

WITNESS STATEMENT

Name	Relevant Role	Dates
Lord Bach of Lutterworth	Minister for Defence Procurement	June 2001- May 2005

Planning for Military Action

1. What elements of the 1998 Strategic Defence Review which were intended to improve the UK's capability for operations such as the invasion of Iraq were still to be delivered by late 2002? Could any capability have been delivered earlier?

I don't know the answers to these two questions.

2. When did you become aware of the planning which was taking place for potential operations against Iraq? The Inquiry understands you first became actively involved in overseeing the delivery of Urgent Operational Requirements for possible military action against Iraq in January 2003; what role, if any, had you played before that point? Should you have been involved earlier?

As a Minister in the Department, I attended many Chief of Staff meetings during 2002, where obviously matters concerned with both Afghanistan and Iraq were discussed. However, I was never closely involved with detailed planning for potential operations.

I was asked by the Secretary of State, in the second half of January 2003, to take temporary responsibility for UORs. This involved being briefed by DCDS (EC) in writing, before chairing (for the most part) weekly meetings with senior officials in order to look at the progress of UORs, that had already been agreed between MOD and HMT. I played no part in determining what UORs should or should not be proceeded with. Those decisions were taken at a stage well before their progress was looked at by the committee I chaired.

I had played no role before the request in Jan 2003, nor should I have. UORs were not the responsibility of Min DP: they, and the Defence Logistics Organisation were in the portfolio of Min AF.

3. What were you advised was the Ministry of Defence's Planning Assumption for the time needed to prepare, equip and deploy a large scale ground force following the 1998 Strategic Defence Review?

As far as I can recall, I was given no such advice.

4. Were you satisfied that the timescales involved in preparing for the Iraq campaign were sufficient? If not, how did you raise concerns?

This was not at any stage an issue for me. When I first became involved, in late January 2003, the timescales had already been very much narrowed.

5. From the information available, the Inquiry understands that a number of contracts for necessary stocks and spares were let with a delivery date of 31 March 2003. What was your understanding of how this date related to the likely commencement of operations? What advice were you and other Ministers given about the level of risk from deliveries after commencement of operations?

From the documents submitted to the Inquiry, the approved Iraq UORs were divided into 'packages'. Packages 0-2, namely SF, Maritime and Air, and Maritime and Air were said in DCDS(EC)'s first advice to me (see DCDS(EC)/6/2 24.01.03), to be predicated upon an ISD (50% confidence) of 28.02.03, whilst for package 3, the Land Component, was predicated as for an ISD on 31.03.03. Of course, not all of package 3 was predicated for that date, and as is apparent from following the documents setting out the advice and the corresponding minutes of the Committee, the IOC in Theatre and FOC in Theatre altered,, depending on the UOR in question.

However, what is also clear, is that my Committee put considerable and constant pressure on officials to in their turn to put pressure on industry/supplier of the UOR in question. Any advice I received as to this matter can be seen in the 'advice' notes, sent to me by DCDS (EC) before each meeting of the Committee.

6. Contracts for items such as desert combat clothing, boots and body armour were let in December. The Government then decided to deploy additional forces. What advice were you given about the risks which arose, including the capacity of industry to deliver the necessary kit? How did you respond?

Again, the documents I have put before the Inquiry set out clearly both the information and advice put before my Committee, and the response by the Committee to problems that arose. For example para 3(d) of minute D/Min(DP)/WB/14/6/3/1 dated 27.01.03 shows clearly our concerns re desert clothing and boots. DCDS(EC)'s next advice (DCDS(EC)/6/2) dated 31.01.03 at para 2c at para 7 shows the response to the minute referred to above.

7. What action did you take to assure yourself that industry would be capable of delivering the necessary quantities of stocks and equipment to support a force of the scale deployed?

I constantly questioned the ability of industry to deliver the necessary quantities of stocks and equipment. The minutes of the Committee clearly set that out.

Readiness

1. The papers indicate that concerns were expressed before the invasion about the quality and accuracy of information being received in the Ministry of Defence about equipment deliveries to Kuwait. What was your view about the manner and accuracy of information you were receiving from theatre about the arrival and onwards distribution of equipment to units?

This answer covers questions 1, 3, and 4.

Document D/Min(DP)/UB/14/6/3/1, a minute from my Private Secretary, dated 3.2.2003 (it should be dated 11.02.03) at para 2 (h) suggests "it might be helpful to establish a direct link from theatre for reporting equipment related issues so that they could be addressed as quickly as possible." Advice was sought. Again in Document D/Min (DP)/WB/14/6/3/1 dated 17.02.03 at para 3 the point was raised again, and it is stated the 'Minister attaches real importance to this.'

The response from VCDS came on 21.2.03 in document D/VCDS/40/1. it was argued that "it would be very difficult for an agent outside the command chain to keep an eye on the many equipment issues which may arise" and the clear advice was that reporting should continue to come through command chains, although there was an acknowledgement that matters should be brought to 'Ministers' attention as quickly as possible'.

I accepted this advice from a 4 star officer whose responsibility included ensuring equipment reached theatre. (see PS's comment on margin of document!) I did not have direct

conversations with either CJO or National Component Commander. I was meeting on a weekly basis with senior representatives of these officers.

2. Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup told the Inquiry that in his view he did not consider a UOR to be delivered until it was in the hands of the end user. At the time you were being advised on delivery timescales to Kuwait, what did you understand the information to mean? Did you believe that the equipment was in the hands of the end user?

I agreed with Sir Jock. When we were told that a UOR had been delivered, we understood that to mean it was in the hands of the end user.

3. The papers suggest that in late February you expressed concerns to the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (Air Chief Marshal Bagnall) about a lack of direct equipment reporting from theatre but were advised to rely on the chain of command to flag up the necessary issues. Was that satisfactory?

See answer to question 1

4. What steps did you take to assure yourself that the deployed force had access to sufficient kit and equipment? What advice did officials and military officers in the MOD give you? Did you ever have direct conversations with the CJO, (Lt Gen Reith), the National Component Commander (Air Marshal Burridge), or any other commander in the field about the readiness levels and equipment provision and delivery for UK forces deployed on Operation TELIC?

See answer to question 1

5. Were you aware of the assurances given to the Prime Minister by the Chief of Defence Staff about the readiness of UK forces before the invasion?

Only after the assurance had been given.

6. The papers suggest that, on the eve of the invasion, the Chiefs of Staff Committee received a report indicating that only 3% of troops had had their respirators checked and verified as working in line with the orders that had been given to theatre. What advice were you given about the availability of sufficient, and appropriately fitted, NBC protection for personnel and vehicles?

7. The Inquiry has heard evidence from both Lt Gen Robin Brims and Maj Gen Graham Binns, who respectively commanded UK Land Forces and 7 Armoured brigade during the invasion, that they ordered a redistribution of body armour to units not supported by armoured vehicles because of insufficient quantities having arrived in theatre in time for the start of operations. Were you aware of this shortfall before the start of operations? What steps did you take to seek assurances that this represented an acceptable operational risk to members of the deployed UK forces?

Answer to questions 6 and 7

I invite the Inquiry to look at the set of documents – firstly, the weekly advice I received on 7.3.03, 14.3.03, 21.3.03, and 28.3.03; secondly the minutes of committee meetings, 10.3.03, 17.3.03, 24.3.03, and 1.4.03, thirdly notes from my Private Secretary, both undated. These documents show clearly that, apart from some minor concerns re NCB protection, we did not receive information that the Chiefs of Staff Committee apparently received on the eve of the invasion. The documents referred to above also show that we were not told re body armour distribution at this time.

Equipment Shortfalls

1. When did you first become aware that there had been significant deficiencies with the delivery, tracking and distribution of equipment into Kuwait and onwards to frontline units? Were you advised that this had been a problem in the 190/91 Gulf Conflict?
2. What role did you play in improving the MOD's ability effectively to track assets after the invasion? Did you have evidence that progress had been made on this front when you left office?
3. Following the invasion, what steps did you take to ensure that lessons from deficiencies in the supply and delivery of some equipment in Operation TELIC were identified and applied?

Answer to 1, 2, and 3

It was on Tuesday 8.4.03, that my Private Secretary wrote to D Log Ops in order to point out in para 4 that we were concerned about the accuracy of the reporting to us. Advice was sought. (see document 8.4.03). A response from D Log Ops was sent on 10.4.03, where at para 4 we were reminded there were no 'showstoppers' on the UOR list, and were told in the last sentence that 'Minister's concern that kit was languishing in some depot somewhere' is unwarranted. (see doc 10.04.03) My Private Secretary responded on 11.4.03 (see document), and in the minutes of the Committee meeting of 14.04.08 made it clear in strong language at para 2 (c) that Min DP "was concerned that he had not had visibility of equipment issues at the front line that he expected (and which he was reassured would be provided through the chain of command." Further advice was sought. (see document). PJHQ replied on 17.4. Please see PS's comments in margin (see document), and minute dated 28.04.03 which sets out my concerns and wishes (see document).

On 9 May 2003 PJHQ wrote to my PS with a response. In Annex A, we were informed that "processes currently in place from tracking UORs only tracks them until they arrive to the original consignee in Theatre. There is therefore no means of tracking whether UORs reached the end user for whom they were intended". (see Doc.)

In the minute of the Committee meeting of 12.5.03, at para 3 we raise again the argument that 'advice to Ministers, albeit on the basis of advice from theatre, has turned out in retrospect to be less than wholly accurate, and that 'the lack of an effective tracking system will need carefully to be examined during the lessons learned process.' (see Document).

I have placed other documents in front of the Inquiry to show that I was certainly concerned that reporting from theatre to the UOR Committee had not been satisfactory, and that lessons needed to be learned.

The Iraq Campaign

1. What steps did you take to ensure that you received accurate information about UK Forces' access to equipment during the campaign?

I have set out the steps in my comments above.

2. Lt Gen Andrew Figgures (formerly DCDS(EC) in succession to Lt Gen Sir Robert Fulton) told the Inquiry that in order to meet the emerging capability requirements of the forces deployed on operations in Iraq the Ministry of Defence would examine the capacity to utilise resources from its core equipment programme before asking for Urgent Operational Requirement Funding from the Treasury. How did you direct the prioritisation of the MOD's

core equipment programme to support current operations in Iraq whilst you were Minister of Defence Procurement?

I cannot helpfully comment on this.

3. Were you satisfied with the dialogue between the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury about Urgent Operational Requirements? What was your personal involvement in this process? Were any requests for Urgent Operational Requirements not met by the Treasury?

I have no personal knowledge of this. I was no part of the dialogue and had no personal involvement in the process.

4. What was the Ministry of Defence's strategy for the procurement of Protected Patrol vehicles for Iraq, including the SNATCH Land Rover? Were you ever made aware of concerns about the level of protection offered by the SNATCH Land Rover against the threat posed by Improvised Explosive Devices in Iraq?

5. Did you ever receive a request for a replacement or alternative vehicle to the SNATCH Land Rover? Did you ever commission any work to examine alternative options for the role performed by the SNATCH Land Rover?

6. The Inquiry understands that the potential for the proliferation of Improvised Explosive Device technology within Iraq seen in other parts of the Middle East was a growing concern in the intelligence community within the Ministry of Defence in late 2004. Did you receive intelligence reports about threats to UK forces and the capability of equipment to withstand the emerging threats? Did you seek any assurances that military equipment could stay ahead of emerging threats in Iraq?

7. What steps did the Ministry of Defence take to work with industry to improve its capacity to deliver electronic countermeasures against IEDs?

Answer to 4, 5, 6, 7

I cannot help the Inquiry very much on this matter. During the time I was Min DP, the IED threat, while obviously existing, was much less than it later became in Afghanistan. Fatality figures for Army personnel in Iraq from April to Dec 2003 were 22, in 2004 were 21 and from January – May 2005 4. I do not know how many of these fatalities were the consequence of IEDs. I agree with the evidence of Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fulton and Lieutenant General Andrew Figgures on this matter. As far as I can tell from the papers, this issue was one I was advised on very little, and was not a priority for me at the time. However, my recollection is very limited. It is important for the Inquiry to bear in mind that this issue, while always there, did not become a major issue until after the period I am addressing.

8. Did you ever receive a request for the provision of additional support helicopters for UK forces deployed in Iraq? If so, how did you respond?

I have no memory of such a request, and have seen no papers which suggest I did.

Lessons

1. Are there any lessons from the UK's involvement in Iraq you wish to offer the Inquiry?

In my view in broad terms, the logistics task of sending equipment to Iraq was an outstanding success. As, 'Operations in Iraq' Lessons for the Future (published Dec 2003)

made clear: 'A deployment of roughly the same size as in the Gulf Conflict of 1991 was achieved in half the time.' (p.38).

I believe the UOR system worked well in general terms, and that all those involved whether at home or abroad can be proud of their achievement.

Of course, mistakes were made, and it is clear that lessons have been learnt. From my own very limited point of view, the UOR Committee system worked well. However it became clear soon after the conflict that we had not always been receiving accurate reporting from theatre about the delivery of UORs to the end user. It is an open question whether a more direct reporting system would have resulted in better and more accurate reporting.