

Thursday, 6 May 2010

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT

THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Kevin, welcome back --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: -- for the third time. You are now batting equal with Sir Peter Ricketts in the number of appearances.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Performance pay will be paid.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Much more dangerous since I've already retired.

THE CHAIRMAN: Unlike the last two occasions on which you appeared before the Committee, this session is being held in private because we recognise that much of the evidence we wish to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's protocol on sensitive information, for example on the grounds of international relations or defence capability, and in particular we want to use this session to explore issues covered by the classified documents.

We will apply, and I quote, "protocol between the Inquiry and Her Majesty's Government regarding documents and other written and electronic information" in considering whether and how evidence given in relation to classified documents and/or sensitive matters more widely can be drawn on and explained in public, either in the Inquiry report or, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.

Importantly, if other evidence is given during this hearing which neither relates to classified documents, nor engages any of the categories set out in the protocol on sensitive information, that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry secretary's letter to you.

We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence, as before,

based on their recollection of events, and we are of course checking what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

I remind each witness on every occasion they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons, we will not be releasing copies of the transcript of this session outside the Inquiry's offices upstairs here at 35 Great Smith Street. You will, of course, be able to access the transcript here whenever you wish to review it.

With those preliminaries out of the way, I will turn to Baroness Prashar.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much indeed.

Sir Kevin, I want to cover the first part of the dialogue with the US from 2001 onwards, and I've very carefully read the documents. It seems to me that you made regular visits to the States. Following your visit to the US in December, what discussions did you have with Ministers and other officials about what you heard?

THE CHAIRMAN: December 2001.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: December 2001, sorry.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, yes, you are correct. I tended to try to go about three times a year because I had a very sort of strong transatlantic background, having served in the embassy and done a lot of US/UK work. So it seemed to me to be sensible to try to keep current in that area.

I obviously produced a report, which I have been able to see, of my visit in December 2001, which was of course, you know, a very interesting visit because 9/11 was still a very, very strong feature in Washington. So strong at that point that you saw a country that believed itself to be at war, compared with a Europe that regarded itself as having witnessed a terrible

incident, but normality had returned. That was not the way it was in Washington. So that atmosphere was quite important.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So they genuinely thought themselves they were at war?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Absolutely. I went to a bookshop near the Pentagon in between visits, because it was close to Christmas, and bought some books. The bunting was out, a tremendous amount of Christmassy things on show. I went to pay at the checkout, and I said, "You have got a lot of Christmas decorations up this year, more than I remember when I used to live here", and this cashier said to me, "Sir, this Christmas the American people are coming home together". I had a complete shock, this sort of feeling they had that they were at war.

Anyway, I did a report, as I always did, and sent it round to the Foreign Office and to the MOD about my impressions. They were probably no different from the ones that were coming out of the embassy itself. It just happened to be my own particular contacts that I was keeping up, but they were the same as the embassy would have seen.

At that point, as far as Iraq was concerned, which wasn't the only concern obviously, there were divided views. There was on the one hand a sense that the existing sanctions regime was not adequate to contain Saddam Hussein, particularly as we had become, as it were, seen as the problem, that we were the ones who were denying the Iraqi people their food, that we were the ones that were causing trouble and strife in the Arab world, and between those on that side and the others who felt that it was time to force, one way or another, the sort of regime change. But I didn't sense that there was any clarity in American thinking as to what that meant and how that would be achieved.

Clearly Afghanistan was the number one priority, and the

sense that I had was that they wanted to deal with Afghanistan first. Indeed, I was quite surprised when later on they started planning as quickly as they did in Iraq, that they were doing so before they had sorted out Afghanistan. It was a surprise to me.

It was clear that in the State Department the desire was to move down the UN track and to sustain UN activity as fully as they possibly could, whereas in Pentagon circles, particularly the office of the Secretary, there was a much tougher mood.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This was evident to you in December 2001?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes. So there are different views at that stage, going around.

I went and saw Richard Perle. It slightly surprised me in that the embassy thought this was interesting enough for them to want to come too, because I assumed he was somebody they kept in touch with all the time. I found that he wasn't somebody they were keeping in touch with all the time, and yet I regarded Perle at that stage as one of the most influential figures.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This is our embassy?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes. As one of the most influential figures still, in Rumsfeld's thinking certainly. He was chairing the Defense Advisory Board at that stage. And I met him in his house, and he at that stage was very clearly talking of trying to encourage a sort of Northern Alliance of Iraq, to move, as it were, the Afghan model into Iraq, and he was looking at the Iraqi National Congress in the same way as the Northern Alliance, and try as I did to say these were not comparable at all, and that people like Chalabi, and indeed Allawi, did not have that level of support to, as it were, go in and stage their own action against Saddam and achieve a regime change which, as it were, the US would encourage, but not have to do very much about.

That was not Perle's view. Perle was very clear that no, we

had got it wrong - [REDACTED] the UK were paying too much attention to the misinformation coming out of the Gulf, and that this was indeed an interesting way forward.

I mention that not because I think that was mainstream thinking at that point in Washington, but because I felt that was an important area of evolving thinking that was not being picked up very well.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it fair to ask that was ideologically based, rather than based on a separate source of fact or information about the situation?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think certainly people [REDACTED] were in quite close touch with Chalabi, and tended to believe what they were being told about the groundswell of support that would be there for people like him if he only went back into Iraq.

I wouldn't want to get this out of context, but you asked me what was strong about my impressions, and that came through to me at the time as being a particularly striking feature. I reported all of that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you encourage the UK officials at the embassy to try and dissuade them of that? Because I think I saw that you thought their thinking was flawed. Did you try?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I certainly did. I don't think I needed to encourage them. They would automatically have thought it was flawed. It was just that it seemed to me that more UK effort could usefully be expended in challenging the views that were coming out of the Republican right at that stage, which didn't seem to me to be challenged strongly enough. Now, I don't want to criticise the embassy. I'm just describing what I felt.

THE CHAIRMAN: And there is some degree of constraint for an embassy to take part in the internal arguments?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It was easier for me to stroll down the road and see Richard Perle, I think, at that stage, than it was for the embassy and the people who were formally accredited.

So the position at that point therefore was, I think, still Afghanistan first, but equally rising concern about Iraq, a sense that it couldn't go on like this. That is to say that the no fly zone patrolling was getting more and more difficult; the sanction regime was not working effectively, and there didn't seem a prospect of making it work better; a sense that Iraqi WMD would not be dealt with by those means; but not clarity in any sense of an American plan to do that. I don't know if that's exactly what I said in my report, but that's the sort of sense I had.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: At what point, based on your contacts, did it become clear to you that the USA would take military action against Iraq, that it was inevitable?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Probably -- I'm going on the basis of my own visits. So I'm not going on the basis of documents. I became clear that the Americans were going to bring this to a head one way or another in July when I visited.

THE CHAIRMAN: 02?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: 02. That doesn't mean to say that they were going to, as it were, take military action, but they were going to bring things to a head, either through the UN or through military action, and they were much more seriously thinking about military options at that stage than had seemed the case before.

I recall writing as a result of that that 'the administration as a whole is increasingly united in the view that military action will be taken against Iraq to bring about regime change and remove WMD risks'. But it wasn't clear how that would be done.

But what was of particularly concern at that stage, I think,

was that there was no evidence at that point that they shared the UK's own concerns about the conditions that would need to be fulfilled, were that to happen. Because I think, as I have testified before, I felt that right from about April, when we started looking at options and possibilities, we had sketched out pretty clearly the criteria we felt would be necessary if we were to go forward with military preparations, and that would be: firstly, exhausting the UN disarmament track; testing that, as it were, to destruction before anything else; trying to keep the UN engaged as fully as we possibly could; building a credible coalition of other countries, like-minded countries; ensuring that we had the support of public opinion in all of this; and also managing the wider political climate, particularly in terms of Arab Israel, not necessarily getting a resolution, but managing that in a way which made it clear that the West was working for a solution as hard as it could; and it didn't seem to me that the US was fully on board for those criteria at that point.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were we clear within our own administration that these were the conditions? When do you think our system became fully clear about the inevitability of it and that conditions were necessary?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I describe it like that because I think we didn't have a specific legal hymn sheet which said these are the four conditions. But from April onwards, whenever we talked about the possibility that military action --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And "we" being ...?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The UK Government, various officials. Whether it was Ministers -- I can't say that individuals said all of these things at the same time all the time, but this was the general, as I understood it, sort of consensus of conditions that

we felt would need to be met, were the military option to be taken. And I think the whole story at various points was people trying to get those points across, with varying degrees of success. We had some success in that area and not complete success.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, the fact that we were aware that there was not full appreciation of these conditions within the USA, how did that influence the way we planned our own involvement?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: There were clearly two tracks. There was a military option track, which was the Ministry of Defence's job, and that continued in varying degrees of sophistication, but it began -- I can't remember the precise date, but around June, I guess, we were beginning to engage and talking about possible options. And that continued, as it were, as a military planning activity throughout.

There was a parallel track of seeking to ensure that the policy conditions were met, which became increasingly intense as the months went by. It became almost a daily issue by the time David Manning was talking to Condi Rice from late 2002 into the first two or three months of 2003.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: At what point did the USA formally request support from us about Iraq?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Formal request? I think the papers would say this. I wasn't aware of a formal request until the US Ambassador made one in about November, I guess. That would be a formal request. But well before then, we had made it clear that we were prepared to engage in planning on a contingent basis, subject to conditions being fulfilled, in around September. But I can't remember the absolute details.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you think the bilateral discussions

going on between the military gave the wrong impression, that they took us for granted? Because I saw some papers when Manning visited the States, I think he found out about our man in Tampa was there, and some commitments had been made.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I remember I wrote, and I think probably the private secretary wrote, from the MOD to Number 10, expressing the dilemma that we would face in engaging in detailed discussion about military options; that if we didn't engage in that detailed discussion, we risked losing influence over the way in which events unfolded. But if we did engage in those discussions, we obviously ran the risk of assumptions being made, ahead, perhaps, of our political conditions being fulfilled. But we spelled that out very clearly from the MOD to the Government, that one of the things that would need to be understood, were we to go forward with military planning, is that that was a risk that would have to be run. That was spelled out very clearly to Ministers.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would discussion of basing, as opposed to participation in support of actual operations, come earlier or be seen as separate from --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Basing?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: That was going along in parallel, but I think the idea of basing was so engrained in our relations with the Americans over military activity, that that would have been expected. We would have expected them to look for that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Whatever our wider role?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well I mean not if we completely disagreed with them, certainly. But that would have been part, as it were, of the three options that we were looking at. That would have been part of option 1, the baseline option, I think: what we had

in the region at the time, including our bases available.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But were you not trying to get them to slow down the planning because you were sceptical about the timetable that you were hearing about?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, we were. Once the American planning machine got into full gear, I think we were concerned that it was in danger of getting ahead of the political track, the policy track, and there were various concerns expressed by various people that it would be much better to slow it down if we possibly could. That went on until quite late in the day. I remember David Manning having exchanges with Condi Rice, saying it would be very good to give the UN track a full opportunity of succeeding if we could have another month or six weeks. In the end we didn't get quite as much time as we looked for. But that became sort of theoretical, once the French had said that they would veto a resolution in any circumstances, and therefore that was a --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: No, I'm talking about the earlier period. Once you could see that the USA were determined to go down the military route --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: We didn't see that they were determined. I think right at the beginning of my evidence I did say one of the difficult things of getting across is if you were a Ministry of Defence, and you are asked to have the option of doing something, you actually have to do serious planning for a long time to have that option, like it would take six months to get a large-scale military activity there.

So even if one didn't in the end use it, you had to begin six months before in earnest, and when you were moving people, material, war-like stores, remember, against the prospect of somebody who had weapons of mass destruction, you don't play

around. You do this with very serious purposes.

So the papers and the records, if you are just looking at the military track, will indicate clarity of intent, when in fact what there was was a determination to provide the politicians with the option. I don't believe we ever got to a stage where we had gone so far down that track that we couldn't have stopped. There was never a point when the military track, as it were, completely took over, and that, I think, has been made clear at various times. Right into March, when we had made it clear that we would have to get Parliamentary authority for this, Rumsfeld was having to face the possibility of going without us, if you recall.

But even before that, there was always, as I say, the risk that the closer one gets into military planning, jointly with the Americans, the more difficult it becomes to pull out of it without having very good reason for doing so, and that was something we spelled out continuously through this process.

I have to say that by Christmas 2002/2003, I was very concerned that the penalties of breaking with the Americans, even if our conditions were not fully met, were going to be very severe.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So what sort of advice were you --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can just I ask what those penalties would be?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think the penalties of having gone so far by that stage on a joint venture, if the circumstances were proceeding, were very awkward. I'm moving on quite a long way here, but I felt that it would be helpful for Ministers to pause around January in 2002/2003, when we were being presented with a completely different plan, and when it wasn't clear necessarily that our conditions were going to be met, that there was a risk

that the Americans might proceed without a second resolution, which we regarded as absolutely essential. There was a risk that Saddam wasn't going to disarm. There was a risk that we were not going to get the broad coalition we wanted, and I felt that at that stage it was quite important to consider all the issues, including the cost of not proceeding with the Americans.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I just go back? You obviously had a good dialogue. You understood the situation through the people that you were talking to in the United States.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, actually, if we're going back to July, all I did, I think, was confirm what other people were saying as well. Just that I had the same impression.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But what steps did you take about these concerns? Who did you raise them with, and what advice were you giving to the Defence Secretary?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't regard myself as having -- I'm reconstructing events on the basis of personal recollection. So I'm talking about what I was doing. Therefore I wouldn't like you to feel that I was the only person --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It's your perspective that we're interested in.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Hundreds of people were playing at the same time.

So I recorded my concerns, and the message was very clear: we need to work harder at making sure our conditions are fully understood and taken up by the US administration.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But can I come back to the question I asked? Do you think the bilateral dialogue that was taking place between the military here gave them the impression we were fully committed, and therefore they were not taking account of

the conditions?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't think so, no. I think they were behaving fully professionally in working up options and packages, and I don't think that they had fallen into the trap of implying to the Americans that it was absolutely guaranteed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Or that Tommy Franks was under any illusion that we were committed before we actually were.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Can I turn to Sir Roderic Lyne?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I wanted to ask a little bit about Turkey and the northern option as opposed to the southern option, just to make sure that we are clear about all of this.

Could you start by encapsulating the reasons why MOD were so keen that we should send our land contribution through Turkey and the north of Iraq, the northern option?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The military planners would obviously have a sort of better view than I about the military issues involved, but as I understood them, it was that one needed to shut the door in the north to prevent Saddam retreating north under the pressure of the American move into the south. One needed to shut the door for two reasons: both to avoid giving him an exit, but also to avoid what would otherwise be a very politically difficult situation with the Kurds and the Turks, and it was partly a stabilisation rationale in that area.

I think the military planners, this was for them to say, and I haven't, I must say, read their material, but they would have had this concept that, you know, if you squeeze from both ends, you have a much better way of outmanoeuvring your opponent.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Franks had this concept from the beginning, his earlier plans, and obviously we saw the sense of it. But my

question is: why did we particularly want to make our contribution through the north, rather than the south?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't think it was offered to us initially. I'm not sure how this worked, how the idea that we should go down into the north actually came about. It wasn't a political suggestion. It would have emerged in the military discussions that were authorised during that sort of time, between June and September, and would have emerged in that way.

Other considerations would have been there was a concern that it was a real bottleneck through Kuwait. There wasn't much space there for putting the size of force necessary to do the job, and therefore a second way in was highly desirable.

I think from a political and military point of view, it would have been very good to have got the Turks locked into the venture as a neighbouring country. I think, again, from a politico/military view, it seemed slightly more, should I say, less risky. It would have involved going alongside, as it were, going down a fairly stable area, the Kurdish autonomous zone, which, to my mind anyway, looked rather easier than fighting one's way or helping to fight one's way up Iraq.

The logistics problems were greater, I understood, although I think a lot of the military men still would have liked to have gone through the southern Turkey option.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: The logistics were greater in the north?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The logistics length, the length of the supply chain through very difficult mountainous territory and so on in south-eastern Turkey was a challenge. But even so, I mean, I know CDS would probably have preferred that route. But we switched, you know, when it became clear that we were not going to get the support we needed to do that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I just want to ask one or two questions about

that. Certainly from the papers we have read, and indeed from the military witnesses we have talked to, the picture is that from the autumn until December, our military planning was absolutely focused on going through Turkey and being part of the northern option of what at that stage was going to be an operation with two points of focus. Then the switch came around the turn of the year.

Does that correspond with your memory?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes. People were telling us that it was getting too difficult, and time was running out in terms of the American timetable options -- remember, options, not determined to go forward -- and that we needed to rethink.

We didn't actually take that decision until mid-January. I went with Geoff Hoon to Ankara on, I think, about 6 or 7 January to actually finally see whether we could achieve agreement with the Turks.

I felt slightly embarrassed, to be absolutely honest, because having been head of chancery in the embassy in Ankara for three and a half years, I thought I knew my Turks. I thought they were going to be supportive, and I of all people should have realised that the idea of the Brits going into Kurdistan, as it were, re-awoke some very sensitive Turkish nationalist memories of how we had behaved in the 1920s when they felt that we were flirting with the idea of a Kurdistan as part of a way of dismantling the Ottoman Empire.

THE CHAIRMAN: More the history than [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, there was also [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. But I thought I knew my Turkey, and I was saying to people, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So we miscalculated there, and I have to say, I should have known better myself.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When one looks back over the papers --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I see Martin Gilbert is nodding his head.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We started getting warnings certainly by the end of October. There was correspondence from Christopher Meyer to David Manning in late October, which isn't overtly copied to you, but [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that the Turks were baulking at a large British military presence, and then [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] a week later. Again, the telegram is not copied to the Ministry of Defence.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think we thought we could provide reassurances that would overcome the Turkish objections, and unfortunately the Turks were reasonably polite and accommodating to let us feel that that might actually be the case.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Turkish military?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, and civil. The problem was also they had an election, and there was a certain amount of chaos in Turkey about the stability of their arrangements, and I -- we were encouraged to think that even at the last moment there might be a vote that would enable us to go there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But here is a telegram of 1 November, which is copied explicitly to you, quoting [REDACTED], telling the embassy [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] "Turks had made it abundantly clear that they would not accept a British presence, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]". It's not fair, but that was their opinion.

But a week later, or five days later, you are in Washington again, and you are urging Armitage and Wolfowitz, Hadley and Miller to press Turkey to let us in. So at that stage -- and you have said all our planning thus far has been predicated on a northern route.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: That's right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So we were pushing on with it.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: We were still trying to persuade them to agree to it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and

this kind of went on, and as you say, it only ended really in January definitively with Geoff Hoon's visit to Turkey.

I don't know if you recall what advice we were getting from our embassy in Ankara. You say you were surprised. Of course you were in the Ministry of Defence. It was some years since you had served in Ankara. Is it your recollection that the views of the Foreign Office and the embassy in Ankara were not dissimilar to your own, that we should be able to persuade the Turks logically?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, I think so. I mean, I don't recall being out on a personal limb on all this. I must say, I haven't been able to see -- I haven't been shown any of the telegrams coming out of Ankara at that stage, so I don't know what they were saying. But my sense was that we were getting mixed messages and that we needed to clarify the situation, not that we were being

told by everybody that it was not on. Had that been the case, we would have stopped much earlier.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

THE CHAIRMAN: I think there was a majority vote in the Turkish Parliament, but it wasn't a sufficiently large majority to carry.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: That's correct.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we then move, we then find ourselves in a situation where --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I'm sorry I can't help you more about that detail, but I haven't seen any of the telegrams from the --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think you have sort of confirmed the picture as it was.

Then we find that at a very late stage, having planned for the north, we have to switch to planning for the south. It's January, and by then we have got the strong impression that the Americans are planning to start the action in March and time is very short.

How difficult was this for us?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, not as difficult as I thought it was going to be, as it happens. I mean, I think the Americans --

I think it was a great achievement to have switched in the way we did, which surprised me. I thought the military -- the quality of the military effort was tremendous, to have done it in that short time, because it wasn't just a question of moving to a different place. It was getting different host nation support arrangements, it's a question of a differently configured force. It was a question of actually slightly fewer reservists, as it happened, but the Americans gave us help with logistics, which was a big difference, which enabled us to do it in time.

I think the military had been running a slightly parallel option for a bit of time during December, actually.

THE CHAIRMAN: It would help a layman, namely me, in terms of the American assistance on logistics, is this shipping and heavy airlift and that sort of thing?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It would have been that. It must also have been providing some equipment for us, but I'm not sure what. Most of the equipment I thought we did for ourselves. So it must have been shipping and lifting. Particularly lifting, I would guess.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In the January rethink that you were talking about just now in answer to Baroness Prashar, you were mainly talking about the fact that the political situation, environment that we thought we were looking at had changed. But did this switch in our military planning, necessitated by not being able to go through Turkey, play another part in you saying, hang on, we should sort of pause for thought? Was it part of the mix?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: This is where, going back to the records, I ought to provide the context, because I saw a minute from me in January to Geoff Hoon, which appeared to be just about one aspect.

Over Christmas I recall being concerned that, for the

reasons I have explained, the military track, as it were, was moving along, and suddenly we were looking at a different option, the south, which we hadn't been planning for.

The political track seemed to me not to be moving as fast as we wanted or as clearly as we wanted. I was very concerned that before things went further, it would be very good for Ministers to sit down and really discuss this fully, and I wrote my concerns to Geoff Hoon in a private note, manuscript, written over Christmas, in the days when you didn't automatically have laptops in your house, advising him that I really thought he ought to talk to his colleagues about this, and look at it in the round again and pause. I was very concerned that the machine seemed to be moving, and I don't mean just the military machine. I just mean the process seemed to be going on without a full ministerial discussion.

Geoff Hoon said to me, okay, yes, I understand that, I think that's very important. He said, I just want a note from you on one aspect, and that is the US/UK relationship and the implications of not proceeding, how important is this to us in bilateral terms. So I wrote him a note purely on that issue, as a sort of aide memoire, for one part of the discussion that he was going to have with his colleagues. Looking at the record, it looks as if that's the only thing I was bothered about, and that gives a slightly misleading impression.

I think he did have those discussions with colleagues. The record is not entirely clear, but Ministers clearly had a very serious discussion in the period about 16 to 18 January, but it doesn't seem to have been a formal meeting.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, so many of these discussions don't seem to have been minuted formally.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It's a great frustration when one is trying to

brief oneself for this and looking through the records.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It's ad hoc with a small A and a small H, to quote a previous witness.

Just to finish off on this sort of southern route that we are now on, as you say, our military did an extraordinary job in switching and getting ready in time.

Was one of the advantages of this, indeed, looking at a couple of minutes that Geoff Hoon sent to the Prime Minister -- advantages or disadvantages -- that by going the south, we became more integral to the American plans? In fact, when it turned out the Americans couldn't get their division down out from the Mediterranean in time for the start, we became even more integral than we'd expected. We were playing much more of a front line role, a more critical role in the military campaign than we would otherwise have been doing.

But with the downside -- and the upside of that obviously is, you know, you are up in lights there. The downside is that if you do have second thoughts, or you don't get your vote through the House of Commons, withdrawing has much more serious consequences.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Exactly.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How did that play out in your calculations? Is that a fair summation, for a start?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think it is actually, yes. In my own calculations, I didn't feel particularly comfortable about it. I mean, we are talking about this purely from the point of view of how important we were to the Americans. As I was saying at the beginning, I think there may be a slightly -- my own evidence may seem certainly slanted because of the way in which the documents were around, and have fallen, and I can't find the note that I wrote to Geoff Hoon over Christmas.

I think we need to remember, the first purpose of all this was to actually work on Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis. The main purpose for our military build-up was to help to convince them that we were in deadly earnest, the west, us and the Americans and whoever else we brought along with them, and that they would do much better to pursue the UN route and disarm and allow the inspectors back, and then none of this military action would be necessary.

So the most important objective, whether we were going to the north or to the south, was actually to have real impact on Iraqi perceptions of how serious we all were. It was not the most important thing to actually have impact on American perceptions. That was obviously a vital thing, but an adjunct, adjunct, almost secondary issue. It wasn't the first thing we thought about. It wasn't the first thing I thought about.

I think, in that sense, it didn't make much difference whether we were going the north or the south, but frankly, I thought the north would have more effect on Iraqi perceptions, if we could have achieved it, than going in in the south, to be honest.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Final question. Our military then, having been very keen on going in the north originally, having been the people who pushed it at a time when others in Whitehall were saying it's not worth going on spending political capital on trying to persuade the Turks, and actually thought MOD were going too far, then the military end up in a place they hadn't intended to be and they do a terrific job, getting there and then subsequently.

Did in the event, did they discover a serious downside from finding themselves in the south, or did it in fact all go pretty well?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, it went very well initially. I think it's fair to say it was the sort of thing in the scenarios they had trained for. We had had the First Gulf War. We had had Saif Sareea, the exercise the previous year. So, you know, the idea of moving through Kuwait into Iraq was not completely alien. So there was that familiarity about it, I guess, and they were extremely successful and effective. There was no doubt about that. So from the military point of view, it was a great success, yes. And it could have been more difficult through the Kurdish area, although, as I say, I think it was a more stable area. I can't remember the detailed calibration that we were making between the two.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are going to come on in a bit, I hope, to Phase IV.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Can I just go back, if I may, Mr Chairman, just to say did I do anything about my concerns with the Americans? I'm just looking at my record. I remember saying that we have got a job on our hands to persuade the Americans that our conditions need to be met, and the right ones. As far as I was concerned, that was me signalling to the Foreign Office, if they hadn't got the point already, that this was a really important issue.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think it's right, is it, from your recollection that Tony Blair, in putting what is sometimes called conditions to President Bush earlier on, these were actually not conditions for participation, but conditions for the success of the whole?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Of the whole thing. And if I could just add to that, I remember in September 2002, particularly as I had been so concerned about these issues myself in my visit, that Condi Rice was saying to David Manning, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Frankly, at that time I regarded that as a successful piece of diplomacy in continuing to talk to them about military options.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are going to come on in a little bit to Phase IV and the catastrophic aspects of early military success, but before that, can I turn to Sir Martin Gilbert, because we are still at a point where we can, if we want to, withdraw.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I want to go back over something which has been touched on and, if you like, ask you to help us unpack a conundrum and a contradiction.

You said at the beginning of this afternoon there never was a point when the military track took over, and this very much echoed your evidence to us. I think you said that right up until the end we were making it clear to the Americans how important the UN framework was, and how absolutely vital the House of Commons vote was, as against what you said to Lawrence Freedman, the penalties of breaking with the Americans, the cost of not proceeding with them.

In your letter of 14 January to Geoff Hoon, which I must say, as a historian, is something I would call a state paper. It's a very superb document. It is very emphatic and very strong in terms of what Britain will lose if we do not go with the Americans, and you make very wide-ranging points, going far beyond our military or even our intelligence relationship with the United States.

So, first of all, I would like to ask -- this was also a private letter, like your handwritten note, and it's marked "Personal and secret", and it's not marked with any circulation. But was there any discussion at this time across Whitehall at a high level of the issues which you raised, of the danger --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No, I don't think so. As I say, the context is important here. My discussion with Geoff Hoon before that was much wider, and it covered the whole range of issues in terms of what were our basic interests and what we were trying to achieve, and the risks associated with carrying on without a full ministerial discussion.

He simply asked me personally to give him my fullest view about the nature of the US/UK relationship in all its aspects, not to consult anyone, entirely privately, because he wanted to have all the information that might be necessary at his fingertips, should he get into that type of discussion with his colleagues. I provided him with that. Frankly, I was quite embarrassed to see the thing on file because it was intended purely as an aide memoire for him personally.

THE CHAIRMAN: It does survive?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I know it does.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does it?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The original one doesn't survive, I'm afraid, which is a pity, because if you wanted a fuller context of what I was actually arguing, it would be quite different.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could we ask you for, as brief as you like, but a short note of your recollection of its contents?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think it's very difficult to --

THE CHAIRMAN: Too difficult?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, I think it is very difficult, because I couldn't do it honestly, I don't think.

THE CHAIRMAN: You describe what its context was.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It's easy to see things that I have written and be able to try to think what I was thinking at the time, but

when I can't see them at all -- I did worry that we were walking into something without thinking carefully about it. That was the main --

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But it was not a point of no return for you?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No, and my advice was saying I think, in the circumstances, we have got to a stage where it is better all round for us to continue, but continue to push hard for our conditions, rather than to pull out, because I couldn't think of a good reason for pulling out in the circumstances we were in, because we hadn't exhausted the track, we hadn't, as it were, given up trying to bring allies with us, trying to build coalitions, trying to achieve success through the diplomatic route, and therefore there was no grounds, in my view, for pulling out. Were we to think of doing so, there could be lots of damage in those circumstances to our bilateral relationship with the Americans.

That doesn't mean to say that if we decided in March 2002 we weren't going to have anything to do with this at all, there would be damage to our relationship. It would have been much smaller, I think, at that stage. It was being at the point that we were by late December, we would have needed very good reasons for not continuing, and it didn't seem to me at that stage that those reasons existed.

Nevertheless, my main concern at that point was to provoke the Ministers to have a full discussion, rather than simply to say the American relationship is so important, you should just carry on regardless.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to raise some points about the implications of the change to the southern route in terms of Phase IV.

In particular, the proposal which was announced by

Geoff Hoon, I think in late January, that we were going to deploy through the southern route, was about the actual invasion military operation. It didn't necessarily include the Phase IV British post-invasion responsibilities or areas of interest.

I just wonder when that comes before Ministers as an issue that they need to think about and decide, because when the Prime Minister met the Chiefs of Staff on 15 January, the notes don't suggest that there was really any discussion of taking responsibility in and around Basra and the southern province.

Can you say something from recollection about when that started to all come to the fore in the minds both of officials and the military, and then the Ministers?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think I take your point. I think what I would say was that we were still at that point hoping that we would have a UN cover, which eased this issue of the occupying power responsibility. So we didn't confront that as starkly, I suspect, as we should have done.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's clear to us from military evidence, and indeed it's clear from the necessities of the context, that once your troops land on foreign soil in invasion mode, you become the occupying power for any territory you control, under the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Convention and the rest of it. So that requires, one would suppose, quite a lot of preplanning, to consider how you actually execute that responsibility from Day 1.

It's not clear to us from papers we have seen that there were full substantive holistic papers, analysing the implications about going in through the southern route in the immediate aftermath and beyond, until afterwards.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I agree. I think it was very late. Remember, we assumed that what we were doing was sort of holding the

position while the Americans went up.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: And we were not, for example, going to go into Basra. That was not part of the plan. I think you are right that the full implications of administering four provinces did not come home to the UK until quite late on.

I must say, I can't recall, having gone over the papers again myself, at what point we -- I remember writing and saying: what are these provinces we are going to be responsible for? From a military point of view, there didn't seem to be a problem about that, but I don't think that included a full appreciation of political implications.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have seen a Foreign Office paper that was circulated on 20 January 2003, copied to you, among others, and you wrote a quite lengthy and, if I may say so, impressive set of notes --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I thought it might be even worse than you are suggesting.

THE CHAIRMAN: You did, with some analysis, which wasn't entirely present in the original Foreign Office paper, about the different interest groups, the ethnic groups, the possibility of conflict between them. Your conclusion was, and I'm quoting:

"All this points to the need for a very strong initial security presence, but a clear link to the political reform process, and a still stronger one in my view for the US to offer wider coalition ..."

And in effect --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Did I write that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, you did. See if you can read your own handwriting.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Oh yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the one hand precedent, and entirely, in a sense, it responded immediately to a Foreign Office analysis, but late in the sense that our planning, both military and political, following up that decision to go through the southern route, was clearly at a very early stage indeed, and Ministers did not have before them, did they, a full appreciation of the implications, politically, militarily and security-wise, when they took that decision.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I have to agree with you, and we didn't set up the Iraq unit in the Foreign Office until February. And, of course, we didn't have an area of responsibility until this decision had been taken in January.

I should have said, this was obviously one of the reasons why people like me were still clinging to the northern option, because it was what we were planning for, and we understood to some extent, because we wouldn't have had those difficulties by pursuing the northern route because the Kurdish autonomous zone would have remained, as it were, a Kurdish autonomous zone.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is this a fair description, do you think, that in the absence of a clear and -- these were fast-moving events, but in the absence of a clear, planned process of assessment, background, looking at the implications, putting it before Ministers for decision, aware of all the implications, what really happened was the decision to switch to the southern route for extraneous reasons, if you like, Turkey, meant that we morphed from the southern route as a pure military operation short term into the responsibility that fell on us, in effect, to take over MND south east for a period of six years?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think it's perfectly fair to say as a lesson learned that we were much better at doing the military planning

and thinking through the long term of the military issues, although we underestimated some of the risks that would -- some of the issues that emerged subsequently in terms of violence, than we were on the policy track.

If you want my analysis as to why that is the case, I think there are a number of reasons. One is that, as the junior partner in the coalition, we were going to always be heavily reliant on the quality of the American planning in this area, whatever particular part of the country we found ourselves in, and that, for various reasons, that [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The other reason is that it was very difficult indeed to put the UK players in the policy context together, to engage in the planning that should have taken place. DFID were very late comers to the table and should have been integrated right from the outset.

My own view was that the Foreign Office spent a huge amount of time trying to avert the need for military action in the first place, putting a great deal of effort, very effectively and very professionally, into the UN negotiations, into working as hard as they possibly could on Security Council resolutions that would prevent the need for the military option to occur. They didn't spend any time on saying, if it does happen, what is the policy environment in which we have to operate? And that was a flaw in our thinking at Whitehall at that stage.

THE CHAIRMAN: Again, very much with lessons learned in mind, we have had evidence from military witnesses that they actually take in the occupying power set of issues with their mother's milk. It's part of their training.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, that's what they do.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's what they do. That's not necessarily the

case for the Foreign Office, except perhaps at a quite rarefied level. Was there not some responsibility at least, on the military and on MOD civil side, to flag up to the rest of Whitehall that the moment we go in, we are taking these responsibilities, and if we allow them to extend the time, they amount to a very serious commitment?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think we did. I think the only planning forum which actually tried to overcome the difficulties of the compartmentalised thinking was the Chiefs of Staff's meetings, where we had invited the other departments to be fully present, so we had understood what was going on.

I think there was a lot of military frustration that the civilian bit of the Government was not moving as fast or as actively as they wanted them to help.

In defence of the political side, you know, most of the military people were doing what they were doing anyway, as they did their training. This is, as you say, mother's milk. This is what they expected to do.

The roles that we would have been expecting diplomats and aid workers to do were very different from the ones that they would normally be managing. Nevertheless the lessons were all there. We should have had a post-conflict reconstruction unit established in the autumn of 2002, in the same way that we were doing military planning. We didn't have that. We should have had a ministerial level forum for not just reflecting on these issues, but actually driving them, but we didn't have it.

THE CHAIRMAN: One last question from me --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: To be fair, I don't think the Ministry of Defence copped out. I think we were sending as many signals as we could. I'll be very honest. I was conscious of this problem. I tried to involve myself more fully in what was going on in

Number 10. Number 10 wanted to talk only to the military planners. We could not get a forum going until very late in the day that was the equivalent on the Pol/Mil side.

THE CHAIRMAN: And that is talking to military planners about the actual invasion operation.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on that, was there anybody who should have had responsibility for making that happen?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, there was, and yes, there were. But I think we are dealing with the way Blair Government worked, and it wasn't just about Iraq. It was the way Blair Government worked generally. It did tend to operate in small groups of the immediate people who seemed to be important for dealing with the issues at the time.

I did speak to David Manning and suggested that we needed a more structured approach. I spoke to Geoff Hoon and said that. I spoke to the Number 10 people, to Powell himself, saying the same. But it didn't happen.

I was not invited to be part of that regular planning process. Neither, I think, was the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office, nor DFID, and without that, it was very difficult to make progress along that track.

To make matters worse, we didn't have the situation they had in the United States, where in January 2003 the President issues a directive which says to Rumsfeld: you are responsible for the post-conflict Phase IV. We never had that responsibility placed on the Ministry of Defence. It was always a responsibility in the Foreign Office, DFID, Cabinet Office area, which never got properly crystallised.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we will break for tea in a minute, but I've got one last question on this.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Sorry, I'm being extremely candid in this. But you have forced me into this position and I'm being very frank.

THE CHAIRMAN: Standing back for a moment from these very important questions of process and decision-making, echoing what Sir Martin Gilbert was asking about in terms of the withdrawal issue -- was it possible, was it going to be very costly if we had withdrawn before the actual invasion -- could we, having invaded, as the junior but major partner in the coalition, then have withheld taking on responsibility for four southern provinces, and said to the Americans, "It's your show, it's over to you"?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think it would have been difficult. But remember, the benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing. At the time it didn't seem to be going too badly at all. Remember, we had assumed that it was going to take 100 days to take Baghdad. That was the military plan, and it was over very quickly. We were surprised how soon that happened.

I think we assumed that we were in a predominantly Shia area which would be unlikely to be as unwelcoming and cause as many difficulties as if you were trying to manage Sunni/Shia relationships, as the Americans were. I think we expected Basra to welcome us as, if not a liberating power, at least a benign one. I think we expected more support to come in from the United States, even with that being our area of responsibility. You have got all the stuff there. When I went there with the CDS in June afterwards, we were astonished to find that we had been paying the civil servants from the money we had found in the Bank of Basra, and nothing was coming either from the UK Government or from the United States.

So I think at that stage there was no reason to suppose that

top, would be used and brought into the system. We thought we had a clear agreement with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can you recall what led you to think that specifically? Papers, conversations, meetings?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think [USA1]¹ told me. Actually what was going on in the United States was very interesting, digressing, if I may, for a moment. Although, firstly, there was a lot of work done by the State Department during 2002 into all sorts of scenarios, very detailed stuff -- it was quite interesting -- which our people, the Foreign Office picked up, and there was some engagement by November, I think from the Foreign Office side.

Then the reason I was focusing so much on [USA1] was that [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] he was the person given responsibility by the President [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] for pulling together this post-conflict stuff Phase IV.

Now, when it was decided that the DOD would take responsibility for this, and not anyone else, whether it was [REDACTED] or the State Department, that was a surprise. But we didn't regard that as necessarily being a disaster because we didn't know how it was going to operate, and certainly the Pentagon seemed very keen for us to be fully engaged in supporting that.

We had reassurances that they intended anyway to work very closely with the UN. Even in February [USA1] was saying to me that although the executive responsibility would go to the

¹ This individual is referred to as "USA1" in the Inquiry's documentation.

Pentagon, Rumsfeld, the overriding policy function, the strategy, would still be held by the NSC, by [USA1]. And indeed they went on to develop planning on de-Ba'athification, on the army, on oil, which gave us the impression certainly that this was going to be carried forward in a broader framework.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is clearly very important because it's so sensitive. It's right that we do this in this private hearing, but is it possible for you -- was it possible for us, the United Kingdom -- to infer whether Jerry Bremer's two big decisions, both of which have been very widely criticised -- namely de-Ba'athification on a huge scale and disbanding the army almost to the top -- were done on his own authority, assessing the situation on his arrival, on Pentagon direction, or because [REDACTED] thought that they were in charge of it, you would have thought these were decisions for them?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: To this day, I still find this a puzzle. I haven't read the evidence from Jeremy Greenstock or John Sawers as to how what they thought Bremer was doing at that point.

My understanding mainly comes from having read Woodward's books, to be honest, which I'm sure you have read as well. So you are in as good a position as I am.

I was not aware of any discussion with us, with the UK, before those judgments were taken. After they were taken, the Americans said to us -- and this isn't so much Bremer, but this was -- I can't remember the guy's name, the person who handled the army afterwards...

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Walt Slocombe,

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes Walt Slocombe, who I knew well from nuclear planning days, that it had to happen anyway, because the army had disappeared. Well, true, but not the 10,000 officers. So

I didn't quite buy that.

When I was with CDS in Basra and Baghdad in June, we spoke to Wall, our commander, about it, and he said, "Well, it is awkward, but I think I can work it", implying that there was still a sort of process that was going through that was not so damaging as it seemed, certainly in the south, and we shouldn't, as it were, try and take this head on with the Americans because the decision had been taken, but we could manage it through.

That's about as much as I can say about it. It remains a puzzle to me to this day.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think this is a good moment to have a break. Let's come back in ten minutes. Thank you.

(A short break)

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's resume. Turning now to some questions on defence capability and the like, can I turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman to open the questions?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There are two sorts of issues arising from the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. I just want to have a conversation about how these interact by the time you get to 2002. Obviously you have already told us in public session your concerns about underfunding of the Strategic Defence Review.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And that's pretty evident in the papers as well, that this was a pretty real concern, and obviously there are other questions of the defence budget itself that we would want to go into more in public session, but some issues perhaps we can just look at now.

So that's one sort of pressure on equipment and readiness, and then there's another set of questions as to whether the system as a whole was able to adapt to a different sort of threat

environment, the sort of long march away from the Cold War, and whether it was hard for the military, for the Ministry of Defence, to re-gear itself to a different sort of environment.

So that's the sort of broad area if we can try and look at. Does that prompt any initial thoughts from you?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think I'm more or less where I said before. I do draw a distinction between the Iraq operation itself and funding issue. While I think the core budget was insufficiently funded to deliver the SDR force structure, that doesn't mean to say that I felt that the funding wasn't there to conduct the operation, or indeed to sustain our objectives in Iraq, on the basis that we were planning to hand over, on the basis that we were not intending to stay, which raises a big question, I know, beyond a certain period, which we will no doubt go back to.

My own view is that the problems with the budget were more about being able to develop the force structure that we would be seeing about now, rather than the force structure that we needed in 2002/2003/2004, because of the lead times involved in planning the military equipment programme.

So I have always drawn a distinction in what I have said before between the underfunding of the SDR results and the ability to conduct this particular operation.

I think to the extent that there were pressures and problems with the operation itself, some of which have been given a huge build-up in the press, in political debates since, those were more about the amount of time available to do the planning of the actual build-up itself, warning time, the switch from one area to another, the difficulty of doing overt military preparations as early as they needed to be done because of the desire not to disrupt the UN track.

Those were the bigger problems in ensuring that we got the

force structure ready when eventually the time came, and the fact that we would have preferred another month, in ideal circumstances, to do that build-up. But that's a very different point than the underlying funding of the overall defence budget.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I understand all of that, and obviously we need to talk to the planners and so on about more particular issues. When we have had this discussion in the past, and with other witnesses as well, we have obviously discussed the UORs and how they were funded, but there is also this sense that the underlying defence budget provides you with a core provision from which you still must draw for operations. So if there had been problems in the past, that would impact on your ability to undertake operations, say in 2002/2003, and if you are squeezed in 2002/2003 as you've indicated, that would affect your ability to operate down the road. So in terms of the context in which we are looking at, it is germane.

Just looking at a letter that the secretary of state, Geoff Hoon, wrote to the Prime Minister about the defence budget in early 2002.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Early 2002? Okay.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, which presumably you have seen. 25 January 2002.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I may not have reviewed it actually. That sounds a bit early. I probably didn't look at this before I came here.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Some of it I won't spend any particular time on. It talks about a concern that programmes could have cost 70² million excess in 2002/2003, how you deal with it, all the reasons why the budget is under pressure. It goes through

² The 25 Jan 02 letter from SofS for Defence to PM refers to a £700m deficit

the problems of underfunding in the defence review.

But then it talks about how budgetary problems are being addressed at the time. It talks about some equipment measures that have been taken. Then it says:

"It comprises a range of slippages and descoping ..."

I'm not quite sure what descoping is.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Fewer of.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Fewer of. It sounds unpleasant:

"... which we judge to be an acceptable risk in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. For example, we now plan to reduce our procurement of battlefield helicopters by nearly 20 per cent."

Now, in terms of the debates that happened later, that's perhaps, as it seems, a more significant percentage than it might have seemed at the time.

Do you recall anything about that particular decision at the time?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: This is in January 2002?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Not January 2003?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It says January 2002.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Right. So this was part of our negotiating posture as we were building up to the 2002 settlement and outcome, and also, as you must know, given the particular nature of the Blair Government, the MOD tended to look to Tony Blair and the Prime Minister for understanding and support in the budgetary context. Some other departments went direct to the Chancellor. We usually tried to operate through Number 10 because we were always coping with the problem of a policy ambition which the

Prime Minister subscribed to, which was never quite matched by the financial attitude of the Chancellor. So that's the context.

I think that the missing part there is that we thought that when we got the settlement in 2002, that basically that was adequate to achieve our funding objectives. It only subsequently became clear afterwards that there was a different interpretation that the Treasury were placing on it, which changed that position.

I think the other thing is that we were modernising as we went along, which wasn't just an empty phrase for cuts. I mean, there were force structure changes that we were justified in making in any event because of the end of the Cold War, and indeed at that point progressively the reduction of obligations in Northern Ireland.

This was making it possible to retire certain things and take things out. Now, this isn't true of battlefield helicopters, and I must say, I don't remember the point about battlefield helicopters at that stage. We are talking about Apache numbers, I guess. So I can't say anything more about that. I know there was this fixation on helicopters, but since we are on the subject of helicopters, I honestly don't recall a problem of helicopter provision in terms of the Iraq operation while I was PUS, in terms of a grave issue, as it were.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: "Deferring this spend will set back by one year the army Lynx helicopter replacement programme, delaying the Westlands contract, and risking the capability gap."

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Since I'm now a Chairman of Finmeccanica,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]³ I'll say no more.

³ This sentence has been redacted at the request of the witness as irrelevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference

But deferring by a year would not have caused an operational penalty of significance.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In the same paragraph, it says --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: We haven't got them, actually. Those helicopters have only just arrived.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes I know:

"Our decision to defer the equipment of Chinook helicopter pilots with night vision goggles in a previous planning round resulted in limited ability to operate Chinooks in coalition with the Americans with the early stages of the Afghanistan campaign."

So really what I'm trying to get at is a sense of -- I think you said something in previous evidence about how it was all sort of a crisis budget, and the way that the crisis gets handled is by these slippages and descoping of the budget, of the equipment budget in particular.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I mean, I moved into a crisis budget after the problems over cash/non-cash with the Chancellor. That's when it became a crisis budget, from which we never fully recovered, although we did to some extent regain some ground in the 2004 settlement.

I think the other thing you have to remember is, of course, UORs would cover things like night vision equipment. You also need to know that we added money back into the programme for things like helicopters subsequent to the decision, which was much more significant than that one, in 2003, when, as a result of what the Treasury did, we had to take a billion out of the forward helicopter programme, and we then subsequently started adding money back again because that was clearly too much. So these things are never fixed in any one point of time.

I come back to my basic point. I really do not believe that our activities in Iraq were constrained by the overall size of

the MOD budget. My own view was that Afghanistan was -- putting the two together was where the strain came subsequently.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on the equipment process, it's still a question of the extent to which the Ministry of Defence as a whole had reoriented itself in the light of the 1998 review, and the --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: To conduct expeditionary capability?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And then, of course, the New Chapter that followed from the --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: In the light of 9/11, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We talked a bit about the readiness assumptions and so on. What was your sense about the ability of the military to readjust themselves to this new set of circumstances?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: That's a very long question. Focusing it on the immediate issue in hand, I would have said probably the most important positive thing was exercise Saif Sareea, where we actually, you know, with foresight, would have -- it was a brilliant thing to have done because it was a perfect rehearsal for what we subsequently had to do in Iraq. That was not the intention at the time. It was just that we needed to test whether we could, in difficult circumstances, conduct an expeditionary operation. We did it at brigade level rather than full army corps level because it's very expensive, but we learned a lot of lessons from Saif Sareea, and it proved the concept, basically, that we could conduct expeditionary operations at a distance from the UK with a level of success.

So I would have said that was the proof, really, of the SDR working. The exercise cost more money than we expected, and if you looked at the records in detail, you will find the Permanent

Secretary getting extremely upset about the poor planning of the financial amounts required, and we had to improve considerably on our estimating for exercises as a result of that. But we also learnt lessons about desertisation, or 'desertification' equipment, about things we needed to do to improve logistics, back-up, the problems with equipment that got overheated in the desert conditions and that sort of thing, and also about producing shipping and transportation and logistics at a distance. So it was a very valuable exercise.

I would say that, and full credit to Charles Guthrie, who pushed this concept as a way of demonstrating that the expeditionary capability idea from the SDR was real. That was the most positive statement about the SDR working in practice.

The more difficult issues -- one of the big aspects of the SDR was tri-service, jointery, as it was called. Putting in place these joint organisations was a cultural challenge for the armed forces, and they tended to come into place slightly more slowly than we would have liked. Joint Helicopter Command was one of those things. Joint NBC regiment actually was quite successful. But these were big challenges for the armed forces, and there were such a large number of actions for implementation from the SDR that it was inevitably going to take time to work through.

But by and large, I mean, I think we achieved what we set out to do, but that also included retiring some equipment, and I sense that we had to retire a bit more than we intended as the years went by, a bit earlier than we intended as the years went by.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What about the sort of legacy projects that still seem to be --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: You mean --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There are some things which was equipment that was no longer needed, but there were also an awful lot of projects that were in train, some of which still seem to be in train, that perhaps squeezed out some of the other things that you would liked to have had in the defence equipment programme.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I mean, the MOD is actually very good at focusing on what is the most important thing to do. That tends to be rather short term, and it does give incoherence over the long term.

So again, coming back to Iraq, we did Iraq well because that's the way we reconfigured our planning. What we have done less well are things like FRES, Future Rapid Effect System, which was supposed to have arrived by 2009. We are still waiting for it. But that's got nothing to do, I'm afraid, with Iraq itself.

I could go on with other programmes such as Typhoon, the length of time it's taken to do that, the Astute submarines, Nimrod MR4A. These are all big. The destroyers, the type 45 destroyers -- these are all big delayed programmes. But that's how it works. One delays the long-term realisation of the force structure in order to achieve short-term objectives like immediate operational effect.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's in a sense --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: So I come back to my basic point. I really don't believe that we failed to deliver what we needed to do in Iraq.

The biggest regret I had was in respect of deployed logistics, where we didn't perform as well as we should have done in terms of in-transit visibility of getting stuff from A to B and knowing what was there when we got there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry to interrupt. This is the same thing as asset tracking?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Asset tracking, yes. The key thing there was in-transit visibility, so you knew what was where when you needed it, how it was going down the route, as it were.

The asset tracking system we had was not adequate. We managed to cope, but it was not an efficient way of doing it and, you know, we subsequently spent quite a lot of money in improving the system, and it's still, as it were, being improved. But that I would identify as probably the weakest element, but it was well known to be the weakest element.

It wasn't that it sort of was completely broken. It was that it couldn't cope with the volume of equipment we were pushing through the system in great numbers. But remember, we got the same amount of equipment into Iraq -- I repeat myself, I know -- as we used in the First Gulf War in half the time. This was still an indication, as it were, of how things had moved on in those ten years.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the related criticisms, not for what we did in 2003, but as the insurgency developed, was that we didn't really have the ability to move around in a protected way. So that might have been one of the things that would have been perhaps more in the programme in 2001/2002. You mentioned FRES, but that was just one aspect.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't think, though, that was not anticipated because of lack of money. I think that was not anticipated because we hadn't seen the threat evolving as rapidly as it did with IEDs and roadside bombs. That developed so very quickly from about 2004.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is maybe a process question, rather than a substance question, as to how DIS and organisations like that feed into the procurement process. In terms of, say, looking at the sort of conflicts in which we now seem to be

getting ourselves involved, these might be things you need to think about.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think that's absolutely true, but I think that was an issue that you could pose if you were doing an Afghanistan investigation as to what we were up to in 2005. I don't think that applies to what we were doing in 2001/2002. I think the roadside bomb, the IED threat evolved very, very rapidly in a way we hadn't anticipated, and we hadn't really got grounds to have expected, frankly.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were there other sorts of lessons coming out of the early experience with Iraq that were able to be fed directly into the equipment programme?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Oh yes. I mean, one of the most important ones, I think, is we had a concept which is that -- the most fundamental one was our concept of "first in, first out", the idea that we were good at expeditionary warfare, but that we would be able to remove ourselves, as it were, from the theatre of operations and let the other countries who had more peace-keeping capabilities take over at that point. Clearly that has not proven to be the case, and the idea of first in, first out is no longer really very valid. It wasn't absolutely fundamental in the SDR, but it was one of those sorts of assumptions we were tending to work on by 2002.

The other one, I think, is that we assumed that we would have stocks for six months, and that when we came to a major operation we would have preparation time to conduct a large-scale operation by building up stocks in that period.

I'm sorry, I should have said we would have enough for a brigade size operation, medium-scale, but that if we wanted to go for a large-scale, we would need six months in order to acquire the necessary extra equipment, stores, personnel,

clothing, ammunition, things like that.

What we learned, of course, is that you don't get clarity of sufficient warning time, especially if you are planning not necessarily to go to war, but to actually achieve 'force on mind' and persuade the opposition to give up and go down the UN route. You don't get that clarity after six months preparation.

So as a result of the operation, we, I know, increased our holdings of clothing and consumables, things like that, so as to be better prepared in future. It didn't mean that we weren't prepared in Iraq. It means that it was a bit of a squeeze and not everything was there. It was adequate, but it wasn't ideal.

They are the two obvious big lessons that came out of the operation.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's very helpful. I just want to go back to one of those, which is related to the first in, first out.

I'm still interested in this question of the analysis of future needs and how that fits in. To what extent would you have been looking at other people's operations in terms of, for example, whether IEDs were being used? Clearly they weren't used against us in the Balkans. There were other sorts of issues which arose there. But they weren't absent before 2004/2005.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No, absolutely right. I think, as you probably know, the military have a horizon-scanning system, where they do look at all sorts of threats that could possibly come. These are then prioritised and, you know, the research and development people get involved, and equipment programmes are developed, prioritised according to the perception of the threat. That is the way the system works and has done for a long time. Shrivenham [the Joint Concepts and Doctrine Centre] has its inputs.

So I think, quite honestly, the British armed forces are well admired for looking ahead and planning. So I don't think that the idea of threat perception being weak is a fair charge --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it's more a question of how it is fed into the equipment programme, given the long lead times that you talk about. When we are dealing with things like IED, it doesn't take a long time for an enemy to start working out how to do this.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No, but --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the extra chapter to the SDR, the new chapter, had talked about more irregular sort of warfare. We had already started possibly to see it in Afghanistan.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, and we were starting to increase the size of our special forces to create a new special forces support regiment, and to do things like that to cope with irregular warfare. I think that's absolutely true.

You do have to make a distinction, of course, between very big programmes, which were actually systems in themselves, and the sub-systems like counter IED, which are very specific little things. The very big programmes take a long time to develop because they have to be integrated into an overall concept of operations, with command and control systems and all of that, and there inevitably are going to be long lead times involved in bringing forward those sort of equipment, like major aircraft. But there are other things where you can be much more agile, usually using UOR processes.

One of the things that has come out of all of this in recent years is this question: can't the MOD be more agile in changing its equipment programme more quickly as a sort of halfway house between the UOR process, which is very rapid, and the normal procurement process? And that's the challenge that's there at

the moment. It's there in the Gray [Bernard Gray] report and it's there in the MOD's acquisition reform. It's about incremental acquisition, as you know, not going for the 100 per cent solution, but going for an 80 per cent solution which is capable of being upgraded.

I simply don't believe that this [inadequate preparation for the military threat] was really a central issue. I didn't feel it was at the time. I don't think I was just being blind. I mean, at the time, we were much more concerned about things like, you know, making sure in future that we have the right desertisation, that we cool the IT and other things for deserts, that we have secure communications, that we've got enough bandwidth, we've got enough satellites up there, that we've got better combat ID systems, that we've got night vision equipment, that we've got precision guided munitions in sufficient quantities, that we've got the good light machine guns we needed. Those were the sorts of issues we were focusing on, and I think rightly so, through that period. The big one [deficiency], as I say, was asset tracking, from my point of view.

In popular parlance, people were much more focused on things like NBC filters and chemical detection, and combat body armour, because obviously these are so serious if it goes wrong in terms of people. You know, there were one or two dreadful cases where combat body armour wasn't present. But broadly speaking, those were not major issues in terms of logistics support or problems that couldn't be resolved by slightly higher quantities of holdings [in stock].

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's helpful. We had better move on to questions of overstretch. Going back again to SDR, or the New Chapter, assumptions: two medium-scale operations maintaining one with a short-term deployment or single large operation, or

a series of smaller scale deployment.

Now, you wrote to Geoff Hoon quite early on in 2002, I think, saying if we had to join a major expedition to Iraq, we would be severely stretched. You have already indicated this was a concern all the way through. Yet that concern does not seem to have had a major impact when it came to the decision in later 2002 to go with the full land component.

Why were those concerns, which are still present after that decision as well -- why didn't that lead to a more modest contribution?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: There are two sort of separate issues. I mean, one is why did we decide on a large-scale contribution to that operation; and secondly, if we did, did it involve overstretch?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Well, especially that you were seen to be very aware of overstretch before that decision.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, it was my job as Permanent Secretary to maximise resources for defence. I have to say that I never suggested -- I never wrote minutes to Ministers saying everything is fine and we don't need more resources. I mean, my job was always to maximise resources available to do the job, and that was what I was doing in writing that to Geoff Hoon.

I mean, I think -- when we said that the SDR did involve the ability to move up to large-scale from time to time, we hadn't got a precise view, but we were looking at once every ten years we could gravitate up to large-scale.

Remember this had become something of the DNA of the department. We had done the Gulf War. In 1999, remember, we were about to do the same. It's easy to forget this. You sort of say: why did the MOD think it could cope with these things? Well, in 1999 we were a hair's breadth away from calling out

40,000 to 50,000 people to go into Kosovo to defeat Milosovic, and it just happened, thank goodness, that he actually did back down and give in. That's one of the lessons. We were operating in an environment where we were not unused to using very, very large military power to actually persuade people to back down and give up without combat actually having to happen, and that was the experience in 1999.

I remember going and visiting the troops dug in, as it were, in Macedonia, waiting for the Serbs to come over the hill in order to repel them. That was the life we were leading at that stage. Operations were expected.

So to do the same sort of scale, a different sort of operation, but the same scale of effort -- in many ways, the Kosovo operation would have been even more demanding -- that was not outside what we would expect to have to do. We were glad we didn't have to go through with it, and we felt that we had achieved our objective with Kosovo, but three or four years later we found ourselves having to make the same sort of scale of effort. I remember asking our finance people pretty early on, just as a contingency, whether they could cope with, say, a 24,000 force -- that's sort of fighting elements; whenever you say 24,000, you have to double it for all the enablers and the transportation and all that sort of stuff -- and they were pretty satisfied this we could manage financially, provided we got the urgent operational requirements and extra costs from the Treasury, which was always an assumption, the way in which our budgets were done.

So, you know, it would always have been the maximum stretch, but not beyond it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then when we had agreed to send the division, there was an assumption, very clear, it was made very

explicit as the war was going on, that the force that we have committed has got to be drawn down very quickly indeed, and this --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Our assumptions never involve more than six months at that level.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: They are not hewn in stone. They're not the rules, but they are guidelines. But nevertheless, broadly speaking, that's what you have to sort of do if you're trying to --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It's asserted with a degree of urgency.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes. Well, six months was about the maximum that we could keep that level of force going, because you have to keep -- under our arrangements you have to refresh the troops. The Americans didn't do that, but we had the concept that you had to actually put in fresh troops after six months, and therefore you can't really cope with a larger number than that, longer than that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Then there's a number of statements in a number of documents to the effect that it will be necessary to draw down our current commitment to nearer a third by no later than the autumn in order to avoid long-term damage to our armed forces.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Correct, and that is consistent with our broad planning assumptions from the SDR.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that requires the operation to go pretty well as planned. Given what we talked about before, and some of the uncertainties of which you were very aware, it was possible to imagine circumstances in which that would be very

difficult. So we are almost set up here for a tension that did develop between the need to draw down our forces and continuing demands upon them.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, if the need to draw down -- I didn't sense that military commanders were saying, "You mustn't draw down, I can't cope". I think the two were pretty well in balance. I mean, it was a difficult environment, but it didn't require larger force structures in that sense. The Americans were after all there, and we did have a coalition by that stage. We were not operating alone by then. We had an area with allies around us as well.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We do have some evidence of concerns about numbers that did develop, maybe not in the middle of 2003. It's just really again this question about whether our assumptions and the limitations of our capabilities just push us to the edge each time in terms of whether or not we are actually going to be able to cope.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think, you know, if I'm honest, I think that the problem is not so much the military planning, but the civil follow through. I mean, it's perfectly possible to postulate that the real difficulty was that we didn't manage to get the civilian components or the money into the areas fast enough to actually make the difference when it mattered. The biggest challenge was there, and it was true of the Americans as well as ourselves.

There were major delays in getting the resources for reconstruction, and stabilisation and reconstruction almost had to move effortlessly from one to the other, and we were unable to get the resources fast enough, in my view, to make the difference we should have made, particularly in the south. The main problem we had was a frustration that the reconstruction was not

occurring rapidly enough, and I think that was much more of a problem area than the failure, as it were, of having a credible military plan and seeing it through.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that was --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Any number of forces, if you put any number of forces in there, it wouldn't have made a difference without having that diplomatic and civil reconstruction aid effort in place, which was late in coming too.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But that would create operational risks for your people, and therefore, in a sense, you are dependent upon events which you obviously totally can't control, and you are having to put forces in place with very little room for manoeuvre for margin of error, and there are operational risks developing tensions that are going to be challenging for you.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: And yet, you know, we were asked to move our forces out of our area of operations and help the Americans in other places, Najaf, and did so. I as Permanent Secretary was concerned about that because I felt that was putting us into a position where we didn't have the resources possibly to cope, because it was very clear that we were going to take on extra burdens through that, and yet those were quite successful.

So if I'm thinking back to that time, there were lots of problems, but I didn't have the sense that we were, you know, hopelessly overstretched at that point, while I was Permanent Secretary anyway, in terms of our management of the military aspects of our operations.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks. I'll leave it there.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to move now to some lessons learned aspects, and with a rather perhaps overfacile starting point. It's learning lessons about earlier lessons learned or, if

learned, implemented.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Sorry, can I just make one point, just to finish off?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It just occurred to me, there was a proposition put to us that we shouldn't try and go in there at the beginning, but that we should concentrate on follow-on forces. One of the arguments for doing what we did do was that we didn't want to get caught in the role of follow-on forces because then we could find ourselves even more bogged down and under even greater pressure to stay for longer than we felt it was sensible. So, ironically, one of the reasons why we decided on the force structure we did was to avoid getting caught in that follow-on force trap.

Now, you may say we got caught anyway, but I would argue that we were able to come down to 8,000 or 9,000 more easily as a result of our initial effort than would have been the case if we had gone in subsequently. You can never prove that, but I just offer you that. It was a consideration at the time. It did actually weigh with us.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It's clearly in the papers that that was argued, but it does reflect this sense that we are the ones who go in with the Americans, serious fighting force, and then other people hopefully can come in afterwards. Yet it turns out, as you say, it wasn't necessarily a correct assumption.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I would say the biggest constraint on us at that time was not so much whether we could manage 24,000 fighting men and women or stay for six months or however long, but it was about FRESCO. Our biggest worry at that stage -- I'm thinking back now to what it was like at the time. It was having to keep 20,000-odd people trained to do firefighting duties because of

the firemen's strike. That was the biggest single constraint we actually were facing at that stage.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is a lessons learned Inquiry. We have touched already on some aspects of lessons to be learned from the earlier phases. I think what I would like to ask you about is how far financial constraints over the period in question really, from 1998 or 2001 in terms of our terms of reference, how far financial constraints impacted on lessons to be learned from earlier and then developing events. So this grandly where the asset tracking issue came to the fore, that ten years later had not been crowned.

You mentioned the Kosovo 1999 contingency planning, whether there were any lessons to be learned from that as regards planning, force structure, whatever it is. Saif Sareea, you in effect said that there were lessons --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Saif Sareea, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, the exercise in 2001. But then, and perhaps mostly in focus, the lessons continually being learned as Operation TELIC was succeeding, and Operation TELIC 1 through all the rest.

Were there any constraints, of which you were aware in your time, of lessons having been learned, but incapable of being fully implemented because of financial constraints?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I suspect the biggest problem was the ability to -- the technical phrase, taking into core things that were generated as urgent operational requirements. There were an awful lot of UORs approved and taken up. I've gone through a list of them a few minutes ago.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Once the operation is over, under Treasury

rules, if you take them into the core of your budget, you then have to pay for them, and that was a challenge. We, I suspect, didn't take on as many as we would have liked because we didn't have the resources to do so.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is quite important, isn't it? That means that in assessing whether there is a sufficient case to apply for a UOR in an ongoing military operation, one of the factors in your mind, and the collective mind, is: if we get it, can we then afford to embody it in the core later on?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It sort of doesn't quite work like that. It works: we must have it for the operation, so we have it.

THE CHAIRMAN: So we have it?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: We would like to keep it, but we may just have to destroy it at the end of the operation. We can't afford to [keep it]. Now, that is illogical, but that's sometimes the dilemma one is in.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think what I'm after is now a rather different thing. With a long extending operation, 2001 to 2009 in the case of all TELICs put together, were there UORs which were needed early on, were they becoming embodied in the core before 2009, and then coming under pressure, even though they were actually needed still for the ongoing operation?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Having left when I did in 2005, I actually find it quite difficult to answer that question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Because it didn't arise or wouldn't have arisen until later, if it did?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: That's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: So we need to look at that with someone else.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: My successor would be able to give you

a better view on how many or how much of the UORs he would have liked to have taken into the core structure and felt unable to do so. I didn't quite -- I think probably that was just after my time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. The important thing you've established is that, although there may be difficulties which one can foresee in embodying a UOR application into the core later, that is not a reason, and wouldn't be, for holding back from a UOR application.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The other problem is that with UORs -- there isn't an easy way out of this -- you can end up with an incoherent force structure because you are buying things ad hoc, and they don't necessarily hang together as the most efficient way of running your force structure. Vehicles are the most obvious example. In an ideal world, you have a family of vehicles with common sensors and electronic systems that go across the whole fleet, so everything is interoperable. But when you are having to buy bits here, bits there, it doesn't make for a cost-effective or long-term force structure.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. But it is not an example of financial constraints, as it were, standing in the way of --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No. I keep coming back to my main theme, that I don't believe these were central to the actual conduct of the Iraq campaign [during my time as PUS].

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. Can I ask, on a separate aspect, on what I think is the same broad theme, the question of not human resources -- well, I suppose it is human resources -- but the recuperation problem within a very extended operation: roulement periods going down, certain specialisms, enablers being overstretched. Can you tell us something about how that works

and how far you can plan ahead to cope with it?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It's certainly true that was one of the pressures on the military commanders, that -- by and large one works on the basis of a deployment for six months. Then you go into a planning or a roulement process, where you recover for six months. You do general training, then you do very specific training for the next operation. Then you do the next operation. So it's a 24-month cycle.

By and large, that was in my time mostly manageable, other than for particular trades and specialisations that were in high demand. So it wasn't possible to preserve that system for a variety of people like logisticians, medics, these sorts of people, and they were finding themselves back-to-back deployed, which obviously is undesirable. They were breaking harmony, to use the military expression.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: And certainly subsequently -- in fact, I think we had anticipated a bit, but subsequently we recognised that we needed to put a lot more effort into the enablers, the number of enablers we had in our force structure. It wasn't so much a question of the front line forces, the infantrymen or the tank crews, or the pilots or whatever. It was much more a question of these enabling people who found themselves hopelessly overstretched, and therefore needed -- we needed more of them in the force structure.

THE CHAIRMAN: And acknowledging your time finishes in 2005, but nevertheless this is not the same as UORs?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: You have learned a lesson from the real experience about the shortage, say, of medics.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: And there's not an easy way out of it, of course, because of the problems of recruiting and the length of time it takes --

THE CHAIRMAN: Sure there are time problems, but what about financial constraints in the core defence budget, preventing you, as it were, implementing the lessons --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't think -- well, in terms of people, I don't think that was the case.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't recall that being about an issue. I think it was much more a question of identifying these pinch points in the force structure.

We didn't do the SDR with the granularity that was necessary for these types of operations. Remember, it wasn't just this one. We were doing quite a lot of small-scale operations all the time. So communicators were always in great demand. Logisticians were in great demand. Medics, cooks, interpreters, these sorts of people were always -- we always had too few of them. Engineers, signallers.

So this is one of the reasons we slightly shifted our planning assumptions from the ability to conduct two medium-scale operations concurrently to the ability to conduct three operations at the same time. Small ones perhaps, but ones which therefore focused more on these enablers.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: But that wasn't -- I don't think that was a financial resource issue primarily. I think that was much more a planning assumption that we hadn't defined well enough.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. This is much more in Sir Lawrence's realm than mine, but looking at the duration and the endurance of key

enablers through time, is the only answer simply to increase, given the problem that it does take a long time, to increase the volume available of the key enablers, or is it something that's actually very difficult to plan for?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: It is quite difficult. The solution was partly just people were prepared to go back and do it again. You know, we demand a lot of our people. They were magnificent. Many military commanders -- I think every military commander will tell you this was a problem, and people responded extremely well.

Another way of doing it, of course, is sponsored reserves. We haven't discussed reserves, but one of the lessons from all of this is just how important reserves are, how they have to be looked after much better than they were, the support system with employers and that sort of thing, the fact that there are so many different types of reserves. There are some people who almost regard coming in and out of military activity as part of their [normal] life; others who are quite difficult to take out of their jobs. But the reservists became very important, particularly because they often were in these pinch point trades and functions.

A lot more effort is put into reserves as a result of their experiences in Iraq subsequently. I mean, I can still remember some of this in my own time. We had meetings with employers, employer federations. We provided better support arrangements for reservists and their families.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just a last question on this. I'm not sure if it's to the point, but I'll ask it anyway.

You're telling us in effect that where you do find these fairly specific areas of overstretch through time, in effect you rely on people's goodwill, stamina, whatever, and you get by. But progressively through quite a long time, as all the TELICs

have been, there must be a degradation. But that is not something that is forced by any kind of financial or material constraint. It's simply forced by the duration of the operation.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The two must come together at some point. I'm just saying during my time as PUS, they didn't come together.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think I'll ask Sir Martin Gilbert now to pick up a question.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to turn to Iraq/Afghanistan. Prime Minister Tony Blair told us in his evidence that it was the MOD who had suggested the extension of the Afghan deployment.

Were you satisfied, based on the state of readiness and the overall stretch of armed forces at that time, which was of course and remains classified, that Ministers were provided with the fullest explanation of the risks involved in a further deployment and the potential impact of it on the Iraq operation?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't recall during my time, of course, looking at it quite in that way, because I retired by the end of 2005. I mean, I think I'm already on the record, so I'll try and encapsulate my views again as best I can.

We had agreed that it was our turn to take our responsibilities in Afghanistan to the ARRC deployment, but there was an issue as to how many -- what type of force structure we would add to that headquarters. This came together with the idea of Helmand and the need to integrate better the US activities and the coalition/UN activities, and the idea that if the UK took over command of the ARRC, it would be in a position to bring these two separate operations together rather better, fighting and peace-keeping.

I was concerned initially that deploying a significant force structure into Afghanistan, not necessarily the ARRC itself, but a brigade or whatever that went with it -- I think 3,000

actually, we were talking about -- was too much of a strain on our resources while we were still heavily engaged in Iraq at the time. I mean, this is sort of discussions at the end of 2004, going into 2005, when things were particularly dangerous in Iraq at that stage. This came to a sort of head in the spring of 2005, at the point when John Reid took over from Geoff Hoon.

My concerns were not fully shared by the military, the chiefs of staff. They felt that it was manageable in operational terms, in terms of forces. I had put this to John Reid, and he asked for categorical assurances from the military commanders that they could indeed manage this as well as Iraq. They gave him those assurances, and therefore I didn't carry my objections, as it were, to a formal disagreement. But I had reservations to start with. These were, as it were, satisfied by the military commanders.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: They were satisfied. So there was no sense, in retrospect, that you might have put your concerns more strongly?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, I did put them strongly enough for John Reid to ask for categorical assurances, which he received.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: He got the assurances.

On the question of roulement, I would like to give a little quotation, actually from your welcoming letter to John Reid, welcoming him to his post. You say:

"The key issues to consider will be financial cost and the impact on overstretch of different options. It is some years since we operated within our assumptions at the level of commitment we can sustain without creating overstretch and other detriment to future effectiveness. While this is on the one hand evidence of the department's ability to meet demanding performance objectives, equally a period of retrenchment and

recuperation is now long overdue."

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I couldn't put it better myself.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And this had its impact on Iraq?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Over time, yes. I mean, we were operating at more than 100 per cent of what we were provided for, for quite a long period. You can do that for short spurts, but you can't do it forever, for the long term. We used to look at -- as we presented these things to Ministers, we used to have bar graphs which showed how much we were coping with each year, with different colours for different operations, which were of course overlaid on each other.

If you also overlaid the transformation requirement, because we were networking forces as well for communications, voice and data, although there wasn't much data I have to say, but it was called Bowman, you had to take a whole brigade out to Bowmanise it, to put in these new communication systems, which obviously improved. But nevertheless again there was a demand on the force structure you had available to do operations.

So when you added that to your commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan -- in the earlier period of course we still had Balkan obligations as well, we had just got over Sierra Leone obligations -- we were usually operating as the years went by -- 2003, 2004, into 2005 -- at a bit more than 100 per cent.

Now, it's quite difficult to measure these things. You have very crude indicators. We talked about how it affected individual elements of the force structure. Not everybody was under the same pressure. Fastjet pilots weren't, for example. Helicopter pilots were. But as the years go by, this has a corrosive effect on the capability of the overall forces to meet their SDR obligations unless there are a lot more resources and time to bring into the force structure the equipment and the

people associated with those resources.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And this was not --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I'm just giving you a longer version of what I said before.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: This is not something that the chiefs of staff could have factored into initial discussions?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: They were aware of that, yes. We were all discussing that. I think they just felt that they could cope with what was asked for in Afghanistan at that stage.

I think I have said enough. I mean, my concerns were there. They were addressed. They were met. That didn't necessarily leave me feeling very comfortable with the position by the time I left the department at the end of 2005.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Finally for me, are there any lessons to be learned in terms of the discomfort you felt that people in your position in the future were going to be confronted with a similar problem and this similar clash, if you like?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think the lessons to be learned are, firstly, that it is very, very important to have a more integrated approach to the use of military power, and to make sure that we have the political, diplomatic, aid, and other elements there for the post-conflict phase, and to make sure that we can win the peace as well as conduct the war. It's a simple point, but it's a fundamental one.

I think the other point is that it is unwise to assume -- I don't say I did, but some people did -- that if the political authorities will it, that somehow the resources will come too. Understanding what it takes to generate and sustain effective military capability is a very complicated thing, and it's very easy for politicians to dismiss it as, "they're complaining too

much", or, you know, "the same old story". It's a reality which I think we never fully got across to politicians.

Defence isn't cheap, but if you want to use the armed forces as well as have a deterrent, then you do need to fund it. That lesson, I think, is a perennial one. You will never find the armed forces or Permanent Secretary saying they have got enough money for their budget, and I think that will remain true. When they say they need more, they mean it. It's not just a false statement.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So that's --

THE CHAIRMAN: But there is, however, a tension pulling the other way in terms of our admirable military culture, which is you put a question: can you do it? Yes, of course we can, and we will. That goes quite the other way, doesn't it? There are expressions of pain, expressions of need, but there are also expressions of: we can do it, and we will, and we want to.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, there is a can-do culture, and we will and we want to, because that's what they are trained to do. And I suspect, certainly in Iraq, there was just one little element, which was: here we are having to keep 20,000-something people trained to do firefighting and there was a military operation about to happen. If you give us a choice, we would rather go on the military operation, sir. There's a bit of that.

THE CHAIRMAN: And the resolution, or the balance of those competing aspects of the, I repeat, admirable military culture, to be realistic in what is required, but at the same time to say yes, we can do it and we will, whatever, the balance between those two, and the advice that goes to Ministers in a structured way, lies on the shoulders of people such as yourself and your successor?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Such as myself, such as the Chiefs of Staff, advising the Secretary of State.

Expeditionary capability, actually using armed forces for fighting, is a hugely onerous and responsible business. I think one of the problems is that we have moved into a highly technical phase, where one looks for very sophisticated equipment effects, and one looks to be able to keep the people as far away as possible from harm, both in terms of enabling them to look further, in all sorts of ways, and have weaponry that is more smart and precise and can be delivered itself from a much longer distance.

That is the perfect, as it were, ideal for military activity, but it's not the reality that we find, for example, still today in Afghanistan. You can do a lot, but you still have to put boots on the ground. Even helicopters will not stop people from having to take territory. That's the tragedy of it, and, you know, one of the fundamental lessons, linked to the importance of the political track being in line with the military track, is that I think we still underestimate how many resources we need to make available if we are going to put our armed forces in harm's way.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think Sir Roderic would like to ask some final questions before we come to the end of the session.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When we opted for package 3 in late 2002, and decided, despite the stretch or overstretch of our armed forces that we have just been discussing, to make a large land contribution, which the Americans at the time militarily didn't think they strictly required, though for the most part they indicated it was welcome, did we do this in order to enhance our global standing as a country, politically and militarily, including the morale and status of our armed forces, that if

there was going to be a war going on, they wanted to show that they were part of it on the ground? Did we do it because we were afraid of the downside if we just did the package two, the air and sea and a bit of Special Forces, and looked like a bit of a weak ally of the United States and might be treated by them as such? Or did we do it because we reckoned that there would be some tangible benefits in terms of the very important relationship with the United States? We expected a return on this large investment.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: The last point, I think, is a sort of post hoc issue.

Firstly, I really don't think that we believed that a large-scale package would in itself create overstretch. We said that was sort of maximum effort, but that was within our capabilities. So I don't think we were straining too hard, given the situation we saw at that time in having package 3.

There are a whole combination of reasons for going for it, but if we believed, as I think the politicians did believe, that this was the right thing to be doing in terms of removing WMD threats from the region, in terms of changing -- I mean, this is an election day. So in terms of playing a role in shaping a better future for Iraq and its people, is the sort of way in which you can put it politically. I think that that was the foremost consideration, that we needed a contribution. If we believed it was the right thing to do, and that was a political judgment, that it was sensible for us to back that up with a capability consistent with that commitment.

We had learned, I think, from the Gulf War that it's when you commit ground forces in significant numbers that you really have influence, and that you don't have that level of influence if you simply produce air packages or maritime contributions.

Certainly we found in the Gulf war that our influence on overall events -- I'll come back to what I mean about influence -- was transformed once we committed ourselves to a land component, and I think that still influenced the thinking of people, certainly like me, ten years later when we were doing this.

It was a question of influence over the Americans in terms of having an influence about how the thing went forward. I think that was very important because the Americans were in a phase of unilateral action, and we saw ourselves as being able to influence these things in a way which would put the Americans into a multilateral framework with the UN. I think we were quite sincere about all of that. We saw this contribution as a way of channeling the American determination into a multilateral, coalition, UN-led activity, which we hoped would actually result in getting rid of these weapons, getting rid of the threat, but without having to actually go to war. And we thought by -- it sounds a paradox -- by demonstrating a full commitment, we were better able to influence the way in which the Americans behaved, and the way in which Saddam and his regime perceived the seriousness of our position.

So it was an ability to influence the Americans, an ability to influence perceptions of the Iraqis themselves.

Other factors of a sort of technical nature come into play. I think from the chiefs of staff point of view, they always said that, you know, we need to be large enough to be able to integrate ourselves properly with the Americans. We must be able to sustain and defend ourselves. We shouldn't be put in the position of expecting somebody else to defend us or sustain us, and that does itself influence the size of the package you wish to contribute. You should ask the military about that, but I think you will find they will tend to argue that they need to

be self-sustaining. So once you are into a land package, you tend to get quite big in terms of size, so that they can look after themselves.

I think that there was something of a concern to contribute at an early stage or not to be caught at a later stage. That was part of the sort of SDR philosophy, first in, first out philosophy, which had its limitations, but nevertheless was around at the time.

Linked to this, I think, was the idea that we would be better placed to influence the day after as well, if we actually were taking a significant role, in circumstances where we were not at all clear that the Americans had got good plans in place for that; our success in turning them into good plans, even though it was pretty limited. And of course at the end of the day, when it came to it, the Americans actually asked us for this package, when the northern option wasn't there, and they realised at that stage that they needed significant help with the southern approach, they actually effectively asked us for a force this size in January.

So I think the combination of political and military factors.

I think the idea that we would be able to sort of use it afterwards for influence on the Americans, you know -- I mean, I think there must have been a bit about we have got a privileged relationship with the United States, it's very important to us, we need to sustain that position as a long-term partner of the United States. You know, we tend to see the world in the same way, all those sorts of things. That must have been there at the back of some people's mind, probably people like me.

The idea that we should actually use it to get something back from the Americans specifically in return was very much after the operation. We had made this huge effort, you know, we

ought to try at this point to secure some objectives which were always there, which at that point seemed -- it seemed a better climate for trying to get some return. But that wasn't the reason for doing it in the first place.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's come on to the post hoc, though I would just say in parenthesis that the idea that we should secure some objectives, long held, in return for our commitment was one that Christopher Meyer, of course, had been pushing the previous year, as he told us in evidence, with regard to aviation and other items.

[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?
[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT:⁴ [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

⁴ In the exchange that followed, the witness explained that the military operation had brought to the fore a small number of existing issues, including intelligence co-operation, which would be of future benefit to the UK and should therefore be pursued with the US.

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED] ?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: * [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED].

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED].

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED] ?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I have gone into some detail because I'm explaining [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], but it's only one among many items, some of which --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: This is engraved on my heart. I don't need notes for this.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's a very useful information, and I don't want to go down all the list [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] though I should note, not least for the record, that the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. So he didn't have the full range of information.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Correct.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Which again is, I think, an unacceptable situation.

Given that we, as we keep emphasising, are here to learn lessons, with all the wisdom of hindsight, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] should we have made it a condition? Should we in the future make it a condition, that if we are going to join in an operation of this kind and put our own lives on the line, that we have much fuller access? You can't ask for 100 per cent access. We wouldn't give them 100 per cent access. But we should set fairly stringent requirements for the sharing of information, particularly battlefield information in realtime, because sometimes things came through to us that they had been through so many filters that they were not much use by the time they arrived.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I think the position is better now than it was. I certainly hope it is. I agree with you, that should be the natural assumption.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes, I felt that finally I got there [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED] So if we find ourselves in this situation again, this is something that we should keep in mind.

Did you feel that American military perceptions of our performance in MND south east and in Basra, particularly when things got really difficult there, 2006-ish -- well, that's after you had gone -- 2005/2006 --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: You are right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- were a contributory factor to this?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No. They may have become later, but not when I was there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I'm sorry. Remind me again --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Basra had been the point I was making and the general perception. Perhaps I can move on to a final --

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I don't think that was a problem for us. If

you want me to say a little bit about that, it was right that at the beginning we were quite arrogant. The Americans encouraged us to think this, and they looked on the UK as being particularly well placed to understand how to engage local populations and move from a war fighting posture to an engaged stabilisation and peace-keeping role. We were, after all, seeking to hand over to an interim Iraqi authority, and the Americans had the same view.

The only issue was how much the UN was involved in this process in fairly short order, and our experience in Northern Ireland and Malaya, and hearts and minds, contrasted with the industrial sort of army approach of the United States, particularly with the infantry, was very stark. We had also done well in the Balkans. Our troops would play football with the local lads, where the Americans would still go through in closed-down, locked-down vehicle mode. So there's a big contrast, and this was seen as a great plus for the UK in terms of how to handle the situation.

This was part of this issue about exemplar. Do you remember this word? I'm not quite sure who used it first, but what it meant, I think, a lot of it was we were very good from making this transition from war fighting to peace-keeping, and through to local control, and Northern Ireland was the epitome of that.

I suspect we traded on that for too long, and the Americans also traded on that for too long. Quite soon it became very clear that actually the problems they were facing in Baghdad were of an order of a completely different nature than the ones we had initially in Basra, and that our initial successes began to sour anyway, and that we found ourselves in a much more awkward position.

Firstly, the Americans were really suffering and were not very interested in listening to the Brits telling them how to be exemplars; and secondly, they were also learning fast. Americans

make a lot of mistakes, but they get there in the end, and they began to get very good at the same things, beginning with the Marine Corps, and today I think they are the best in the world at this type of activity.

But you are right, what began as a great strength of the UK became something of a liability.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Final question. Going much more widely, you were in the business of dealing for a lot of your professional career with the United States, including serving there, and in the last part of it, you had this experience of working on Iraq in which we were notionally joint occupiers, theoretically in a coalition, but in practice it looked much more, and felt much more from other evidence we have had, like a US run operation over which the junior coalition partner had rather little influence.

Does all of this experience lead you to any conclusions about the nature of this country's relationship with the United States, whether we should invest more in it, or we invest too much in it, or don't handle it the right way?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: I think it's very difficult to draw conclusions from this particular episode. I mean, I can only speak personally.

I think a lot of the problems that we found in the post-conflict phase were to do with some very special and rather dysfunctional circumstances within the US system itself. I was always surprised that I found the members of the interagency process, the NSC, State Department, as puzzled and bewildered about what was going on under the DOD lead as we were. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So there was a unique set of circumstances applying,
I think, in Iraq in 2003/2004/2005, - [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I think that's got a lot better since then,
but I think that one shouldn't necessarily read into this that
one is always doomed to disappointment if one works with the
United States. Quite the reverse.

I think it does mean that we should always do things in the
light of what we perceive our own interests to be, and to not
assume that by not pleasing somebody else, we will get any
benefit from it.

I don't believe that was what we did. I've heard it said
that Tony Blair didn't push hard enough for securing our own
interests in terms of what we were trying to achieve in Iraq, or
indeed in terms of the post-conflict situation. I think there's
something in that, I have to say. I think we could have used our
leverage more firmly with the United States, and I know this is
something Christopher Meyer believes. I don't think I take quite
such a stark view as he does, but I think there's a point there.

I think one of the problems is Blair would often say those
things to Bush. You know, you must work more closely with the
UN, or we must do this or that, we have to have closer
co-operation. Bush would agree and issue an instruction, and
nothing happened.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That comes back to the point about the nature
of this particular administration.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: So it does come back to the nature of this
particular administration. So I don't draw too many broad
conclusions about UK relations with the United States from it.

If I look at other areas, I think the nuclear co-operation,
for example, continues to be extraordinarily close and is of

great importance mutually. I believe that we live in a risk-based world now, not so much a threat-based world, but those risks are just as big as they ever were. So I think that's a fundamental element of our relationship with the United States which we would discard at our peril.

My tie covers all the political parties today.

I think the intelligence relationship with the US remains very close. You know, there does seem to be a very broad secular trend of work whereby we are probably not going to be quite as close as we have been in the past, and that may not be a bad thing, as long as both sides look to their interests and find that actually most of the time they are in common.

You may argue that Iraq has finally come good, and that we have actually achieved the objectives we set out, although the WMD wasn't there, and that objective was achieved, as you are aware, without having to be much of an effort. But you could argue that at last, after a great deal of pain and suffering, Iraq is a much better place, integrated now into the international community, in a way it was unlikely to have been otherwise.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are coming to the end of this session. I've got one follow-on question, actually, from what you have been discussing with Sir Roderic. It's this, from a private conversation, so not attributable, in France very recently. It was argued to us that for the French, if they had wanted to, and even for the British, the pace and cost of American military technology advancing was simply too much to stay with over the medium to long term.

I just wonder whether, despite the obstacles in the way of staying with the Americans in the military technology sphere, which you have been giving testimony about, you accept that. Is

there a tension between striving to keep up with the pace of American military technology and working with them and their systems on the one hand, and maintaining our own perhaps more flexible, though lower tech, capability to do our own operations on our own?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: No, I don't really accept that, actually, because the underlying technology is available on both sides of the Atlantic. I mean, if we were looking at what this means, it means, for example, we have now reached the end of air power in terms of the development of manned aircraft. What we are now seeing is probably the end of that technology. The next stage will be uninhabited vehicles, linked with manned aircraft. The Americans are ahead of us on stealth, but we have some capability there. But we certainly have the capability in Europe, although we would have to collaborate with the French, with the Italians, in order to have it. But we can develop these systems indigenously within Europe, without necessarily doing it with the United States.

If we look at land forces, I think we have the sensors, the radars, the technologies, not in the same quantities as the Americans, but with the same capability in relation to what we would need to do.

European collaboration is unfashionable at the moment, and I don't think we are going to see grand projects with three or four nations together, but perhaps bilaterally.

I really don't think, given the way in which technology has evolved, where it's moved out of the military sphere, and so much of it is now universally available commercial technology, this question of how you apply it, I don't think that holds true, actually. I don't subscribe to the view that the US are going to out-technology the rest of us and we might as well give up.

I would see it very differently; that because so much now is open architecture and civil technology, as long as Europe and European countries have the will, they will be able to sustain their military effect. That's a question of budgets more than technology, and that the real issues are the shift east and what India and China does, and to some extent the Middle East, rather than feel that we can't keep in step or keep up with the Americans. They will always be the leaders for the next 20 or 30 years, but it's mainly about volume and mass, rather than technological capability.

Sorry, that's got nothing to do with this. It just happens to be a personal view.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just turning to different strands of the conversation this afternoon, it's not so much a question of whether we can keep up, but that one of the drivers in our equipment programme and our operations is the desire to stay with the United States, to be able to work closely with them, partly justified in order to exert influence over what they can do, but we have to use quite a lot of that influence in order to sustain that capability in the first place.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Yes. I think that's fair, but I think one of the main lessons from Iraq, and to some extent from Afghanistan, is the limitations on the utility of military power, and so I suspect we will not see these sorts of things quite in the same form again, unless we have got a complementary political framework in which they can be accommodated.

We shall see what emerges from the Afghanistan operation. I'm just trying to think about counter IED technology, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Now, I'm not too pessimistic about that, but I think it will

need European collaboration and co-operation, as well as working with the United States, more than we have in the past.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we have come to the end of this session. You have given us some final reflections on both general and specific aspects of this, but are there any final comments which could only be made in this private setting that you wish to give us before we finally end?

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Well, I think -- thank you, Mr Chairman. I think you have given me a very broad canvas, and I have said things with rather more sort of force, when I should say these are opinions, rather than statements, ex-cathedra statements.

I'm looking for some notes that I did do for this very purpose, but I can't find them at the moment.

But I think the point I would have made would have been to come back to this issue of the importance in future of having good post-conflict apparatus in place, whenever we think of going into operations in future.

You know, we created our post-conflict reconstruction unit afterwards. We should have had that in place before. We do need departments to think through issues in a more integrated way than we have in the past.

As I say, I do believe that the Foreign Office put so much effort into ensuring that the UN track and -- the legal UN route with the proper resolutions and the UN framework happened, and they didn't have the plan B, which says we may have to go without that happening, how are we then going to ensure that this is properly supported, and DFID even more so.

In future, whether we see a National Security Council with more integrated behaviour among the departments, I don't know. But, for example, one of the biggest weaknesses in Iraq, which we haven't mentioned, is that we were looked to by the Americans to

provide police, to take on the role of training the Iraqi police. I'm not quite sure how that ever sort of came about because I don't think it's a particular MOD role. Poor old MOD were crashing around, saying we know a bit about this because we do have military policemen, and there are these chaps in Northern Ireland who are all arms trained, but we have no carabinieri in the UK. We should have been at that stage engaging the Home Office very thoroughly, if we're going to take this on. It would have been a Home Office lead to say how can we possibly achieve this objective? But there was none of that. I think we got two people to go there instead of 50.

Without that integrated planning between departments, I suspect we should not be going into these ventures in future.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sir Kevin, thank you very much indeed for this long and very helpful session.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Chairman. I found it much easier to speak in this forum than before.

THE CHAIRMAN: The only final sentence to utter, I think, is that the transcript of this hearing will be available here in this building for review when it is practicable for you to come in to do it, but I'm afraid we are not going to let it out of the building.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: And you will then, if you wish to use it in an open way, you will let me know?

THE CHAIRMAN: Of course we would.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Thank you. I might be able to comment on --

THE CHAIRMAN: But the essence of it is, unless something lies outside our protocol, it remains as a private record.

SIR KEVIN TEBBIT: Thank you very much indeed.

THE CHAIRMAN: With that, I'll close the session. Thank you.
(The hearing adjourned)

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