

Thursday, 3 June 2010

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE

THE CHAIRMAN: This morning we welcome Michael Laurie, head of intelligence collection for DIS at the material time and I will, if I may, ask you at the end of my little opening just to tell us how you got to be head of intelligence collection for DIS. You contacted the inquiry in January to comment on the position taken by Alistair Campbell during his evidence to us on 12 January and we will be asking you about that. We will also take the opportunity to ask about other issues arising involving the DIS.

The session is being held in private because we recognise much of the evidence in the areas we want to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's "Protocol on sensitive information", for example on the grounds of national security. We will apply the Protocol between the Inquiry and HMG 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.

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 based on their recollection of events and we check what we hear against

the papers.

I remind every witness they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons on this occasion we won't be releasing copies of the transcript outside our offices upstairs here. But of course you can have access whenever convenient to you to review it.

So I wonder, before we start the questions, if you would give us a brief history of the career path that led you to director general of intelligence collection.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, thank you very much.

I joined the army from school and became an engineer but soon transferred to the Intelligence Corps and most of my career was involved either in

[REDACTED]. I headed up the Intelligence Corps at one stage and then my only experience in the Ministry of Defence was after that, I had an appointment called "Director of Joint Warfare" which was anything to do with joint operations, before I became Director General of Intelligence Collection.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we share a sad memory from your time as head of the Int Corps and the Chinook crash.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, let's turn to Sir Martin to start the questioning. Martin?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Perhaps I could just start by asking you, in 2002, how high in the general intelligence gathering area was Iraqi WMD?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I don't recall the exact priorities in the documentation, but there were three things

that I was dealing with at the time in the DIS.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The second was Afghanistan and Iraq was the third.

During 2002, over the summer, Iraq became a higher and higher priority and we were devoting every collection asset that was relevant to Iraq.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of the efforts made in the summer and autumn of 2002, in your very helpful submission to us you make reference to photo reconnaissance and can I ask, I think you used the phrase that it was your top priority?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can you tell us something about that and in particular the relationship between evidence we have heard with regard to photographing in the no fly zone and photographing in the areas between, which clearly were of tremendous importance?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, I mean, for geography, the no fly zone was not so important to us because there were no troops on the ground

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].¹ I suppose the bottom line is that if there was a shortcoming anywhere it was in the analysis capability we had and the number of people that could analyse the photographs, not the photographs. But there was still a limitation and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How much did this photo reconnaissance really tell us in terms of what was on the ground?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean it didn't answer all the questions and it didn't tell us as much as we were being asked.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], but it can only see what it sees and so it cannot tell you if something is not there, which is quite important in the context of WMD.

THE CHAIRMAN: It can tell you that something has changed, or something was there and isn't there anymore, or something has arrived?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Oh yes, absolutely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

¹ The redacted text covered a discussion of the available photo-reconnaissance assets

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. So, yes, the answer to the question is we were doing everything.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].²

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Now, in terms of your concerns at having found so little, how did you flag this, as it were, lack of evidence to the rest of the intelligence committee?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean we were reporting on what we could find and we were being asked the whole time, "Can you not find more? Why can't you find more?", and I think there was an assumption that there was stuff there but we were not capable of finding it. I mean the answers were, in a way, exactly as I've said: you can only see what is there
[REDACTED].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So in a sense there was no way that you could assure people that because you couldn't find things, there weren't things there?

² The redacted text covered a discussion of detection of buried material

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, no, and there were other explanations: stuff might have been taken abroad, it might have been dismantled.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Right. You told us in your submission that the February/March 2002 dossier -- I think your words were, "was rejected because it did not make a strong enough case".

I really have two questions on that. First of all, given the evidence that was in the dossier, what case did you feel it did make and who was it who rejected it?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes. I mean, I don't know because I wasn't conscious of the production of that. It was something that was being put together. What I do know is that people -- I mean Joe French came back from some JIC meeting and said, you know, that dossier which was the four country dossier did not make a case for war and we are going to be doing this all again and we need to collect more information. So over the summer the pressure sort of built up and up to try to collect more.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So already in February/March there was this case for war?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, I mean we were quite clear on that. I'm not saying that was good or bad, it was just the fact: the purpose of this thing was to make a case for war.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I wonder if I can come back on one or two questions [REDACTED].

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, me too, after you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you want to go first?

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED].

THE CHAIRMAN: [REDACTED].

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: [REDACTED].

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, right.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: At the strategic level there was no real need and the risk of deploying assets like that were too great.

THE CHAIRMAN: I heard a tale on the Butler committee --

[REDACTED] -- that a compound was identified by satellite imagery which looked as though it had all the characteristics of a WMD manufacturing capability with dog runs and all the rest of it and it turned out to be a chicken farm and the fences were only about 3 inches high, because from satellite you couldn't tell that they were 3 inches rather than 30 feet. Now is that wrong?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: That's wrong.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. It's a tale in circulation.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], so, yes, I think that's wrong.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Most chickens I know can jump more than three inches anyway and certainly the foxes can.

Can I just distinguish between the different categories that get wrapped up rather misleadingly among the terms "weapons of mass destruction" and what you might or might not be able to detect [REDACTED] in each of them. Perhaps if we take the simplest one first, BW activity: what would you expect [REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: There was intelligence about a trailer, or a set of trailers, so we were hunting for the trailers and the various plants that had been reported where the manufacture was being conducted, there was tracking of what activity there was in those places, and there was work going on. One couldn't do more than that.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And they would be fairly isolated places if they were doing something dangerous with BW probably, rather than buried in the city?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Not necessarily, because a lot of this stuff is produced in pharmaceutical laboratories, I think, which can be anywhere.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay, and the trailers that Colin Powell showed in his evidence to the UN in 2003 in February, which were not very clear, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I don't recall us ever definitively from our side being able to say, "Those are BW production trailers".

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And then CW, what would you see there?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean almost the same -- I mean the same answer really. It's production facilities and activity at them.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now if we move into bigger stuff: nuclear. If there was a significant programme of developing nuclear weaponry, presumably that would leave a much bigger trace?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean, I think the military end, or certainly the DIS end of nuclear, is much more on the weapons side; [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So there are other sources as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: [REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think we will certainly want to come on to the other sources in a minute. Just sort of to pin down -- because up to now we've heard very little about photo reconnaissance. From other witnesses we have had quite a lot of evidence about some of the sources, although not all of those you mentioned.

On missiles, I mean they are fairly visible and the information that was then acted on about rocket motors, that was stuff that you were picking up and therefore when the rocket motors were actually discovered by the inspectors, that was something that was not a surprise to you presumably?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean the rocket motors was, I think, quite historical, because for some time -- and I don't recall, but for some time before the war we had not seen any missiles or rocket motors or anything like that. I mean the only evidence, I think, that we were able to produce was missile test beds that had been constructed to test these things on and that's pretty fragmentary, really, because I think one had been built but had never been commissioned. This was one that was described in the dossier as being "new" but it wasn't useable.

So our knowledge, once again, was quite peripheral, you know, we did not have pictures of missiles and trailers.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You listed your priorities as being [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. How did the picture in Iraq compare with what you were picking up on Iran, North Korea and Libya?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Although in our lists of proliferators, including in the first draft of the dossier, we took all four countries together and by and large we regarded Iraq as in third or fourth place in the list of four of concern, so why were we focusing more attention on Iraq than the others?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Well, that was the direction we were given after that dossier, you know, there was a momentum.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, but if you go back to the beginning of the year, I mean say at the beginning of 2002 were we putting more effort into Iraq than the others?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes we were, because -- I mean I think partly from the DIS point of view because of the ROCKINGHAM cell which was briefing the inspectors and
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. John?

THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. I think you picked up all the points that I had except one just possibly. Going back to the Cuban missile crisis where the publication of photographs from aerial reconnaissance was crucial for making the case to the UN, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: [REDACTED]. We were asked to produce photographs for the dossier.

THE CHAIRMAN: Indeed, the public one?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

THE CHAIRMAN: This is the picture on page 29?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Absolutely, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, well we've got on to the dossier. You clearly had involvement in that particular aspect of it, but more generally what was your involvement throughout the preparation period up to September?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean my involvement was to collect the data that went to the defence, intelligence and analytical staff for them to do the analysis. So there was a constant to and fro of selecting new targets to look at and going back to old targets. I wasn't involved in any of the drafting or reviewing of it right until September.

THE CHAIRMAN: You said in your submission to us that you knew at the time that the purpose of the dossier was to make a case for war. I mean the diplomatic and political background is very complicated, isn't it?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: There is no formal decision to mount an invasion, there is the objective, as some will have it, of putting maximum pressure on the Saddam regime by building up military capability and threat, there is also the need to bring about, if at all possible, compliance with the UN Security Council resolutions all of which, as it were, fold into a dossier being published. But you say very clearly you knew its purpose was to make a case for war. Does that imply an assumption that the decision had been taken to go to war, or that it was simply making a presentation of an argument that would build political and diplomatic pressure?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean I think it's yes to both. I mean certainly from the American point of view -- and I went to America a lot -- four times in one month -- the Americans right through 2002 were quite clear that they were going to go

to war, so there was a momentum anyway behind this. I don't know at what stage the decision was reached in the UK, publicly or not, but yes, we were quite clear that this was to make a case.

THE CHAIRMAN: How do you come to know that, other than by inference? By specific direction, written or oral?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean the words were used. That's one thing I do recollect.

THE CHAIRMAN: By?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean this was Joe French coming back from the JIC. You know, there was no point in producing a dossier which did not say anything.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sure. What about the argument that was put to us in evidence by Alistair Campbell, that it was not the case for war, it was the reason for mounting concern and by implication there to mount pressure on Saddam to comply?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Erm -- yes --

THE CHAIRMAN: Are we just talking semantics here?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I think we are, yes, we are talking semantics here.

THE CHAIRMAN: But your concern in sending us a submission was that you thought that Alistair Campbell's evidence misrepresented things?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Well, I think behind my concern is the line that "we read the intelligence and made a decision on that and then the intelligence turned out to be wrong" and I don't think that is fair. The intelligence in JIC papers was balanced and cautious. The dossier was more certain and therefore to imply that things put in the dossier were wrong

because of the certainty expressed in the dossier is not fair to the intelligence people.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's viewed from the standpoint of collection and, up to a point, JIC assessments.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the other hand, we've had evidence from other witnesses -- neutral I think you would describe such witnesses as being -- of two things. One, the dossier language -- leave aside the foreword -- was consistent with the stream of JIC assessments, but also that the dossier was doing something broader: it was an appraisal of the sum of assessments but not inconsistent with them. But your standpoint was that it was actually inconsistent?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I just feel it was more certain. I mean people criticise JIC papers because of the language used in JIC papers and at JIC meetings more time is spent deciding whether something should be "probably" or "possibly" than anything else, but that is probably necessary. When you get to the dossier those words are removed and of course there is one implication in that: the suggestion that the real intelligence was better than in the dossier, when in fact it wasn't quite as good as in the dossier.

THE CHAIRMAN: Again, you will have read the Butler committee -- on which I sat -- account. Do you broadly accept that analysis in the Butler report --

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes I do.

THE CHAIRMAN: -- that nuances were lost, the intelligence was asked to bear more weight than it could, but nonetheless there was not actually physical disjunction between JIC assessments on the one hand and the contents of the dossier, as opposed to,

perhaps, the foreword?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, I agree with that, I agree with that. But people should make decisions based on the JIC assessments not on a dossier for public presentation.

THE CHAIRMAN: That of course raises the question, JIC assessments are written for a highly professional audience and readership and even ministers, who come to know them over a period of time through exposure to them, read them with a different eye than the general public and the task of the dossier was to expose the intelligence so far as could be done to an uninstructed audience, a public audience.

Leave aside for a moment, and without prejudice to whether it was the case for war because a war was already determined or whether it was to make the case to mount pressure on Saddam, your judgment is, from the standpoint of an intelligence professional, that the public, uninstructed readership of the dossier would get a false picture?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes, yes. They would feel that the intelligence we had was better than we really did have.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm still anxious to know how, other than by Joe French reporting back from JIC discussions of the dossier, how it was that the DIS was placed under direction, if you like, to maximise not only its collection efforts but also to maximise the assessments to be founded on those efforts.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean, I used the word before "momentum". I feel that, looking back on it, because we were so close to the Americans we were heading down this path and all the work was directed towards collection and analysis to support military operations. It's as straightforward as that.

I think a big department like ours, in something like the

DIS, it develops a sense of direction and momentum.

THE CHAIRMAN: How much of that, as a matter of interest -- because you mentioned your several visits to the States, [REDACTED], that was throughout the summer and autumn of 2002?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Two questions about that. Did you sense, as it were, a mounting certainty and belief in that part of the US intelligence community you were in contact with that the war was inevitable and did you sense that the pressure was on them to maximise the evidence of Saddam's WMD?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean I wouldn't say "mounting", because as soon as Bush came to power there was the sense in the American military that they were going to sort Saddam Hussain out [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you mean that pre-9/11?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, this is 2002, during 2002.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So after 9/11 then?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

THE CHAIRMAN: I've got two other points, if I may, on the dossier before we move on. One is the foreword and its relationship to the contents of the dossier. One can argue angels on pinheads about the content and its relationship to the stream of JIC assessments. The foreword is a different document

and John Scarlett in evidence has in a sense disowned responsibility for the content and language of the foreword. When they eventually published, did the language of the foreword create real concern among your colleagues and indeed in your own mind? It talks about "beyond doubt" and so on.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean it didn't at the time and I suppose at the time the dossier was not the most important document. For us, the JIC papers were the important document. If one goes back, you know, that's what ministers should have been making decisions on: JIC papers, not the dossier. So the dossier was out there for public consumption and in a way the minute it was produced one sort of moved on.

So no, I mean I cannot say at the time -- I mean, you know, at the time I do recall being -- not very concerned, but noting that the missile test bed we described in the dossier we described as "new" and it was new but it wasn't working, so the word "new" sort of implied "this is just about ready to go". But it wasn't -- one sort of said it is not important in itself and it doesn't matter because the JIC papers did actually describe it properly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Indeed, yes.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: So there was no alarm at the time which we didn't report or anything like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: I mean, what prompted you, you told us, to put in your submission, for which I thank you, was what Alistair Campbell said, but he too said when the dossier was published it was indeed regarded by the media as dull, as cautious and as unexciting until the storm broke much later. I suppose my last question really is, is there any reason to suppose that the Cabinet, key ministers within the Cabinet, in a sense based their eventual decision to go to Parliament on the eve of the

invasion, to get authority in effect, was in any sense related to the language and tone of the dossier as opposed to what they believed from reading JIC assessments right up to D-Day?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Well, I don't know that and I can't know that, but --

THE CHAIRMAN: But you went on contributing to JIC assessments right up through to March, long after the September dossier?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, absolutely. I think it's probably partly to do with the headlines in the dossier. You know, there were some headlines which jumped out -- the 45 minutes, the uranium -- and it is unfortunate, the coincidence, that they were all wrong but I think they were all separately wrong and it was a coincidence. But they did produce headlines which, of course, for the media and ministers and so on presented some quite good sound bites.

THE CHAIRMAN: As opposed to those intelligence reports which contribute to the collective ministerial decision-taking, which is a different process in itself -- save insofar as the public may be influenced by the publication -- you did mention 45 minutes so there was a great confusion in the public mind, wasn't there, I think --

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: -- certainly in the one headline in a newspaper. It must have been very clear within the DIS that this was about a tactical battlefield weapon and a deployment period from stocks held quite close to front line to deployment, none of which of course is brought out in the dossier. If it had been, would you have been less unhappy?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Well, I mean, I wasn't unhappy at the time, but I think in hindsight it would be better that there

had been some more careful analysis and people in the DIS had had a chance to comment on that, but of course there was a rush at the time quite understandably, because the whole drafting only took place over 10 or 15 days or something like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Well, I will close, because I'm going to hand over to Sir Roderic, but the question that the Butler committee wrestled with and didn't really, I think, find the answer to, is, can you actually use secret intelligence with all its uncertainties, patchiness, professional underpinnings, for public consumption? Is it do-able or is it better not even to try?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I think it is better not to try. I mean the dossier has proved how difficult it is. Yes, I believe it is better not to try.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Rod?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Perhaps I can just come back on one point on the dossier before we move on. The sentence in the foreword that Sir John alluded to, can I just read it to you and then ask you as an intelligence professional to say how you would characterise it? This is from the Prime Minister's foreword:

"What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, that he continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons and that he has been able to extend the range of his ballistic missile programme."

Now, was that a justifiable encapsulation?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, because I don't believe it was beyond doubt. I suppose there were three bits to that. I mean, first of all, there was the language used by Saddam, who I think probably liked to portray that he was more capable than

he was. There were clear intentions, both historical and fairly recent at the time, of their wish to have these capabilities, but neither the inspection teams nor ourselves really found a lot of evidence that this stuff was being produced. So capabilities and intentions are very different things and there was no doubt about the intentions --

THE CHAIRMAN: Confirmed by the ISG after the event.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Confirmed, yes, but there was certainly doubt about capabilities. So I think, yes, I mean that's the case.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So "continuing production of chemical and biological, continuing efforts to develop nuclear"; now if you had been the chairman of the JIC and this had been shown to you in draft, would you have queried that sentence?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: As an intelligence officer, yes I would.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, I mean one has to have courage and stand up and say "I can't sign up to that", yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If I can now look a bit wider. We focused very much on the sort of intelligence leading up to the dossier, but from spring and summer of 2002, we were into the developing process of actually planning for the contingency -- it wasn't a decision at that stage -- of sending our forces to Iraq, possibly including ground forces.

Were any requirements at that point placed on the DIS to feed into this planning process as to what the troops would expect to find when they got there?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean, the regional desks in the

DIS were always, as a routine, working on updating their knowledge of ground forces, terrain, all the sort of stuff that ground forces need. So that was routine.

But the big focus for that really was the Permanent Joint Headquarters, who are responsible for doing that for troops on the ground, so that's where the effort would be and they lever off the DIS, and also they get feeds from all the sources themselves. So I suppose what I would say is that the focus for support for the ground troops would be more the PJHQ at the time.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the PJHQ's prime source of information on the Iraqi order of battle and Iraqi capabilities, or the likelihood of Iraq using particularly CW or possibly BW against the invasion forces, would DIS have been a source, or the prime source, or specifically tasked to assist them in this area?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean the PJHQ would have asked and placed it as a requirement, so they would get a feed on that. But a lot of the tasking and the requests for information all come together and everybody is getting everything. So the PJHQ is getting the same stuff as the DIS and making their own interpretations.

THE CHAIRMAN: I recall from the Butler committee that DIS is described as the only all-source analytic and assessment capability within our system. So although PJHQ may be getting feeds from all sorts of different quarters, DIS is the only all-source analysis --

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Well the PJHQ intelligence people describe themselves as all-source as well because they get stuff from all the sources.

THE CHAIRMAN: But they don't collect it?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: They don't collect it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do they have as strong analytical abilities as the DIS?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean not as large, but for the size and the task at the time it was right, and it was the nature of the people who were designed to do what the PJHQ needed to do. A very large chunk of the DIS are the scientific and technical people who spend years and years working on the same problems in great detail, whereas the people in the PJHQ are very much more, today's intelligence for tomorrow's operations.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In this all-source operation, were we making the fullest possible use of all sources including open source intelligence, the academic community, what the UN had accumulated, what the inspectors had accumulated, were all of these sources being fed into the mix?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes, yes. I mean the DIS had an open source bureau whose job was to collect open source material, they were well used to going out to the scientific community and bring in experts and seeking advice. I never sensed that there was any weakness there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Part of the common assessment was that there was a significant risk that Saddam Hussain would use chemical weapons against the invading forces --

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- and there was no dispute about that?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: There was no dispute about that at all. I mean he had used them in his own country and, from my point of view, in my previous job I had been responsible for NBC

protection and everything and had been involved in the whole immunisation thing and so on for previous operations. So, yes, there was an expectation that he would use chemicals or biological weapons if he needed to.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Do you recall if DIS were asked to look at the situation after the campaign, after Saddam had been defeated?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No. I mean I don't recall that, but I do recall at the time that there was a general feeling that we weren't paying as much attention to follow-on operations and what would happen as we should have done. I clearly remember an American document, which was a big strategic planning document, and phase four was called "The aftermath" and it was one paragraph at the tail end of this, whereas actually probably the aftermath should be the first part of the document and in the greatest detail. So I believe in general there wasn't enough planning for afterwards.

THE CHAIRMAN: And, again, who would be the appropriate customer in the British system to look for phase four intelligence and assessment? PJHQ?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I think it should be -- no, because I mean the political side is -- you know, in the MoD it should be the director of operations.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have had a lot of evidence from a variety of witnesses that the situation that we discovered in Iraq, with the Americans, after the campaign -- the state of the infrastructure, the state of society -- was far, far worse than anybody had expected. Now, would it have been part of DIS's brief to gather together and assess such information as would

come from your different sources into your hands about the state of Iraqi infrastructure, particularly things like power generation, water, communications and so on?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes. I mean, I don't know how large a part of the brief it was, but there certainly were teams that were working on infrastructure. I mean this was partly to do with military operations, you know, how do you take the infrastructure out if you need to in mounting your attack and then what is available afterwards -- power, duration, capability -- so there were people looking at this. I don't know how large the effort was, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: [REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE:

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

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But we [REDACTED] still seem to have been surprised by what we found, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Does that surprise you?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: [REDACTED] -- no, I mean it didn't surprise me, because I think the atmosphere

on the intelligence side was really focused up until the moment of invasion, you know, doing the invasion.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the wrong questions were being asked. If the intelligence community had been asked to provide a better picture of the post-invasion situation it probably had some information there it could have drawn on but it wasn't being tasked to do that.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: That is true, yes, that is true.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean Iraq wasn't a closed country in the sense that the Soviet Union was closed or that North Korea is closed. You've got people traveling in and out quite a lot, I believe some other countries had diplomatic representation there, we had diplomatic visitors there, and of course you had a lot of Iraqi exiles around the place. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes we were, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And was that useful information?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, it was. I mean the debriefing team was quite successful in producing stuff and people were very happy with it. But I mean, to be honest, I'm not conscious of a major effort being put into looking at the infrastructure and the state of the country afterwards.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Infrastructure would have been a concern for the fighting phase --

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: For the fighting phase, yes, but not beyond that.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It should have been beyond that, because people were conscious of the fact that, having run the campaign,

we then had to do something with the place we were in afterwards.

Overall, not just on the infrastructural question or the state of Iraq, did you find after the conflict that the information that had come through the debriefing teams from [REDACTED] had been reasonably accurate?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean I saw very little of it because my job was to manage the teams and the production, not verify that it was all good. But people were very happy with the reports that came in. I mean very often these are quite small -- this is very low level stuff, because you are talking about a [REDACTED] who was a computer programmer or a telephone engineer or something like that. So I mean I don't recall any great insights which people went rushing around saying, "We've got a fantastic report".

THE CHAIRMAN: We have been talking pretty much about fairly recently arrived refugees and exiles, but there was of course a longstanding and high level emigre community in this country which again had their contacts and I just wonder whether that was being drawn on at all?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Not by us, I mean I wasn't conscious of it.

THE CHAIRMAN: SIS expressed the view that they were very mistrustful of such sourcing, but that wouldn't have been a concern for DIS anyway?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When, from January onwards of 2003, it was clear, subject to final decision, that we were going to send in a large land contingent, as well as a sea and air contingent, and that this was going to go into the south -- albeit at that

time it wasn't clear that we were going to end up running the four southern provinces, but we knew where we were going to go and we knew we were going to have a lot of boots on the ground, were specific requirements placed upon DIS to focus on that area and provide information particularly about Basra and its surrounds?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, they were. I mean, to put it in context, you know, the DIS is an organisation that sort of grew up during the Cold War, at a time when no intelligence was passed out, it was all compartmentalised and troops were never going to operate, so there was no process or culture for the DIS producing information packs for troops that were about to deploy. Afghanistan was probably the first time that it happened and it was not done well.

THE CHAIRMAN: It didn't happen in Gulf One then?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: It didn't happen in Gulf One, no. I mean there was lots of criticism of that.

But in 2003 the DIS was doing it, it was beginning to happen, and I do know from contacts that it has got better and better and people are very happy with it now. But this was the first time, I think, that we were using serious technology to support troops on the ground, because I remember clearly, just as an example, 3D virtual reality models of Basra being given to PJHQ to pass to the troops so they would know what it would look like as they were driving along the road into it. So it was definitely happening.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think my final question is a very broad one. If you cast your mind back to the sort of decision period -- which really, I suppose, means from, for the UK, somewhere between the autumn of 2002 and March 2003 -- when our policy was based on the perception that there was a growing, to

use the word used by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons after the dossier was published, a growing threat from Saddam Hussain; that the containment methods of the previous twelve years would not be sufficient to deal with this threat in the period ahead; that there was evidence that we believed that he had weapons of mass destruction and programmes to develop further weapons of mass destruction as well as a proven intent to use them where he could, because he had done it in the past; were you and your colleagues in the DIS convinced at that stage that this was a sufficiently serious case that we needed to act on it, that we just couldn't, as it were, continue to let it go on for a further period of years in the way that it had in the preceding period? I mean you had an awful lot of information about it. How convinced were you that this threat was so serious that it required action?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I was convinced that action was required. I think that I would say probably the intelligence was not the thing that really mattered. So the whole intelligence case for war was not the most important. What was most important at the time was that there were a number of rogue states there who were desperately trying to produce WMD capabilities -- the four we've talked about. After 9/11 there was the risk of non-state actors doing exactly the same and Bin Laden had been quite clear that that was what he wanted to do, so there was a perception that the world was going to become a very much more dangerous place, so there was certainly the need to do something. Saddam Hussain was clearly a case of somebody who had the intention of doing it and proved that he would be prepared to do it, and constantly spurned all attempts to curtail that or contain him, and so it seemed to me entirely reasonable to put a stop to it.

So I have no doubts about the decision. The fact that afterwards it hasn't worked out as well as we hoped doesn't matter. I mean so far as the decision is concerned, it was entirely reasonable and, as I said, the intelligence was not necessarily the most important driver of the decision.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were convinced by the strategic case, the geopolitical case?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But so far as the intelligence was concerned, as an intelligence professional, had our intelligence over the two, three, four years up to 2003 shown any significant change in what we believed his capabilities to be?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, I don't believe it had. No, I don't believe it had.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It had not had any significant evidence that would justify an intelligence based case that, hey, this guy has become so much more dangerous that we've got to deal with him now?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, it had not developed.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. Martin, any final questions?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Yes, I have a question. When you were talking about your criticism of the September dossier, you mentioned the influence it would have on ministers, but ministers were receiving briefings -- for example, Gordon Brown told us of four briefings he had had on either side of the dossier. So my question is, from the point of view of these briefings, which were based on the JIC assessments and came from your materials, did you feel that those assessments and those

briefings based on them were strong? I mean quite irrespective of the argument about the dossier and foreword to the dossier, I mean these were regular and detailed --

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Well, I mean I can't answer that because I only remember seeing the JIC assessments on paper and not what people were then briefed -- whether they were a precis of those or verbal briefs. So I don't know how people interpreted them at the time.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But the assessments themselves, I mean; if you had been reading them not as somebody who had been involved in writing them?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: I mean coming at it from the point of view of being an intelligence officer, the JIC assessments are very cautious in their judgments and when they point out that things were single sources on which they could not place reliability, you know, you really do want to start looking for other material to justify that. I think that the JIC papers over that period gave a very fair picture of the situation.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Which was essentially one of caution and doubt?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: I've got a final question, which is timely in the sense we've got a new government with new ministers in charge of all these things. Is it satisfactory that they should see a stream of the most carefully assessed and expressed intelligence assessments without any background, briefing, training, exposure, in how to read, interpret and understand professional intelligence product? They have to learn it by osmosis insofar as they learn it at all and, by definition,

osmosis takes time. Is there a gap there in our arrangements for preparing ministers for their responsibilities?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, because I mean I was involved in briefing ministers within days of them coming to office and I was conscious that most of it was going completely over their heads however simplified one tried to make it, because they have no previous knowledge of this at all, especially when you get into WMD, military intelligence, you know, they are technical areas. I mean I suppose the answer is there should be some sort of training or briefing before they start seeing papers to understand this. It also may be that JIC language -- people need a sort of glossary or a guide stuck on the front cover of every paper so that they know what it means.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, thank you. Thank you very much.

Are there any final comments you would like to offer us that we haven't covered in the course of this last hour?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: No, I mean I haven't come to this with any sense of political purpose or anything like that, I just -- it was purely because I would like some balance against the argument that we made the decision based on the intelligence and the intelligence was wrong. I'm not sure that's quite fair. The decision was based on other factors as well and justified on those at the time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Well, in that case thank you very much indeed, Mr Laurie. Can I just remind you that there will be a transcript available very soon. It will need to be read in this building, at your convenience to review it whenever you find it convenient. With that, I will end this session. Oh, I beg your pardon, one other thing. Do you mind if we publish in a list of private witnesses -- not publishing the transcripts obviously -- if we may include your name in that?

MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL LAURIE: Yes, I don't have any problems with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. That now closes the session.

(The session closed)

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