SIS5[1]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I'll open this session a touch ahead of time with a welcome to [SIS5] [redacted].

SIS5: Thank you indeed.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The session is being held in private because we recognise much of the evidence on the areas we want to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in our Protocol on Sensitive Information -- for example, on grounds of international relations or national security. In particular, we want to use this session to explore issues covered by classified documents.

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.

The important point is that 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 would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in our letter to you.

We recognise every witness gives evidence based on their recollection of events. We are of course checking what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

I remind every witness on every occasion that they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect

[1] This officer is referred to as SIS5 throughout the Inquiry's documentation.

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that the evidence they have given is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons, on this occasion we will not release the transcript outside this building. So at your convenience, please come here to review it.

With that, let's start the questions. Perhaps, fairly briefly, could you tell us the roles you held on which you worked on Iraq related operations during our period, January 2001 to mid-2009. What were you doing, and what were the responsibilities?

SIS5: [2] [redacted]

I then went from that post at the beginning of December 2004 to take up a new position [redacted] which was essentially to look at the implementation across the service of the recommendations coming out from the Butler Review.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could you speak up a bit?

SIS5: [redacted]

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you very much. Perhaps I could start with a few questions following the Butler Committee's work, on which I sat, to ask about the implementation of it.

Could you, just for our best understanding, tell us a little bit about source validation and the distinction between source validation and validation of actual intelligence reporting?

SIS5: I think the critical element of validation of intelligence reporting actually is understanding of the source and validation of the source. So in a sense one is built on the other.

But the foundation stone in Humint, human intelligence, is having a deep and constant understanding of who your agents are as individuals, and against that background, understanding what it is they can and can't do for you, what access they have to what information, what weight you might therefore place on what it is they are telling you, the information they provide, and what it is that realistically you might ask them to do.

The critical point, I think, here is that it's not a sort of static snapshot process. It has to be a process, an evolutionary process, because as we are dealing with people, people change.

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People change just as they go through life. So things that might have motivated them to work with us at one time in their life, actually, as they see the world differently, events occur,

[2] The witness outlined his career.

actually their motivation might change. From being honest and accurate and reliable reporters, for reasons unconnected with our immediate relationship with them, they might become unreliable.

Unless you constantly have a wider understanding of the person you are dealing with, so that you appreciate how their lives are changing, how their views of the world are changing, how their understanding of their relationship with us is changing, then there is a risk that at some point during that relationship, either they will be telling you things that actually they don't have real access to, or you will be asking them to do things that are unrealistic, or you will simply fail to appreciate that their motivation and fundamental basis for their relationship with you has changed. So it's a constant process of evaluating who they are, what they are doing and whether they can be relied on to report accurately.

Although it's a constant process, to ensure that it's something that is properly looked at, it is captured in a formal structure[3] [redacted]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Has that always been the practice?

SIS5: [redacted] The reality is it wasn't happening, and it wasn't happening with due diligence and with the regularity that it should have been happening, and I think there are a number of reasons for that.

[3] The witness explained that important cases were now regularly evaluated.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. Butler goes into that a little bit, resourcing, whatever.

Could you say a little bit about how you actually validate subsources, where a known reliable agent, perhaps of longstanding, who is still considered wholly reliable, is operating a network of his own?

SIS5: Yes. That is difficult. Actually, one of the sort of broader lessons that very much pulled out from the Iraq experience is the danger of having chains of subsources, people talking to people talking to people talking to your agent, and eventually producing intelligence that gets reported back. So just as a sort of point of principle, we don't like subsourcing chains that go back more than [redacted].

How do you then validate [redacted]? There are a number of ways for that. One is that actually, in an ideal world, we would like to [redacted]. Actually, in an ideal world, [redacted]. On other occasions [redacted] where it's just not realistic, it can't.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: And the subsource might be an unconscious subsource, even though the agent is fully conscious?

SIS5: Very often is an unconscious subsource. Not always. Sometimes they might have a sentiment, if not a knowledge, that their information is being passed back to HMG in some form, but usually they are unconscious, unaware of what's happening to the information they are passing on to the source.

So if we can't actually [redacted], ways of testing and

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checking them will be [redacted] and looking for collateral [redacted] and over time one would build up a picture of consistency and understanding of whether the subsource is likely to be accurate.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Is it ever feasible or useful to do, as it were, [redacted]?

SIS5: Yes, and we do do that. We will ask people [redacted] If you look at [redacted] the [redacted] [source validation] tests that we now routinely apply, and this very much followed on the Butler recommendations, within that we would include asking people [redacted].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just one side note, to get it out of the way. It came up in Butler. It comes up in the ISC working sometimes. There was, I think, a suggestion at one time that a single source for a stream of intelligence reporting was unsafe to rely on. That, I think, has been answered, but I would like to know what the current view is.

SIS5: There are occasions where, given the difficulty of the target and the circumstances in which we operate, the number of people who hold that information, have access to that information, where we may find that we have only a single source and a single subsource reporting on an issue.

That is not something we like. It is something that we will test and check and look at, and it is something which we will want to make our most senior policy level customers aware of if particular weight is being put on that.

But there are circumstances [redacted] where some areas of

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access we have one source.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Looking up the system to, say, a JIC assessment, which now will have an intelligence base box in the assessment, would that draw attention particularly to a single source if that was what was involved?

SIS5: The assessment staff would be aware of it, and the rubric they then use in the assessment base box on a JIC assessment is that we have limited human coverage, and in some [of the most highly classified] assessments, in terms of the discussion around the assessment, we probably make that clear that it was a single source.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just two other things from me. One is you mentioned early on that the process of validation is one that has to be continually refreshed and rebuffed, but the principles remain pretty stable and settled. So it's a matter for each generation, as it were, to refresh the system.

SIS5: Yes. I think it's also a matter of, in some cases, technology. [redacted] So, for example, [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Taking the whole of the Iraq experience, really from 2001 if not much earlier, right up to the end of our engagement, the lessons learned aspect is what this Inquiry is about. In a sense Butler picks up some of those, but it's now five or six years ago.

Has there been a formal disciplined exercise of lessons learned at any point since the key Iraq events?

SIS5: Within SIS?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Within SIS, yes.

SIS5: There were, I think, [redacted] papers which pulled together some of what are called underlying issues. I think Butler looks at what I call the sort of immediate symptoms and issues. I think there were some deeper underlying issues which were looked at [redacted] and on the back of that, whether [redacted] and so on, have been put in place.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I was going to ask about training in particular, because I think there was a history from an earlier age that training of new officers would include key lessons learned from major experiences in the service, and I wondered whether Iraq had become part of that legacy.

SIS5: Yes. It has in the sense that the principal cases that actually both went less well, badly, we got wrong, and other cases that actually we got right, are given as cases studies in training, and the lessons then drawn from that around the pitfalls to avoid, those are extensive case studies on training.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Is there one place we could find, as it were, a description of this work? I don't think we've found it yet.

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SIS5: There are documents in the case studies which are used on training courses.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Okay.

SIS5: Those are available.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thanks very much for that. Anything else before we move on, on the basic validation issue?

SIS5: No.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In that case, can I turn to Sir Roderic Lyne?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I want to sort of move one step up the chain from validation to the [requirements] function. We found very useful the report that was written by [SIS12][4] in late 2004 on Butler follow-up, which indeed led to the appointment of [redacted][5] which was you, as the first occupant of that post.

Can you, first of all, tell me who or what [SIS12] is or was?

SIS5: [SIS12] was the post within SIS that was, if you like, pulling together the institutional understanding and, if you like, lessons learned from Iraq. So the post --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is that an ad hoc post for that purpose?

SIS5: It is. It was a post that was set up, in fact, initially to support Lord Butler's review in collating documentation and pulling things together. Then, following the review, it was the post where then lessons learned and some of the wider issues were looked at and drawn up in the kind of document you have there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the individual who wrote this would have been a fairly experienced, fairly senior officer in the service?

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[4] This SIS officer will be referred to as SIS12 throughout the Inquiry's documentation.
[5] A new post with responsibility for overall quality of intelligence and the process by which it is produced.

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SIS5: Yes. It was held by two separate officers through its existence. Both were senior heads of station with wide operational background, neither of whom had any immediate direct connection to Iraq and events there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, in the section of the report that deals with quality control of [SIS reports] and the [requirements] function, [SIS12] says very stoutly that the [requirements] function in the service has been degraded, and traces this back to a decision by the board in the mid-1990s to bring the function more directly under the control of [redacted][6] when there were warnings issued that this might emasculate the requirements function or jeopardise its objectivity. [SIS12] says in its report unfortunately this is precisely what has happened.

Can you say a bit more about how this degradation had occurred from the mid-1990s onwards?

SIS5: The main change in the mid-1990s was the fact that the reports officers, people who receive the raw intelligence and then put it into a reporting form to go out into Whitehall, having had an independent line management chain, then were moved to have the same management chain as our operational officers, under [redacted]. The reality is that, if you like, culturally, within SIS, the reporting role had always, if you like, had a second class position, as against the agent recruitment and agent running role.

Where you had an organisation that culturally set such great store by its ability to recruit high level human sources, and traditionally had seen people going to the top of the service on the back of those sorts of agent running and agent recruiting operational achievements, to be put into a [requirements] team, a reporting team, where you were not actually running agents,

[6] Senior SIS officers who were also responsible for production.

recruiting agents, where you were doing what was perceived to be a much more bureaucratic role, culturally was felt to be not a good place to be for one's career or quite at the sort of front line of SIS work.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But that had always been the case, going back longer than the decade?

SIS5: I think that had been the case, but the great thing is that when you had a separate line management structure in the service to support the [requirements] role, you there had somebody who could push back, who could act as a champion, and who could actually push the case for the reporting officer cadre and the importance of the role, and speak to it and actually make people realise that it was critical, essential, to the function of SIS, in a way that, once you remove that champion, you remove that separate line management chain, was then lost.

Over time, having lost the champion, having lost the separate line management role, if you like, the weight of the culture, I think, gradually bore down on both the quality of people we tended to put into the [requirements] role, and also the numbers. By which I mean that if you [redacted] have your agent recruiting team here, and you have your reporting team over here, and you are stretched and you have got some vacancies on your agent running team, there was a huge temptation to fill them by taking somebody out of your reporting team, and there was no counterbalancing mechanism to stop that happening.

I'm not saying it happened often, but it would happen, and what certainly was the case is that over time the actual profile and quality of people who went into the reporting teams went down once they lost that champion role and separate line management chain. It was very much to counter that that the

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re-establishment of what we then called the [redacted][7] was made following the Iraq events.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?[8]

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted].

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

[7] The new post with responsibility for the overall quality of intelligence and the process by which it is produced, previously referred to on page 9.

[8] Sir Roderic asked about the extent to which the distinctions between different types of officers had been a factor. In doing so, he referred to the mainstream/faststream distinctions deployed by the Civil Service. T he witness described the distinctions that existed and how they related to this particular issue. He confirmed that these distinctions had been abolished in 2007.

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What part did shortage of resources in the 1990s post Cold War play a part in the degradation of the [requirements] function?

SIS5: [redacted]

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So, if you like, to go to the question, I think the kind of pressures that the service was under more widely, from the size of the service set against the range of requirements that it was trying to tackle, exacerbated the potential risks and dangers that were always inherent in reducing your [requirements] officer cadre, reporting officer cadre, once you removed that senior line management separate role.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: To what extent do you think that the leadership of the service at the time, up to 2003, was conscious of this weakness or this overstretch, this dilution of quality?

SIS5: I don't know. I wasn't involved in board discussions at the time. I don't know to what extent they would have fully appreciated the kind of pressures and, if you like, the year-on-year chronic impact of those pressures, what effect that was having across the service.

I think it's one of those things. It's like when you, if you like, sort of heat up a pan of hot water slowly with the frog in. It doesn't leap out until it's too late. My sense -- and it's only a sense from working in the sort of operational part of the service in the years running up to that -- was that gradually over time the amount of tasking was building up, the amount of operations was building up, and it was that sort of slow increase that at no one moment people said, "Hang on, this is too much". But I wasn't part of board discussions. I don't know how that would have been directly seen.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Specifically with regard to Iraq

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How did these weaknesses in the [requirements] function translate themselves into specific problems and defects in the reporting that was served up on Iraq in the critical period leading up to the campaign?

SIS5: I think the critical issue was one about -- and it's where we started – [source validation]

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I think at every stage in the process, if you like, the pressure of events and the pressure of requirements was pushing out that space for assessment of the sources, validation of the sources and reflection about the position they were in.

Without rigorous application of the [source validation] process, there was no real check on that. That certainly would be my sort of impression.

SIR RODERIC LYNE:

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[redacted]?[9]

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted].

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Just to finish off on this, we have talked a bit about what has been done now to strengthen the function.

[redacted]

[9] Sir Roderic asked about the relative importance of the source validation and reporting officer function in the problems that had occurred in relation to specific cases and the relationship between this and SIS senior management engagement. The witness explained how SIS' internal procedures worked.

[redacted]

Now, that's five years ago. Are you confident [redacted]? [redacted]

SIS5: I'm a lot more confident, but it's something you have always got to keep working at. Actually that is the case across the board here. We have absolutely got to keep working at that. The reason I say that is if you take a current example, if you are [redacted] looking at producing intelligence on [redacted] then you will have a huge motivation to see that intelligence reported into Whitehall, and you will have an instinctive desire to be trusting your agent and supporting their reporting.

We have always got to fight those tendencies, and when you are a highly motivated agent runner and case officer, that tension is going to be there.

Where I think we are much better in terms of managing that tension and putting ourselves in a more appropriate position, is that I think right from the start now, in terms of both case officer training and wider operational training, the importance of both the reporting role is absolutely fully explained. The whole intelligence process is properly mapped out, so people can appreciate that, although they're case officer end of it, they are part of the process. And the kind of exercises and training that we now put into our case officer training is actually quite designed to trip people up over this and get them to learn some tricky lessons by misreading their agents and misreading their cases.

So that kind of approach to training wasn't there five, six, seven, eight years ago. It's a tension we have always got to work at, and I think we are a lot better at it now than we were

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in terms of getting the understanding right from Day 1, getting the training right, and certainly, I think, at a sort of higher institutional level, being fully aware of the risks there and the importance of getting that [requirements] officer cadre in a good place.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When [redacted] put out a [redacted] notice in March 2005, describing what the Foreign Secretary was going to say in response to or about implementing Butler, it included a statement:

"The Foreign Secretary would record that SIS and the DIS have agreed a procedure to ensure that the distribution of sensitive reports can be extended when necessary."

Can you decode this for me? Extended to whom?

SIS5: Yes. I mean, the particular point there was that I think there had been occasions in the past when some [of the most highly classified] reporting hadn't gone to DIS at all. What we agreed was that every [very highly classified] report that we issued would go to at least one person in the DIS. They would then look at it, and it was, I think, at deputy director level, but it was quite a senior level.

They would then look at it, and if they felt that there was somebody at a lower level, or a different part of the DIS who needed to see it, they would then ask us to extend the distribution to that person. So there wouldn't be a case where we were issuing [very highly classified] reporting that wasn't being seen by the relevant person in DIS.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was that because previously you weren't confident of the security of DIS, or were there institutional rivalries here?

SIS5: I don't know, actually. I don't know. I find that puzzling. I don't know.

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Can I ask a question on that? This did come up in Butler in 2004/2005 too.

The examples that arose at that time were essentially highly technical, weren't they? It wasn't so much source protection -- or was it -- as somehow ownership of technical expertise that was being disputed?

SIS5: My sense was that the underlying point would have been source protection. In other words, the ethos of the [very highly classified] case is that you do give it to as small a number of people as possible.

If there is a view that possibly we have, within our own counter proliferation area, expertise that is sufficiently good to give a technical view of the reporting, then I can see there may have been a view that said this is too sensitive to go further and actually doesn't need to. That is clearly not right, and the purpose of this arrangement with DIS was to get through that, so that at least one person there would have a view of it and could say, "Actually this desk officer here must see this", and it could then be extended to him.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And how much technical expertise does SIS now have in-house on WMD issues?

SIS5: [redacted]

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[redacted].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: On the assessment process, which is, I suppose, the third stage, if we can move through from the reporting, how much in-house assessment capacity do you have? How much do you do before you pass your product across to the assessment staff in the Cabinet Office?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

So it is about contextualisation and it's about understanding

issues that bear on reliability. It's not assessment in the way that assessment staff would approach it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When you look across the JIC, how confident are you that their assessment processes are now rigorous, and perhaps more rigorous than when things went wrong in 2002/2003?

SIS5: I think they are very good actually. I think they are rigorous. I think there's been a huge benefit from the appointment of the professional head of assessment analysis. I think that separate role there has made sure that people remain mindful of some of the key issues around assessment. I think they have built in processes of challenge and other things that weren't perhaps in the past.

I think they have also grown in size. I think there are more on assessment staff today than there would have been in 2003. And I think some of the developments that, if you like, you see on things like the assessment base box are symptoms of a mindfulness and a quality of dialogue between the assessment staff and the range of collectors and producers that I think is a lot healthier than it might have been in the past. So in terms of my confidence around assessment staff, I think they do a good job.

[redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Where does peer review come from for your more specialised products?

SIS5: I think it depends what the subject is. So, for example, [redacted]

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SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think I'll turn to you, Usha.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we move on to talk of some of the underlying issues that you mentioned earlier, to do with resources, training, pre-deployment training and IT and communication issues.

What proportion of SIS's overall effort was devoted to Iraq in January 2001, and how did this increase in 2001 to 2003?

SIS5: [10]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What was it by the time we got to 2009?

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: ?

SIS5:

[10] The witness outlined the effort that SIS had devoted to Iraq between 2003 and 2009 and explained why the proportion had changed during the period, plus the impact of other priorities.

[redacted]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted].

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How was the effort divided between the regional non-WMD issues and work on WMD in Iraq counter proliferation during this period?

SIS5: [11] [redacted]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [redacted]?[12]

SIS5: [redacted]

[11] The witness expected that, initially, there had been an intense focus on WMD and source validation, but the balance of effort had changed as time progressed.
[12] Baroness Prashar asked about the SIS presence and activities on the ground in Iraq and the witness described these in some detail.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: ?

SIS5: .

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: .

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: ?

SIS5: .

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: ?

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the question of training? I know this is probably before your time, but what training and preparation were staff given before deployment to Iraq, and how has this evolved during the period of 2002 to 2009?

SIS5: [13]

[13] The witness outlined the specific training that operational officers working on Iraq would have received and how this varied during the period.

[redacted]

[redacted]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [redacted]

SIS5: [redacted]

[redacted]

But it was training that evolved very much in step with the security situation, and at the outset, frankly, in April/May 2003, it wasn't apparent that the security was going to get as difficult as it got.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: .

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: ?

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: ?

SIS5:

SIR JOHN CHILCOT:

SIS5:

SIR RODERIC LYNE: ?

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What was the interface with the military operation?

SIS5:

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BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did that work well? Were they happy with it?

SIS5: In a sense -- I'm sure you'll be asking them, but from my perspective, up until December 2004 -- I thought it worked well. I thought it worked well. In terms of hands-on understanding of where it went after that, I'm not too sure.

So that was one aspect of working with military. Two other aspects of working with the military -- three, rather -- were slightly different. I'm happy to go into those.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Briefly, yes.

SIS5: One is that

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[redacted] Actually, that bred a degree of immediate understanding and familiarity that kept us very well grounded with the military.

The second level was that [redacted] to support the work he was doing.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I move on to the question of IT and communications? [redacted]?

SIS5: [14] [redacted]

[14] The witness outlined SIS' capabilities and the challenges it faced in operating in an environment such as Iraq and the link to operational activity.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: ?

SIS5:

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:

[redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: [redacted].

SIS5: [redacted]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's take a break for five minutes and come back.

Just as we do, were you talking mainly about [redacted]

[redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: *[redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's come back at 10 past.

(A short break)

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We are reopening the session. Lawrence, over to you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to talk about the terrorism threat both in Iraq and from Iraq. So we are really looking from June 2006, [redacted].

Perhaps just to start then, what was your assessment at that point of the terrorism threat within Iraq to UK forces?

SIS5: It's a complicated picture because it's sort of very messy, and to impose a clear analytical structure on it can sometimes be quite risky because different people move from one organisation to another, and precisely on whose behalf they carry out a particular attack may not be very clear in their own minds and certainly not in ours. So basically a muddled situation.

[redacted] would say that the threat in Iraq was seen to break down into, first of all, Al Qaeda in Iraq as being the organisation -- and this did have a fairly clear organisational structure -- which was looking to have the highest level strategic impact on the evolution of Iraq into a stable, peaceful country. This was headed by Zarqawi, Al Zarqawi, who came with an Al Qaeda background, and a senior, if you like, Al Qaeda strategic mentality, which meant that high value strategic impact was something that very much he was looking for.

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SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on Zarqawi himself, how aware were you of the differences between what we would call Zawahiri and Bin Laden in Pakistan, and Zarqawi? Because there was obviously a lot of comment about the tensions between the two, particularly the very hardline anti-Shia position taken by Zarqawi. Did you have a good sense of that, and how important did you think it was?

SIS5: [redacted] there were tensions between the senior Al Qaeda leadership and the kind of campaign that Zarqawi was seeking to run.

I think understanding that was important. I think it was important for two reasons. One is because it provided a source of leverage to divide different factions, different groups. I think, second, it was important because, looking at if from a UK perspective, what critically also interested us was whether they would seek to use Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks more widely in the region, and particularly against Europe and the UK. So having insight into that tension and those differences of view was of real value.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's what I was leading up to. Sorry, I interrupted you.

SIS5: So Al Qaeda in Iraq, under Zarqawi, were working to a particular high level strategic agenda. So they did the UN attack in 2004. They did the attack on the Jordanian Embassy.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: 2003.

SIS5: Was it 2003?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, August 2003.

SIS5: They later did the attack on Golden Mosque in Samarra. They did the most vicious sectarian attacks, but with very much

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a strategic purpose in mind, and making wide use of foreign fighters.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted] to create sectarian division and internal warfare, a civil war, in a way that would break down the prospects of Iraq becoming a stable democratic ordered state, with the thought that thereafter it would become, if you like, part of a caliphate. There was some sort of view that by undermining Iraq's prospects as a stable, modern style state, actually what you could then replace it with was something more like a caliphate.

Allied or close to in some ways Al Qaeda in Iraq, we then had what we call the Al Qaeda Kurdish Brigades. They were a group of radicalised Kurds, with their senior leadership or senior figures based in Iran over the border conducting some attacks within Iraq. But in terms of numbers and impact, less of a threat day in, day out within Iraq than some of the Al Qaeda in Iraq operations under Zarqawi.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Any support from the various components of the Iranian state for the Kurdish Brigadess?

SIS5: Tolerance. There would have had to have been tolerance.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Zarqawi had been based in Kurdish areas before the war.

SIS5: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So did these have a relationship?

SIS5: There would be personal relationships and personal contacts, and the Kurdish areas were, because of Saddam not running, if you like, the area where people like Zarqawi could

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find sufficient safe haven to work to their agenda. So there would be certainly personal awareness of this and personal contacts.

But in terms of their strategy following the war in 2003, [redacted] was they were working to slightly different agendas with different points of focus.

There was then what I would describe as the broader Sunni insurgency. [redacted]

The range of organisations that were involved in the Sunni insurgency, what was politically motivated, what was criminally motivated, people that changed position and changed views, evolved significantly over time. [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

SIS5: Yes. Our starting point here was actually what represented the greatest threats to the UK. So having done an analysis of where the different elements were coming from, what their objectives were, our operational response to that was based on an assessment of what we thought represented the greatest threats to the UK. At the top of the list we put threats to the UK homeland, and then threats to UK deployed forces, then threats to, if you like, the political evolution of Iraq. Against those sorts of criteria --

(External noise)

SIS5: Against those criteria, the Sunni insurgency was judged to be a less immediate threat to UK and UK interests.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How would that prioritising be worked out? I can obviously see a logic to it, but presumably there would have been those [redacted] who might have thought the key priority was to get this place sorted out, and that will help us deal with the residual threat to the UK.

So were there tensions about that prioritisation?

SIS5: I don't think there were tensions in that prioritisation, at least none that came to the fore [redacted]. There was an analytical ambiguity about was this insurgency or was this Al Qaeda in Iraq --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: My next question is: what's the difference -- put it as an exam question -- between a terrorist and an insurgent?

SIS5: And genuine ambiguity about that. In a sense, we learned as we went along.

Having set our criteria against which we would judge how to apportion our operational effort -- threat to the UK homeland, threat to UK interests in Iraq, deployed forces and so forth -- actually there was some degree of more pragmatic aspect of it [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did your answer to the exam question evolve over time? What was your rule of thumb distinction between insurgency and terrorism?

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SIS5: It was that -- the insurgency, over time, you could see having a motivation that was not principally about destroying the sort of fundamental coherence of the state of Iraq, whereas Al Qaeda in Iraq was very much about that, and the Kurdish Brigades' agenda was wider again beyond Iraq. But the insurgency fundamentally wasn't about undermining the entire existence of Iraq, which Zarqawi very much was.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that leads on to -- I guess the Kurdish brigade is the link between the threat posed by activity in Iraq and the rest of the world, particularly to the UK. So how did you assess that threat?

SIS5: The particular group that seemed to represent the greatest direct threat to the UK homeland were the Kurdish brigades, the AQ Kurdish Brigades, [redacted]

So that was the area where [redacted] there was a potential direct threat to the UK homeland.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I want to come back to the point where

they were picked up. Can you just clarify the chronology a bit of this? What point -- maybe it was before your time, but at what point did we become aware that a threat could be developing here? [redacted]? What sort of numbers of people were we looking at in these Kurdish Brigades?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were these largely Kurds?

SIS5: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So were they likely to have come from Kurdish areas in Iran or Syria?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What was their motivation against the UK, the Kurds?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why would some of them then wish to attack the UK?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: They respond therefore to instructions as part of AQ's global agenda in which the UK featured; that would be the reason for that?

SIS5: Yes [redacted]

I think the second element is the fact of the invasion of Iraq in itself might have changed people's views about the UK [redacted] So clearly that would have been relevant as well.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Even a Kurd who would have been happy to see Saddam go, presumably?

SIS5: Yes. That's a choice that each person has to make, where they finally put their money, if you like, in that equation. I think the numbers that we are talking about [redacted] who would have chosen to take a course of violence and think about attacking the UK, were actually very, very small. Very small. But some clearly saw that as something they wanted to do.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned the caliphate aspiration in Iraq. Was that somehow also a universal aspiration among these people?

SIS5: A universal caliphate --

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of their hostility to us in the UK.

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SIS5: It would have been a factor, yes. It would have been a factor. There are people who deeply hold the formation of a universal caliphate as something that is desirable and would contribute to it. But my sense is that in most cases the reasons here were probably more focused and more personal and local.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And the training, you said, was often in Iran [redacted]?

SIS5: In a number of cases [redacted] they would have training in Iran, and then the intention --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In Iran?

SIS5: In Iran, yes. And the intention would have been to send them [redacted] to the UK to conduct attacks in the UK.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could I just come in quickly on that? Iran tolerance, you said a little earlier, for radicalised Kurds operating out of Iran into Iraq; tolerance or more than tolerance for AQ oriented people in Iran?

SIS5: It's a big question. There was a significant proportion of the Al Qaeda leadership in Iran after they left Afghanistan. [redacted]

So it is a wider issue as to the way the Iranians sought to manage, perceived, and use the wider Al Qaeda leadership.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would the Iranian authorities have been aware that fighters were coming from [redacted] into the Kurdish areas, into Iranian territory, in order to train to mount attacks on the UK?

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SIS5: I don't recall [redacted] that the Iranians would specifically know that people were being trained in Iran for attacks against the UK.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Attacks in Iraq, yes?

SIS5: Attacks in Iraq, yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A general Iranian hedging strategy.

SIS5: Yes. [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So just going back, in terms of the chronology, when did we become aware of this [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

SIS5: I would say that we [redacted] were aware of threat coming from the Kurdish Brigades potentially towards the UK in 2005.

[redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's helpful. [redacted] Did that lead to successful prosecutions?

SIS5: [redacted] My recollection is that that did lead to prosecutions in the UK.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So was there a link with the Haymarket attempted bomb and Glasgow?

SIS5: Yes, that's very interesting. That was rather different. If you look at -- when I was talking earlier about how we might analyse the terrorist threat within Iraq, and I said that we had Al Qaeda in Iraq, we had the Al Qaeda Kurdish Brigades, we had the insurgency, if you broaden your analysis and say actually then who represents a threat, not to people within Iraq, or Iraq particularly, but who represents a threat to the UK homeland, actually there's another group. The other group are people who are radicalised, motivated and just get on and do it, and they could come from a whole range of backgrounds and communities.

That's sort of the area that I would position [redacted] the attacks in London Haymarket and Glasgow in June 2007.

If you look at the genesis of that attack plan, and you look at who was involved, we had a man who I think was -- what was his name? Bilal Mahmood, I think was his name. An Iraqi, born in the UK, trained in medicine in the UK, came from a religious Iraqi family, went back to Iraq after 2003 [redacted]

with his Indian assistant, Kafeel Ahmed, somebody who he met in Cambridge, somebody who had been a convert and radicalised whilst in the UK, they put together this plot.

That was entirely to one side from anything that the Kurdish Brigades had been doing, and stemmed from what I call as that general level of risk, that where you have got radicalised people with grievances, somebody somewhere might just pop up and do something. I think we were very lucky that more didn't do that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But there's a difference between the freelancing amateur and the trained professional.

SIS5: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: At one point, certainly before Zarqawi was killed, I know there was a lot of concern about the possibility of Iraq itself becoming a base for operations against Europe. ?

SIS5: -- we touched on it earlier -- a sort of tension between some in the Al Qaeda leadership who at one point wanted to see Al Qaeda in Iraq or Iraq itself become a base for attacks against the wider region, and possibly into Europe, and others who had a more immediate focus.

Now, if you look at Zarqawi, Zarqawi certainly conducted

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attacks into Jordan, hotel bombings in Jordan, I think attacks on US ships in Jordan, before his death. But his focus fundamentally was within Iraq.

Over time the position of the wider Al Qaeda leadership back in Pakistan, the tribal areas, shifted from one where they wanted to see Al Qaeda in Iraq have a broader regional look, to one where they wanted to see its main focus be on pursuing the fight within Iraq, and then the regional aspirations being rather subordinate to that. So they themselves appear to have slightly shifted over time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How has your assessment of the threat from Al Qaeda in the Kurdish areas developed since 2006?

SIS5: [15] [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]

[redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]

You have touched on this, but it is important because there's been a significant argument and debate about it, which is the role of the Coalition's presence in Iraq, in the initial occupation, as a motivator for the extremists in the UK and elsewhere outside of Iraq.

Is there a way of measuring this, or is it just one of the things that you recognise as a fact?

SIS5: I'm not sure there's a way of measuring it. You'll have seen the JIC assessment in 2005, which looked at this and made some judgments about it.

I would make a couple of observations. One is that I think our understanding of what motivates people to commit acts of violence, as opposed to, if you like, be politically radicalised or radicalised within the wider Islamic context, I think our understanding of that has evolved quite a bit over the last three to four years. I think we see that it's a much more complicated mix of factors that will turn an individual from radicalism to violence.

Within that mix of factors, having a sense of grievance is an important element, but not the only element. If you are looking at the grievances that people will typically seem to

[15] The witness set out what was known about the threat.

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seize on or have in their minds, Iraq is still very much one of them.

I would say that of late, if you look at the narrative coming out of the Al Qaeda single narrative machine, which is infinitely flexible and will seize on events and developments around the world to weave into that single narrative, things like Palestine and Afghanistan have tended to be more prominent.

Nonetheless, Iraq as a grievance and as a factor in people looking at their own sort of role, position, identity, sense of purpose, has been out there. I think the initial key judgment of that JIC assessment probably has stood the test of time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you get a sense that, as a result of us having left Iraq, that could subside or is subsiding, or do you think it's just one of the things that are still strong enough in people's memories to animate them?

SIS5: I think in terms of the list of grievances that people will tend to look back to, it's always going to be there. Does it have quite the same emotive power that it had three or four years ago? Personal judgment -- I have not seen an assessment on it. I'm not sure that the research has been done. My personal judgment is probably not, because it's simply less immediate.

Do film clips from Iraq still feature in some of the jihadi video tapes that are circulated? Yes, they do. But what is it that's front line now? It's Gaza, it's Palestine, and the evolution of that single narrative grievance rhetoric will tend to change to reflect world affairs, world events.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thanks very much. Very interesting.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's move straight on.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to look back at 2006/2007. Can you tell us how the counter-terrorism work in Iraq was

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co-ordinated with other areas of SIS operations in Iraq?

SIS5: [16] [redacted]

At the UK end of it, we have what is increasingly a much more

[16] The witness explained in detail, with reference to specific cases, how that co-ordination had been achieved, the scale of SIS' effort and how SIS had worked with the

integrated set of arrangements with Thames House, with the Security Service, to reflect that and make sure we are joined up.

So you get day-to-day co-ordination on the ground by having the right people [redacted]. You have a wider counter-terrorism strategy co-ordinated in the UK.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of the numbers dedicated to counter-terrorism, how did they pan out [redacted]?

SIS5: Let me check my numbers here.

[redacted]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

Security Service to address threats to the UK. The witness also explained how SIS had worked with coalition partners overseas.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: ?

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[redacted]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I've got one general question on this before we close with any final reflections you want to make, and I'll ask my colleagues if they've got a last question as well.

But there's a quite complex bit of knitting in London regarding counter-terrorism strategy and Iraq. You have got the lead policy on Iraq generally lying in the FCO. You have got the Home Office interest in domestic CT threat and activity, and you have got SIS with global CT and Iraq as part of that.

How does that get co-ordinated, or doesn't it?

SIS5: In terms of the wider Whitehall machinery, I think there was confusion around it, and if you would sort of try and delineate it clearly, you probably couldn't. I think it's interesting looking at where the overseas CONTEST strategy fitted in with the wider Iraq strategy, and Cabinet Office, Foreign Office and so forth. I'm not sure that there was, for quite a period, an entirely seamless meshing of all those different strands and elements.

I think relevant that in trying to, if you like, impose bureaucratic order and structure on things that of themselves are

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intrinsically very muddled and confused -- what was insurgency, what was terrorism, where do the politics come in here -- that's always going to be a struggle, I think.

I think OSCT had been set up in 2007, actually very relevant here, and I think helped put --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Not least with its personalities and leadership?

SIS5: Indeed -- put this in a better place. But in terms of practical, day to day, what we did, how we saw the threats and how we dealt with them, it probably sounds unreasonable, but actually the most important piece for us was our relationship with the Security Service and the operational imperative between us and the Security Service to deal with specific threats and issues. That wider machinery, the fact that it was perhaps less seamlessly co-ordinated and structured than it might have been, I wouldn't say that from an SIS perspective it imposed a penalty on our ability to deal with the threats coming to the UK on the terrorism front of it.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: [redacted]?[17]

SIS5: [redacted]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: [redacted]?

SIS5: [redacted]

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SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The JTAC level is essentially operational, very here and now, isn't it, rather than high policy?

SIS5: Yes. It's not high policy. It's assessment that ought to inform policy.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Sure.

SIS5: And we would regard it as being one level up from the operational, a sort of in-between piece of the assessment that allows better policy to be formed.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: There's always a balance between compartmenting things in these sensitive areas on the one hand and ensuring proper lateral flows of information and sharing and whatever.

Judging the whole network in Whitehall at the moment, above the JTAC level, is it about as reasonable as it's possible to have?

SIS5: The whole network right now?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, at the end of 2009, if you like.

SIS5: First, I think if we're looking at terrorism, I think the OSCT is a good thing. I think in terms of allowing us to develop a broad approach to terrorism, that looks at it from its many facets, and I think we have to do that, I think it's been of huge benefit to us.

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[17] Sir John asked about SIS' interaction with other parts of the UK intelligence machinery (including the Security Service, GCHQ and JTAC) and with Whitehall. The witness outlined his understanding of how this worked.

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I think it's been of great benefit in allowing some kind -- tricky, but some kind of relative assessment of balance of resources, where you get benefit by putting various mixes of resources in a way that was quite difficult before.

The point that I think remains to be seen as to where it takes us right now, I would say, is the National Security Council, and the evolution of the National Security Council, where that is today, where that could go in the future, and the kind of issues that looks at, how it looks at them and how it addresses them. I think it offers great potential, but is fundamentally too soon to judge.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: But insofar as there are lessons learned over all the years in Iraq, in the CT context, those have been pretty much absorbed into the system?

SIS5: I think you will always have an ambiguity and a tension where you have an insurgency overlapping with a terrorism campaign, and I don't think there is a bureaucratic answer to that. What you have got to have is people and structures and organisations that understand the ambiguity, and then manage through it and work across it. In terms of the learning of that lesson, I think we are in a much better place.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. I'm just going to ask my colleagues if they have any final questions this morning.

Any final reflections you want to offer us that we haven't covered already?

SIS5: No, I don't think so. Thank you very much for the chance to talk to you today.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We are very grateful. A valuable session, very much obliged.

Just to remind you again, the transcript has to be looked at

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in this building upstairs, but whenever you find it convenient.

Thank you very much. I'll close the session.

(The hearing adjourned)

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