

IRAQ INQUIRY STATEMENT BY AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR ANTHONY BAGNALL GBE KCB

I am Air Chief Marshal Sir Anthony Bagnall. I served as Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS) from May 2001 to July 2005. I worked for 2 CDSs: Admiral Sir Michael Boyce and General Sir Mike Walker. In both cases my principal role was to regalanize and lead routine and new MOD business, in some cases in concert with the then 2nd PUS (Sir Roger Jacklin and Sir Ian Andrews respectively) - for example, work relating to: the Defence Medical Services, Joint Personnel Administration, Single Living Accommodation etc whilst acting as co chair of the Defence Change Programme Group and other cross MOD groups. In addition, I led work to stimulate reform in NATO; to help build closer relationships with Russia and Turkey; to take forward lessons learned from major exercises and audits of defence capability carried out by the Directorate of Operational Capability (DOC) and taking forward the myriad of other topics which crossed my desk each day.

My fundamental role was to support both CDSs in managing day to day business whilst they both led and focussed on current operations including the Iraq war. I did not visit any of the operational theatres or have any discussions with the US military planners during my time as VCDS. I also did not attend any operationally focussed meetings with Ministers other than on those occasions when I was acting CDS. That said, I did take forward some work relating to: UORs, some reserve matters and some aspects of medical support during operations. In each case, I was however acting as CDS's agent, and his principal source of advice came in looking at possible deployment options, particularly during the early days before MOD more widely became engaged in planning for a possible Iraq operation, from: DCDS (C), the Policy Director, the Chief of Defence Intelligence (CDI), DG Op Pol and the Director of Special Forces. The membership of this inner team was broadened to include selected DLO staffs in, I believe, Sept 2002.

I offer the following in response to the questions you have posed.

Planning for Military Action

Q1. When were you first involved in discussions on possible military operations in Iraq? What were your role and responsibilities in preparing for military action?

A. *Although I have no written confirmation, I believe that I first became aware that closely held discussions relating to Iraq were taking place in May 2002. As I have highlighted above, my role was to continue to conduct routine MOD business. Clearly, Iraq began to feature in the later COS meetings which I attended. You will no doubt have the dates of such meetings available to you.*

Q2. 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?

A. *I do not recall the detail of the 1998 Strategic Defence Review although I am confident that shortfalls were addressed, as funding and other factors allowed, in subsequent planning rounds.*

That said, I was aware that we were short of strategic airlift, of Support Helicopter effort and that other capabilities (for example the Future rapid effects System (FRES) and Nimrod MR4 to cite but 2 cases) were slipping. Moreover, beyond the planning rounds, the Directorate of Operational Capability (DOC) audit process highlighted areas which could, and which were being, addressed; at the same time, lessons from exercises such as Exercise SAIF SARREA had been identified and driven forward. Could any capabilities have been delivered earlier? In my view, the answer is yes if funding had been available. Also, as the UOR process demonstrated, we had made excellent progress by the time operations in Iraq began.

Q3. What lessons which were relevant to operations in Iraq had been identified from operations and exercises, eg Afghanistan and Exercise Saif Sareea II? To what extent was action in hand when operations commenced in Iraq?

A. A lessons learned report is prepared after each major exercise and following each DOC audit. These routinely include an action plan highlighting shortfalls identified and recommended remedial action. In some cases, speedy action is possible and indeed essential - for example, in cases where potential safety issues are highlighted. In other cases, particularly where often significant investment is required (shortfalls in strategic lift is a good example), the actions identified are taken forward in subsequent planning rounds if an in year reallocation of priorities is not possible. Even in cases such as these, identified additional requirements cannot always be met for industrial or other reasons (for example, agreed slippages in programming terms to produce an affordable outcome). In terms of the Iraq campaign, shortfalls were identified and addressed by the UOR process.

Q4. As the number of forces to be deployed grew, what advice were Ministers, including the Prime Minister, given about the MOD's ability to equip and sustain the force? What risks were highlighted?

A. I was not routinely privy to any bilateral discussions which CDS had with Ministers, the single Service Chiefs, DCDS(C), CJO, the Agencies etc in terms of advice or indeed broader matters relating to risks associated with possible deployment options. That said, I clearly saw copies of a number of papers relating to possible courses of action, and I was aware that risks were highlighted in many if not all of these papers. I did not (as far as I can recall) highlight any specific risks relating to timelines, availability of kit or medical support. As I have highlighted earlier, I was confident that there were enough experts at 2/3 star level available to offer advice en route to Min (DP) and CDS. This may sound like ducking my responsibility as VCDS; it is not. Rather, it is a reflection of the way in which the UOR process was taken forward. I would also add that as time passed, the number of risks identified decreased.

Q5. In the light of the Ministry of Defence's Planning Assumptions for the time needed to prepare, equip and deploy a large scale ground force following the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, were you satisfied that the timescales involved in preparing for the Iraq campaign were sufficient? If so, why could the timescales be compressed? If not, how did you raise your concerns?

A. *The timescales for preparing for the Iraq campaign were driven by many factors (the desire to seek a peaceful outcome, the need for secrecy, the need to work with the US, the need to secure a UN resolution, the need to agree the legal framework for any operations, etc) which have, I believe, already been highlighted by others. Ideally, it is clear that a longer build up and preparation period would have been welcome. However, from all I saw and heard, it is difficult to see, in the circumstances at the time, how timelines could have been compressed further. Although I do not have the dates available, I recall that I visited a number of reservists who were either en route to theatre or who were supporting the out load of equipment and personnel. I also took steps to improve the management of the 'coupling bridge' between the UK and theatre and, as I have highlighted, to oversee the UOR process.*

Q6. 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 did you provide about the level of risk from deliveries after commencement of operations?

A. *I do not recall the specific date of 31 March 2003. I am, however, aware that S of S agreed that the DLO could approach Industry on 15 October 2002 about potential 'invisible' UORs which would not become public knowledge; he later, on 2 December 2002, agreed that Industry could be consulted about higher visibility 'visible' UOR requirements. It is also evident that all sensible steps were taken to ensure that the individual UORs reached the end customer rather than simply the port or airfield of entry into theatre. Inevitably, not all UORs were available by 31 March 2003, and other requirements for specific UORs only became fully apparent once operations commenced. Given my role as VCDS and the tasks of others in managing the UOR process, I did not take any additional steps to highlight any risks associated with specific UORs or with the UOR process in the round.*

Q7. 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 did you give about the risks that would entail for the forces deployed and the capacity of industry to deliver the necessary kit?

A. *The potential and current availability of combat clothing, boots and body armour were addressed as part of the ongoing UOR process. I saw no requirement to offer additional comment or advice.*

Q8. The Chief of Defence Staff delegated responsibility for the oversight of the delivery of Urgent Operational Requirements to you for Operation TELIC. What steps did you take to ensure that Minister's were provided with accurate information about the progress of UOR procurement and delivery to UK forces in theatre?

A. *S of S tasked Min (DP) to be his lead Minister for UORs and for DCDS(EC) to act as the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for UORs. This led to regular and increasingly frequent meetings between the then Minister and his staffs and the then DCDS(EC) and his experts. For my part, I monitored the UOR process on CDS's behalf and intervened if and when required; for example, I recall giving direction to CJO about the need to give certain NBC kit to the BBC journalists who would be in theatre.*

Q9. The papers suggest that after the Defence Secretary lifted the restrictions on discussing Urgent Operational Requirements with defence industry in late 2002, some parts of the procurement community in MOD had not understood this instruction, resulting in delays to letting some contracts. What steps had you taken to ensure everyone understood when discussions with industry had been agreed?

A. *Although I have not seen the correspondence recently, I understand that S of S's office informed the DLO on 15 October and 2 December 2002 respectively about authorization for the DLO to contact industry re 'invisible' and 'visible' UORs. I did not see any requirement to reinforce S of S's direction.*

Q10. 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?

A. *Min (DP), DCDS(EC) and CDL were all aware of the urgency of the UOR process. Funding for UORs was not an issue. I took no additional steps to ensure that industry was able to deliver the required outputs. I was, however, satisfied that there was a robust process in place to monitor progress.*

Q11. What, if any, impact did the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) have on the level of routine stock holdings within the Ministry of Defence by March 2003? Did it have any impact on the equipping and sustainment of the force deployed to Iraq?

A. *Others will have provided evidence relating to the implications of introducing Resource Accounting and Budgeting into MOD and the impact this had on stock holdings. The UOR process was designed to help overcome any shortfalls.*

Readiness

Q12. The papers indicate that concerns were being expressed before the invasion about the quality and accuracy of information being received in the Ministry of Defence about equipment deliveries to Kuwait. What steps did you take to ensure timely and accurate reporting about the arrival and onwards distribution of equipment to units?

A. *I was not aware of any concerns which were raised before the invasion about the quality and the accuracy of information available in MOD about equipment delivery to Iraq. I was subsequently told (I think by DCDS(EC)) about concerns relating to the availability of equipment delivered under the UOR process, and I recall that he asked for agreement to send some of his people into theatre to monitor progress. I also recall that I supported this request, but for reasons I cannot remember, the request was denied. If my recollection is correct, some of DCDS(EC)'s team did subsequently deploy into theatre. What I was aware of were concerns relating to asset tracking. This was not a new issue, and it was a topic which we had been working for some time.*

Q13. 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?

A. *The information which I saw indicated that equipments had arrived in theatre. I did not see (or at least I do not recall seeing) what became known as 'the final mile' once a particular bit of kit had been unloaded in theatre and moved to where it was needed. Indeed, this is arguably not information which is required in MOD unless problems were identified which could not be resolved in theatre or by CJO and his staffs or by the staffs in MOD.*

Q14. What steps did you take to assure yourself that the deployed force had access to sufficient kit and equipment? What advice did you give to Ministers? Did you ever have direct conversations with the CJO, (Lt Gen Reith), the National Component Commander (Air Marshal Burrige), or any other commander in the field about the readiness levels and equipment provision and delivery for UK forces deployed on Operation TELIC? Were any concerns raised? If so, what did you do?

A. *As I have highlighted earlier, it was CDS who had the lead on operational matters; it was CDS who would routinely contact CJO, the national component commanders, Tampa and others, and I was aware that he was doing so. I did not have any discussions with them other than on the occasions when I filled the role of Acting CDS.*

Q15. The Chief of Defence Staff assured the Prime Minister that there were no significant equipment shortfalls facing UK forces in Iraq. Was that your view?

A. *I was aware that the commanders on the ground had stated that their forces had achieved Full Operational Capability. I saw no reason to question their judgement. I say this not for reasons of complacency; rather, as a reflection of the way in which the Iraq campaign was being run and managed across the UK armed forces.*

Q16. 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 did you give Ministers about the availability of sufficient, and appropriately fitted, NBC protection for personnel and vehicles?

A. *I do not recognise the figure of 3% in relation to respirator fitting. I understood that all ground force personnel had been tested through what was described as the most advanced testing facility in the world. Only 0.5% of all the personnel tested did not have a perfect fit, and it would fall to local commanders to decide how best to employ personnel in this category.*

Q17. 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?

A. *I was not aware that, in some cases, all personnel did not have access to Enhanced Body Armour at the start of Operations. That said, I heard anecdotal evidence of personnel being deployed on one ship whilst their body armour plates were on another vessel which went to a different port of disembarkation. Any shortfalls identified would have gone from theatre to CJO and, if required, onwards to DCDS(C) or DCDS(EC) and their staffs. I do not recall any shortfalls being*

identified to me at the start on the campaign although issues emerged later as the operation progressed.

Q18. What consideration was given to the level of operational risk that might arise from difficulties with combat identification? What advice did you receive about the systems and processes agreed with the US and the provision of US technology to UK forces to minimise the risk of friendly fire incidents? What steps were taken?

A. *Combat Identification (CID) has been an ongoing problem which has been highlighted in many exercises. I think that I set up a Tiger Team to address this issue and look at possible solutions. I regret that I cannot recall what was agreed.*

The Iraq Campaign

Q19. What steps did you take to ensure that you received accurate information about UK Forces' access to equipment during the campaign?

A. *Once operations commenced, other than monitoring the UOR process and attending daily OPCOS and COS meetings, I left it to the operational command chain from theatre to CJO to MOD to address any equipment issues which were highlighted in theatre.*

Q20. 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 VCDS?

A. *DCDS(EC) had detailed visibility of equipment issues including what could be found from the currently funded and available equipment programme to support likely future operations. VCDS and others (and, ultimately, Ministers) would help shape defence wide priorities during each planning round taking note of each of the single Services 'must have' wish lists. Of note, one of the reasons why we had early availability of desert type accommodation was that this was a shortfall which had been identified well ahead of the Iraq campaign.*

Q21. The Inquiry understands that the potential for the proliferation of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) 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. When did you first receive intelligence reports about threats to UK forces and the capability of equipment to withstand the emerging threats? What did you do to ensure military equipment would stay ahead of emerging threats in Iraq?

A. *Suicide bombers and vehicle borne IEDs were a constant threat to UK forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I do not recall issuing any specific taskings for bespoke threat assessments, but I am aware that this type of threat was highlighted in both COS and Ministerial briefings. I also recall that a counter IED working group was set up either during my time as VCDS or thereafter. I regret that I do not have visibility of any findings.*

Q22. Were you involved in any discussions or decisions about the level of protected mobility required to conduct an effective campaign? What view did you take?

A. *As a member of the MOD Investment Advisory Board, I was aware of a protracted and ongoing debate about the balance between protection, mobility, firepower, air mobility, likely procurement timescales, available funding etc. I was also aware of the need to provide appropriately protected vehicles in theatre to counter small arms fire, Rocket Propelled Grenades and IEDs. This was an ongoing challenge and one which I suspect may not, as yet, have been fully solved.*

Q23. What steps did the Ministry of Defence take to work with industry to improve its capacity to deliver electronic countermeasures against IEDs?

A. *See my answer to Q21.*

Q24. 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?

A. *I was aware that any commander on the ground wants more helicopter support and during my time as VCDS this was one of my main efforts. I recall that we took steps to improve availability, to purchase additional (Puma and Merlin I think) helicopters, to address the Chinook Mk3 problem and took other steps(I recall a Support helicopter tiger team which I set up but I would need to check on this) to increase the helicopter effort available. All that said, I do not recall any specific requests for additional SH effort during the campaign but there may have been some.*

Lessons

Q25. You oversaw the MOD's Operation TELIC Lessons Learned exercise. How many of the lessons were being actioned by the time you left office, and what progress had been made in implementing them?

A. *I am aware that DOC produced 2 volumes of Operation TELIC lessons learned: Vol 1 was issued on 17 October 2003 and Vol 2 on 22 February 2005. Each report included a clear action plan against each recommendation. In the time available, I regret that I have not been able to track down what actions may have been completed or taken into core in SR04. Nevertheless, I have no reason to doubt that they would have been addressed subject to the caveats of continuing operational need, military judgement and affordability.*

Q26. How many of the lessons were addressed by reprioritising existing resources? Was any additional capability sought in SR 04? If so, what was agreed?

A. *See my answer to Q 25 and earlier answers.*

Q27. Are there any lessons from the UK's involvement in Iraq you wish to offer the Inquiry?

A. *MOD and the Chiefs of Staff Committee had excellent relations with the FCO and some of the agencies for many years; we were in each others minds. Broader, cross government working was not good in the run up to the Iraq war although I would note the Prime Ministers personal drive and energy in addressing issues as they arose. Things got better with the passage of time, but from my*

perspective given the pressure on the PM's time, is there not a case for a war deputy PM to sit on top of all the government departments supporting a campaign in whatever way? Also, it was clear to me that we faced serious financial challenges. The problem then, and maybe it is still a problem, was that it was very difficult to persuade one or other of the single Services to offer up their pet project to help balance the books and there were broader challenges. Salami slicing can solve some of the problem, but it also leads to some of the structural difficulties we faced in the run up to the Iraq war. Thankfully, the UOR process addressed much, if not all of the problem. Finally, whilst much progress has been made since I retired, I only hope that we have solutions to the asset tracking and the final mile in theatre problems to which I have alluded; to countering the IED threat; to avoiding blue on blue events; and to addressing some of the capability shortfalls which will no doubt flow from the most recent SDSR.