it has legitimate interests in
8 a stable Iraq. It does not have legitimate interests in
9 trying to run Iraq and I don't think Iraqis want to be
10 run by Iranians, even amongst the Shia.

11 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, with time now pressing hard on us,
12 I will turn, if I may, to Sir Martin Gilbert. Martin?

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I have a two-part question which links
14 several of your answers, which I suppose can be put
15 under the general heading of "Delivering the
16 Objectives".

17 When you took up office in June 2007, what did you
18 see as the key UK objectives in relation to Iraq, and
19 looking back, after what I believe is some 33 or 34
20 months in office, how far do you feel we have gone to
21 achieving those objectives and, in particular, what has
22 been the contribution of Foreign Office?

23 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Our objective in 2007 was to
24 transition to a whole Iraq strategy focused on politics,
25 economics, education/culture with a military component,

1 a normal diplomatic relationship, and pending the
2 selection of a new Iraqi Government or the negotiation
3 of a new Iraqi government, I think we are a significant
4 way on the road to that.

5 I think the work by our successive Ambassadors has
6 been outstanding. I think that our teams have done very
7 good work and I think that they have been well-supported
8 from London. That's the Foreign Office's contribution.
9 I think that the military have obviously been an
10 important part of that.

11 So if you are asking, "What were our objectives in
12 2007?" that is a different question from, "What were our
13 objectives in 2003?" I don't know if you want to come
14 to that, but in respect of our 2007 objectives, that's
15 what I can say to you.

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of our role in political
17 reconciliation?

18 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Certainly I'm amazed at the
19 degree of candour with which the different senior
20 politicians in Baghdad talked to me about their
21 colleagues. A quite extraordinary degree of openness.
22 Also, remarkable faith that we can help shift some of
23 their colleagues who haven't been shifted on various
24 issues.

25 Now, the legislative gridlock that has existed

1 suggests that it is harder to move people than is
2 sometimes suggested. I think that the greatest driver
3 for political reconciliation is that the Iraqi people
4 are desperate to escape some of their recent history --
5 desperate to -- and the politicians are reflecting that,
6 I think.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What is the feeling in Iraq towards us,
8 given our part in 2003?

9 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think the view of us -- we are
10 seen to have played a part in freeing the country from
11 a tyranny that is bitterly remembered. That is true for
12 significant sections of the population. Obviously for
13 the Kurds, obviously for the Shia, but for some of the
14 Sunni as well.

15 Now, when you are the Foreign Secretary of Britain,
16 your recent actions have -- have always got to be put
17 into a rather longer-term context. John Jenkins talked
18 about some of the -- I can't remember the exact
19 adjective that was used to describe it, "Son of Naji"
20 or --

21 THE CHAIRMAN: Abu Naji.

22 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: That's right. People are
23 probably not old enough to remember the 1920s, but it
24 has been passed down from generation to generation, and
25 sometimes that means people overestimate our powers, but

1 I think that the simple way of putting it is people
2 want -- the people -- enough people I have talked to
3 want -- in Iraq, want Britain to be part of their
4 future, a partner in their future.

5 THE CHAIRMAN: I defer to Sir Martin, but I think, if we are
6 to look at the full historical context of the Anglo-Iraq
7 relationship. I think your starting point, Martin, is
8 1758.

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Always benign.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: Can I close this session with a couple of
11 questions, really pointing to lessons learned in your
12 judgment, but can I start by picking up something you
13 said just now?

14 The objectives that the coalition set itself, we set
15 ourselves, in June 2003, and compare that to what has
16 been achieved and what hasn't been achieved by 2010 and
17 the cost paid in lives and treasure along the way, how
18 does that sort of contrast work?

19 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I went back to the Azores
20 declaration, because it has four objectives that are
21 laid out there. One is pre-eminent. It is:

22 "Our aim is to disarm Saddam of his WMD."

23 Now, we can't claim that as an achievement because
24 of the history that we know, but we can point to the
25 Libyan case. The second objective it set was -- we have

1 discussed this -- to secure compliance with
2 UN Resolutions and I think that there we have talked
3 about the obvious divisions and controversies.

4 You picked up that John Jenkins referred to the role
5 of Ad Melkert and of Steffan de Mistura in Iraq. I think
6 that is -- and you said that no one else had mentioned
7 that, Mr Chairman. I think that is an important point.
8 The UN has played a very significant role since 2003.
9 Within months of the war, the resolution was passed and
10 the UN agreed a position. I think that is a remarkable
11 thing actually.

12 The third objective was:

13 "The Iraqi people deserve to be lifted from tyranny
14 and allowed to determine the future of their own country
15 for themselves."

16 Here there is a balance sheet. There is death and
17 destruction, but there is freedom. There is economic
18 loss, but there is economic and social renewal. There
19 is sectarian violence, but there is the restoration of
20 Shia religious life. There is the iron grip of Saddam
21 gone and there is -- I suppose I would describe it as
22 chaotic potential. So I think that there is -- it is
23 still in play that there will be a significantly better
24 cultural, economic, social life for Iraqis.

25 The fourth objective set in the Azores was an Iraq

1 at peace with itself and with its neighbours; the
2 regional stability point.

3 Now, the region is not a stable region, but it is
4 not unstable because of Iraq, and that, I think, is
5 a significant point. So I think it is interesting to
6 take those four groups -- those four objectives as
7 a sort of test of what we were originally trying to do.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: One additional theme which has come up
9 constantly in the evidence we have been taking, which is
10 where the human rights situation in Iraq is heading,
11 because there is a balance sheet, as you have said, more
12 broadly.

13 On one view, the position of women and, indeed, the
14 position of religious minorities in Iraq is not better,
15 and in some respects worse, than it was before 2003. On
16 the other hand, there is a constitution which guarantees
17 rights and it is enforced rather variably across
18 different provinces. Could you comment on that?

19 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Insecurity is the greatest danger
20 to anybody's human rights and, while insecurity remains
21 on the scale that it does, it is a problem. There is
22 a progressive NGO law, there is freedom of association,
23 there are legal rights written into the constitution,
24 but that is different from having them actually
25 delivered.

1 I think you haven't taken evidence from Ann Clwyd.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: We have.

3 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Okay, because --

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Both in extensive private conversation --²

5 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Good. I wanted to draw attention
6 to the remarkable work that she has been doing over the
7 last -- a long period actually. She has registered with
8 me at various points her alarm about women's rights in
9 Iraq, and I think that that's something we have tried
10 to pursue.

11 What I think she would say is -- she is a remarkable
12 optimist -- she would say the potential is there for
13 a radically inspiring -- well, a radically different
14 example of what it means to be a citizen in the Arab
15 world, and that is something that, in a community which
16 is as fragmented as the Iraqi, if they can unite around
17 a set of rights for citizens, that would be a remarkable
18 thing.

19 The fact that so many of them have gone and
20 exercised their democratic rights I think is
21 significant, because there is no other country really,
22 query Lebanon, in the whole of the Arab world that can
23 muster that kind of potential and maybe that explains
24 some of the wariness with which Iraq is viewed in
25 significant parts of the region.

² And in a public hearing on 3 February.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: I think this is the moment to ask about other
2 lessons learned, but just as a quick preface to that, we
3 have heard so much evidence now about the need for/value
4 of/potential in the comprehensive approach to
5 stabilisation and reconstruction that we have that
6 agenda pretty well fixed, but other than that, lessons
7 learned?

8 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: The Prime Minister highlighted
9 organisation within government, the post-conflict
10 stabilisation issues and the international organisation.
11 I don't want to go back over that. I would highlight,
12 if I might detain you for just a bit, a couple of things
13 really.

14 One is the Petraeus/Crocker relationship and what it
15 said about how the international community can engage
16 with a host country. The need for a focal point for
17 international military and civilian coordination can
18 sometimes get lost in the bureaucracy of discussing how
19 budgets are set and how objectives are set.

20 I think that is a very, very profound example and one
21 of the challenges in Afghanistan is for
22 General McChrystal, Mark Sedwill, Steffan de Mistura
23 coming from Iraq to provide that focal point, and
24 I think that's very, very important indeed.

25 Secondly, I think that -- I mentioned in passing the

1 LE staff, the locally engaged staff, and I think that is
2 an important point. I have just got the statistics for
3 you this morning, because I thought it might be
4 interesting for you, that 1,000 claims by
5 locally engaged staff have been accepted as being right.
6 500 have chosen financial compensation; 500 have chosen
7 resettlement in Britain, of whom 400 have been resettled
8 in Britain along with their families.

9 So that is quite a significant reflection of our
10 commitment to these people, who were incredibly brave in
11 the way that they went about their service, not of their
12 country, but of a country that they have now adopted,
13 and I think that's important.

14 Thirdly, I'm honour-bound to say that the importance
15 of ground truth is a vital part of any government
16 machine working and I have found that the diplomats who
17 have worked for me have spoken very, very candidly about
18 ground truth, both in writing and in person, and that
19 culture is incredibly important. Because the most
20 dangerous thing, if you are in a foreign country, is not
21 actually knowing what is going on.

22 I thought I would just make a final point, because
23 in all the discussion of lessons, which is, after all,
24 why we are here, I think it is important to register
25 that, from my point of view as Foreign Secretary,

1 I think it is very important that we don't learn the
2 wrong lesson and the wrong lesson, it seems to me, is
3 that Britain should leave international engagement to
4 others, that the world is just so complicated and
5 dangerous that we are better off retreating into
6 ourselves.

7 We are a remarkable country, not just in the breadth
8 of assets that we have, from the softest of soft power
9 of the British Council and the BBC World Service to
10 intelligence and hard power, we are also plugged into
11 a unique group of networks: the UN, the EU, NATO, the
12 Commonwealth.

13 There is an argument about whether or not
14 medium-sized countries should think of themselves as
15 global players and I think it is an argument that is
16 going to become more and more pressing in the months and
17 years ahead, because of the temptations for politicians,
18 never mind those concerned with the finances, to rein us
19 in, and I think that ask a lot of those whom we put into
20 harm's way, and I think that the way in which the
21 Prime Minister summed up the -- not just the gratitude,
22 but the respect and the sadness, the profound sadness
23 that is felt by people in government, was absolutely
24 right.

25 But, equally, we mustn't be a country that turns our

1 back on the world, because, if we do, because of the
2 hard decisions that are faced with, we will be much
3 poorer in all senses of that term.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Far from seeking the last word,
5 but we have been given a number of lessons and you have
6 just added to that list -- thank you -- two. One,
7 I think you have mentioned already, this is co-location.
8 Clearly, we are not going to turn our back on the world.
9 If we are not, then that is one lesson clearly to be
10 learned.

11 An associated one, which has come through more and
12 more, I think, certainly to me, is the need to ensure
13 that the diplomatic and military people on the ground
14 are better and better aligned. Not only co-located, but
15 tour length and the alignment so relationships can form.
16 I don't know whether you'd want to comment on that.

17 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think it is a good point, it is
18 an important point. I don't like the Afghanistan/Iraq
19 comparisons because I think in many ways they are very,
20 very different. However, we have learned some lessons.
21 The civilian military mission in Helmand, which is led
22 by a civilian, actually a DFID lady, is a remarkable
23 example of joint work.

24 However, I think that one of the things that
25 Douglas Alexander and Bob Ainsworth and I have committed

1 to is that none of this works unless you have a clear
2 country plan, that is a government country plan. Britain
3 needs a view of where it wants to see Iraq go, and then
4 all the different bits of the British Government can
5 contribute to that.

6 It is no good having an FCO country plan, a DFID
7 country plan, an MoD country plan. We need a unified
8 set of objectives for any country or region that we are
9 dealing with, and then all the different bits of the
10 British government can march behind it. I think that is
11 the sort of leadership that the Civil Service responds
12 to. It is when they feel that they have got a different
13 set of markers that we get into trouble.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Foreign Secretary.

15 I think, with that, we will close this particular
16 hearing. After a break, we will start, perhaps a little
17 before 11 o'clock, with Sir Bill Jeffrey. Thank you
18 very much.

19 RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: Thank you very much.

20 (10.35 am)

21 (Short break)

22

23

24

25

FINAL