THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon.

This afternoon we welcome Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Sir John Sawers and Desmond Bowen, and we will be asking them about the period between 2003 and 2007/2008. For much of this time, these three witnesses were the senior civil servants in Number 10, the FCO and MoD responsible for policy on Iraq.

Their times in post were not exactly the same, but substantial overlap, and it is right to emphasise that each of them had, of course, many other responsibilities in this time, although Iraq was a major responsibility for all of you but by no means the only one.

We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events, and we are checking them against the papers to which we have access, which are still coming in. I remind all witnesses that they will be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence they have given to the effect that the evidence they have given was truthful, fair and accurate.

There was one point arising from last week's session, with Sir John Sawers, I don't know if you want
to say something?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: The issue that was raised by Sir Roderic Lyne was about the involvement of the Department for International Development in the policy review taking place in the first half of 2001. I have reminded myself of the documentation at that time.

It is true to say, I think, that the Department of International Development was not substantially involved in the development of Iraq policy at that time. They played a role in terms of providing about £20 million a year to the UN and to various agencies to assist humanitarian work in Iraq.

They weren't involved on the ground and the main policy deliberations in London were between the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Cabinet Office and Number 10. So they weren't deeply involved.

It is true to say that the letter with an outline paper was not copied to DFID. It is also true to say that a lot of other documents on Iraq policy at that time were also not copied to that department, but they were involved in the discussions after the paper issued. They took part in a Cabinet Office meeting. I think it is their participation in that meeting that may have triggered a letter asking for them to be more fully
involved in it, and I think they were.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Let's start the questions for this afternoon.

Roderic, you first.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just comment on what Sir John has said. I think that's very helpful. This is a subject that we are going to have to explore further, because we heard, for example, this morning from General Fry that he felt that DFID had been far too detached -- he used a rather stronger term than that -- from the making of an execution of policy over Iraq.

We have heard a complaint from Sir Suma Chakrabarti about this. We will be obviously talking to officials from this department again tomorrow. We will be talking to the Secretary of State responsible in due course.

And the whole course of events in which this bit of the British Government was not joined up right through to the point at which its leader resigned I think is an important part of this story, but it is not this afternoon's story. It is very helpful. Thank you for what you have just said.

On our subject for this afternoon, perhaps I could start with Sir Nigel Sheinwald because we have not seen you here before. In September 2003 --

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: End of August.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: End of August 2003 you took over the post as the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser from Sir David Manning and, simultaneously, the chairmanship -- sorry, you became the head of the Defence and Overseas Policy Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, all of which meant that from then on for a long period you were the senior official in Whitehall dealing with Iraq. Not only with Iraq -- I want to ask you about that in a second.

Did you have previous experience of Iraq or of the Middle Eastern region before you took up the job?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Not directly; as part of other jobs in the Foreign Office, but I have never worked specifically on the Middle East. I knew from January 2003 that I was going to be moving into the job in Number 10, the Cabinet Office, so I think observing events of the day, I had spent a bit of time preparing myself for it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What sort of preparation did you do?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Trying to see everyone in the Whitehall and military hierarchy, getting my head around the issues of the day, not just Iraq.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Were you able to visit Iraq before you took up the job?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I wasn't, no.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When did you first go there?
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: November 2003.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We heard from one of the generals who has given evidence that he felt strongly that there was a need for more professionalism at the highest levels of policy-making in Whitehall, and he made clear that he was referring both to ministers and to senior officials.

Do you think from your own experience of arriving in this job with no background in the region, not having been to Iraq, a bit of time for meeting people but not much more than that, is one lesson to be learned from that that would have been useful? Do you feel it would have been useful to have more grounding on the subject before you took it over?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I'm sure it would have been useful. I think all of us who started jobs in the summer of that year were conscious that we were arriving after the train had left the station and with an unfolding drama which was intensifying in Iraq itself.

But I applied myself to the job pretty diligently.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Sir John came back to be a political director at the same time, but having been in Cairo, having spent his three months in Baghdad in the summer, so obviously he did have that first-hand knowledge.

In your post, as Sir John Chilcot said already, you weren't just dealing with Iraq. Can you give us some
feel for the wider context, the sort of subjects that were high on your agenda and the Prime Minister's in the period throughout the period in which you did this job? Was Iraq constantly the top priority. How much of your time did it take up, and the Prime Minister's?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I think it was the biggest of the issues on the actual scene that the Prime Minister and I were dealing with, and I think -- I recall a meeting chaired actually by the Foreign Secretary in the autumn of 2003 which said explicitly -- which agreed explicitly that Iraq was the top strategic priority for the UK and that failure there would affect our interests more widely.

There were lots of other things, as you have said, Sir Roderic, going on. For the Prime Minister and for his team, the other big things were Afghanistan, the Middle East peace process, Iran, Libya -- as I started, we were in the final stages of discussion with Libya leading up to their declaration in December of that year on renunciation of weapons of mass destruction -- a whole range of other things connected with our G8 presidency in 2005, climate change, development, Africa, the aftermath of the bombings on 7 July 2005 took up a great deal of time, developing relationships with India and Pakistan, handling developments in Russia.
So there were lots of things on the international agenda. I would think something approaching two fifths or a half of the time probably went on Iraq over the whole period.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How difficult was it for you to stretch yourself across this huge range? Would it have been better if one person at your very elevated level had been able to focus solely on Iraq?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: There would have been some disadvantages in not seeing the other parts of the picture, the linkages. It would have been a lot more difficult dealing with opposite numbers outside government. And within government, where I had had a lot of experience in my previous positions -- within government it undoubtedly helped that you were dealing with the whole waterfront of our international relations.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I know Sir John wants to ask you about how all of this was structured, but just before he does, can you give us your first impressions? You arrive in Number 10 at end of August 2003 and you are in charge of this pretty difficult situation. What did it look like to you at that time?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It looked pretty worrying, and it was a situation which even in the weeks that I was taking
over, deteriorated very, very sharply with the bombing of the UN on 19 August 2003, in my first week was the massive bomb attack on the mosque in Najaf. I think that was 29 August, my first week. So it was obvious that we were dealing with a fundamentally different security situation from the one I think that Whitehall left in July.

It was moving very, very rapidly and more quickly than our understanding and appreciation of events.

And also, as a result of John Sawers's reports from Baghdad and the reports we were getting from Hilary Synnott in Basra, the scale of the gap in terms of what we were doing on services and the economy was also becoming apparent.

So I think, you know, there was a sense of (a) a need for a heightened sense of urgency in Whitehall. I think the Prime Minister used the -- used that sort of term when he reviewed things with his colleagues at the beginning of September, the need to get back on to a crisis or a war rhythm to deal with the urgency of events, but also (b) just the scale of what confronted us in terms of the decline of the Iraqi economy and the state of Iraqi politics, and the declining security situation. So it was a huge job from that point.

And a very sombre analysis that was put to ministers
and accepted by ministers.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. That's a very useful starting point, and I think Sir John would like to discuss the mechanisms for handling this in Whitehall.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mechanisms and processes. I am afraid this does take me back to the Butler Committee, which I sat on. We published a report in 2004 which, among many other observations, drew attention to two changes that had happened in the central machinery. One was taking the Cabinet Secretary out of the loop for intelligence and security matters directly -- by the appointment of a security intelligence coordinator, but the other was meshing together the two posts of Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister and head of the Defence and Overseas Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

I just wonder how you found the structures working in your time, and I know it is quite a long time?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Well, I tried as much as I could to bring the two sides of the equation together so that the teams in Number 10 and the Cabinet Office worked as closely as possible together, so that the advice that went to the Prime Minister was not just the personal advice of his team, but was the best advice that Whitehall, both civilian and military, could offer at the time.
That was the advantage of the system, that there was a unity of effort at the top of the Number 10/Cabinet Office system, below the Cabinet Secretary.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Butler Committee observed that the thing was actually thought to be working pretty well, although there was this potential structural difference. But what the Butler Committee did draw attention to was that the concentration between -- in a very few minds, including your own on the witness table, meant that there were actually fewer minds within the ring of knowledge who were acting on key matters such as Iraq policy, and that this had a wider effect because of the process behind Cabinet discussion of Iraq, namely that apart from the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and, to some degree perhaps, the Defence Secretary, there was less information available through the Cabinet Office machinery for other members of the Cabinet.

Is that, do you think, fair reflection, looking back?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I don't think so, Chairman, and maybe it just would be worth pausing for a moment on what the machinery actually was during the period -- and we are talking about today -- the period after the actual
conflict in 2003. I don't think one should -- pause on
the pre-war structure or lack of it.

From the summer of 2003 onwards, it was absolutely
necessary to get the whole of Whitehall involved, and
there was a lot of structured ministerial and official
level discussion involving all the departments,
certainly the three key departments -- the
Foreign Office, DFID and MoD -- but involving the other
departments as well like the Treasury, but many others
as well who were involved in different aspects of this,
At ministerial level, in addition to what was
happening in Cabinet, and there were regular discussions
in Cabinet,
could I just go through the committee structure?
Would it be useful to do that? Apart from Cabinet where
it was discussed regularly, sometimes an update by the
Prime Minister, sometimes more of a discussion, at the
committee level there was discussion in DOP, the main --
the senior committee in the international relations
field.

THE CHAIRMAN: And discussion based on circulated papers?
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Discussion based on circulated papers.
DOP, chaired by the Prime Minister. That met on
a number of occasions in 2004 and they met once on Iraq
in the summer of that year. It met again, for example,
twice at the end of 2006 and, again, early in 2007 to
look at the issue of transition and military strategy.
Underneath DOP, the day-to-day, week-to-week work on
Iraq was handled by something called an Ad Hoc
Ministerial Group on Iraq Rehabilitation.

THE CHAIRMAN: It is worth pausing on that term, isn't it,
because in Cabinet Office language, it is not little 'a', little 'h' ad hoc, it is a form of Cabinet Committee within the structure.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It is a misleading term, because it lasted all the way from April 2003 to early 2005, but it was a fully structured committee, serviced by the Secretariat with papers, fully minuted and so on, and a wide ministerial membership, usually chaired by the Foreign Secretary, but other ministers occasionally took the chair.

In addition to that, and briefly, another ad hoc ministerial group was set up in the autumn of 2004 to give extra urgency to Whitehall work ahead of the Iraqi elections. All that obviously was very complicated and that was why immediately after the election in 2005, that was simplified and a new committee, DOP Iraq, was set up with the Prime Minister as its chair and with the Foreign Secretary as his deputy, and that carried on meeting all the way through
into 2007. And, again, a fully constituted Cabinet Committee.

So through this period there was a great deal -- and I can give you the numbers of meetings, if you like, of the Ad Hoc Committee -- there were very, very regular meetings, some involving the Prime Minister, some involving the Foreign Secretary within the classical Cabinet Office structure. And in addition there were informal meetings involving the Prime Minister, involving the Chief of Defence Staff, involving others, also minuted and with the records sent out to colleagues.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have heard a good deal from witnesses, particularly witnesses in the field, that they perceived there to be a lack of central drive, direction and energy across Whitehall at ministerial and political and official level. But from your description that's not a correct perception even though they clearly formed it, but that there was a strong central drive, would you say, through this set of structures and processes?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I would say there definitely was a strong drive among ministers, and certainly a strong central drive by the Prime Minister himself.

THE CHAIRMAN: One other question on this, and you mentioned the DOP, the senior committee, meeting not very often,
but was this a committee that met at key points when either events or a turn of policy was coming up, or a decision?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It was used on Iraq probably more towards the end of the period we are talking about, 2006/2007, when we were discussing the really big issues of transition and our force deployments and drawdown. I think it was in 2004 it was more of a convenient moment. We had reasonably regular meetings of DOP, the agenda for that was often recommended by the Secretariat, but sometimes the turn of events themselves pushed things on to the agenda and we discussed a very, very wide range of issues, including some of the lessons of Iraq.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Just to invite your observation on one last point, again, from a number of witnesses we have been told that they did not feel, believe, perceive, that the nation with all its potential capabilities was being put on a war footing for the purpose of the Iraq invasion, but more particularly the aftermath.

And, again, from where you sat -- and, indeed, others on the witness table may have their own views -- that would not be a fair reflection of the reality?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Certainly a crisis footing. I
hesitate to use the word "war footing", but certainly
there was a repeated and persistent effort to try to get
our input right, our input on strategy, policy and on
some operational -- and on the operational end of this.

But, of course, for the nation as a whole, there is
an issue as to whether the nation felt at war and
whether the whole resources of the country were, you
know, genuinely being put into it. Plainly not in terms
of the amounts that were going into the non-military
side of the endeavour.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know whether you, Sir John, or
Desmond Bowen want to comment?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: If I could just comment. I endorse
entirely what Nigel said.

In terms of strong central drive, we certainly had
that in Whitehall, led by the Prime Minister personally,
led by Nigel at top official level, and I think it was
much greater because of the structure of having brought
together the chief Foreign Policy Adviser in Number 10
and the Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat in
the Cabinet Office, brought those two roles into one
person.

I was the last occupant of the old-style job in
Number 10, which was at two-star level, where I was
essentially a private secretary for foreign affairs and
defence matters to the Prime Minister, the same job that Sir Roderic did in the mid 1990s with John Major. And the dislocation between Number 10 and the Cabinet Office was a cause of problems, and the Cabinet Office interdepartmental machinery was not as directly connected with the Prime Minister as it needed to be and as it is, for example, in Washington, in Paris and in Berlin, our nearest counterparts. And raising the job to four-star level with the appointment first of all of David Manning and his successor, Nigel Sheinwald, and combining our two roles really strengthened the ability to drive the Whitehall machine on foreign policy issues. So that’s one point I would make.

The second is that I agree that for most of this period Iraq was the biggest single foreign policy issue that the Government faced. There were periods, for example, I was closely involved in the negotiations on Iran, we had occasional issues with Russia, we had the Balkans, we had the 7/7 terrorist attacks and these took over as the dominant issues at various points. But Iraq was the abiding crisis that we had to deal with and we dealt with it as a crisis. And in the Foreign Office the first thing I did when I got back from Iraq and took over the job of Political Director was to strengthen the
structures inside the Foreign Office so that we had
a full-time, two-star director who dealt with nothing
but Iraq.

So we had a permanent person at that level who
worked to me to deal with Iraq with a structure beneath
him which enabled us to cover all the various
responsibilities that the Foreign Office was carrying on
the subject.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr Bowen?

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Chairman, could I just say something
about Whitehall? It is a very broad term and, you know,
there has been lots of criticism of it and, indeed, at
the time there was criticism that questions were asked
and people didn't get answers.

Some of that, of course, is because the answers
weren't so easy to give, but it may be helpful to think
about Whitehall in three distinct elements. There is
a sort of central, absolutely central
Cabinet Office/Number 10 strategic role. There is
a role within each of the departments to give force to
decisions made centrally, and then at a third level
there is the actual delivery, sometimes of nuts and
bolts, you know, whether it is communications equipment
or vehicles or something else. But sometimes lumping
Whitehall together I don't think helps us to understand
some of the things that did and didn't work.

THE CHAIRMAN: I suppose one question, given that there were these perceptions and criticisms particularly from people in the field, whether military or other, whether the gear train between this central direction with lots of energy and effort going into it and machinery at ministerial and senior official level, whether that did connect up both down into departments and into delivery systems. Otherwise why would there be this array of criticism which we have heard?

MR DESMOND BOWEN: I think it did take us collectively a bit of time to reinforce the structures that make sure that people -- John says there are things that he did early on when he arrived.

I think it did take us to understand that this wasn't just a short-term crisis, this was an enduring crisis and we were going to need to staff ourselves to do it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Roderic?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just one more process question and then I'd like to take some time going through the story.

Sir Nigel, we heard from your predecessor Sir David Manning about his intensive contacts with Dr Rice and the Prime Minister's intensive contacts with President Bush leading up to the period of the conflict.
In your time, how closely were we interacting with the administration in Washington, obviously personalities changed, not only you but people on the other side? Were we in alignment with the Americans or were we differing over some important strategic points with them in our handling of Iraq in your time?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Well, the contacts continued at a pretty frequent level. The Prime Minister and the President, if anything, after the conflict regularised their contacts and they had what turned into a video conference, a confidential video conference, about every fortnight. Sometimes it was once a week, sometimes a bit less frequently, I would say over my period it was roughly fortnightly. And that would be for anything between half an hour to an hour. So they were in pretty regular personal contact, and I had a sort of very regular contact, sometimes once a day, sometimes a few times a week, with the American national security adviser, first Condoleezza Rice and then Steve Hadley. And I will say Iraq, certainly in the first couple of years of my time in Number 10, was the dominant issue.

And there was a constant interchange with the Americans because, of course, we didn't see things exactly the same way and the Prime Minister wanted to ensure that we did have the same appreciation of the --
we shared the same appreciation of the insurgency.

Initially there were many in the American system who
didn't see it the same way as we did and were reluctant
to see the gravity of the threat that we faced. That
changed over time, but he was on to it very quickly and
wanted to share his understanding of it with
President Bush.

The remedies for that in terms of putting effort
into Iraqi-isation of security, putting effort into
public utilities and services, getting the machine
working, because it was ultimately the American machine
which had to work and had the scale of effort needed to
deal with the problems we faced. That was also a big
priority for the Prime Minister and there was --
eventually a response, but it was a slow one because the
American machine, as you have heard -- the American
machine initially was itself slow and cumbersome and
directed from the Department of Defense, which made
coordination with the rest of us, and internally in the
US system, very difficult.

There were other things that we were talking about.
The political process, where the UK -- I think
Jeremy Greenstock said this yesterday -- had a success
in getting over to the Americans our view of the way to
handle the political process in Iraq. The political
process was hugely complicated by the violence which surrounded it and almost went off the rails as a result of the violence, but amazingly stayed on the rails throughout this period that we are talking about. And the UK had a lot to do -- the Foreign Office in particular, but others had a lot to do with shaping that political process within Iraq, sticking to the timetable, handling the Sunni outreach part of this, which you have heard about, and which Number 10 and the Foreign Office were very much involved with.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you were taking up, at central level between Number 10 and the White House, some of the concerns that first Sir John and then Jeremy Greenstock had on the ground about the way that the process was being driven by Jerry Bremer?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Explicitly so, and that was just going back to a meeting I know you have discussed here, when the Prime Minister got back to Number 10 after the summer break at the end of -- the end of August 2003, had his meeting with the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary and others at the beginning of September 2003. What he said was, "I want a discussion here and then I want to take the issues that we have discussed to my next conversation with President Bush", and that's indeed what he did at the end that of week.
So there was a constant interplay between what was being aired in Whitehall, aired from Baghdad and Basra, between that and the dialogue between the UK and the US.

And just coming back to something that Jeremy Greenstock said yesterday, the Prime Minister and I think those of us involved centrally in London were absolutely clear that the fate of Iraq depended on what was happening in and around Baghdad. Of course, we had our responsibilities in Basra, but our preoccupation was with the central issues of the political, economic and security processes in and around Baghdad.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let’s get back to that meeting in two seconds, but before we do, where was the locus of decision-making? Was it with the commanders on the ground, both civilian and military, or was it in Washington and London? To what extent could decisions be taken in Washington and London about the things that really mattered in Iraq at this stage?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Some decisions could be made about our contribution, but the biggest decisions were ones that ultimately the Americans came to, we hoped with significant input from the UK.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: The Americans on the ground or the Americans in Washington?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It varied. It varied over time and
I think a shifting pattern. Certainly Bremer had a lot of power, but he was reporting direct to the Defense Secretary in Washington. Later on both General Casey and then General Petraeus had a great deal of local independence of action, as did Ambassador Crocker when he was there, and Ambassador Khalilzad.

So there was a mixture. Increasingly, I think it is true to say, in the period that we are talking about, the President of the United States increasingly took personal control of this. As the situation got worse, particularly as the sectarian violence increased with a huge impact on American domestic opinion in 2005 and 2006, this was gripped from the centre in Washington and he ran this personally with his people on the ground.

That was not the model that was used early on, at the beginning of the period that we are talking about. It was very much the Department of Defense in Washington dealing directly with their people in Baghdad. John, you were there and I wasn't.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Could I just add, I think Ambassador Bremer was given a great deal of responsibility and authority early on, and as Nigel has said, as the crisis grew through the autumn, the
White House and other bits of the US administration became increasingly concerned, and I think the onus of decision-making was taken back by Washington.

So I would say that by the end of the year there was much greater direction from Washington rather than initiative and decisions being taken on the ground, which was the case in September 2003.

And again, as Nigel says, when new people arrived, I think during the Negroponte era as ambassador, most decisions were being taken in Washington, but when Khalilzad and then later Crocker became ambassadors in Baghdad and their military counterparts, Generals Casey and Petraeus, then again, there was more of a balance between the two.

But certainly in this period it started with the decision-making power resting primarily in Baghdad with Ambassador Bremer and then gradually reverting to Washington as the autumn and the violence in the insurgency increased, going back to Washington.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. Let's now come to the Prime Minister's meeting in September 2003.

By this stage, as General Fry told us this morning, we were facing a very different situation to the one we had gone into. As he said, we embarked on this conflict to deal with WMD, but then found ourselves in
a situation of trying to stick Iraq back together again. And presumably that was the situation that you found when you came in, that the Prime Minister was addressing in the meeting in the autumn of 2003. So how had our strategy evolved at this point? What sort of decisions were we having to take at that meeting for the period ahead? Where were we pointing the machine from then on?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I think we were pointing the machine at the need for a term which has become very familiar in Afghanistan, but which started in Iraq in 2003, which is the need for a comprehensive approach and to do a number of things concurrently, to work on all three strands of the campaign -- political, economic and security -- and to approach this with the United States, both from the point of view of trying to get a shared understanding of the scale of the problem and then to get them behind the specific operational inputs which were needed.

So in the end the Prime Minister's meeting was partly a sit rep on where we were, particularly in terms of security, given the tragic incidents which had taken place in recent weeks.

But then it moved on very specifically to talk about what could be done by the UK in almost all cases in conjunction with our coalition partners in a number of
areas: building up the Iraqi security forces, in particular the police, building up an Iraqi intelligence capability, working on utilities. He gave very strong support to Hilary Synnott's proposals for what was going on in --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the Synnott package --
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- was endorsed at that point?
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Was endorsed by him at that point.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: And on the security sector, what sort of targets were being set at that meeting?
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: They were very initial discussions and this was a first time of gathering people together after the summer break. But we were talking about training packages which were, I think, something like six or eight weeks for basic police training. So the Prime Minister was asking: what can be achieved in three months? What can be achieved by the end of the year? I don't think he believed for a moment you can train an Iraqi police force in that time, but he wanted to know what could be achieved given that he realised it was a race against time in terms of the advance of the insurgency, the need to repair the sense of helplessness within the Iraqi system and build up their self-confidence and self-esteem.
So he was asking questions about how quickly it can be done and they were questions to his experts, to the ministers, to the intelligence --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But following on from that meeting, you then had further meetings. So in the course of the autumn of 2003 a new strategy begins to evolve, and that includes fairly specific objectives for what we can achieve in areas like security service reform?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And, indeed, as we heard this morning, there was a sort of general idea of trying to achieve stabilisation by the end of 2003 and recovery by the end of 2004 and normalisation in 2005. That was the sort of theme of this process.

To what extent was this based on what was really achievable on the ground? We have heard a succession of witnesses who were actually in charge of bits of the military operation on the ground, emphasising to us how slow these processes were, how long they take, how completely rotten at the core the Iraqi police force was, how you were starting, as General Fry again told us this morning, to rebuild the army from zero.

Was there a disjunction between the view from Whitehall and the view on the ground?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Desmond --
SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'm addressing this to you collectively.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Sure. Desmond does want to say a word.

I don't think so in that timeframe. And these dates that were talked about were, of course, rapidly overtaken, even during the course of that autumn, by the knowledge that the political timetable itself was going to take us into 2005/early 2006. That was the elongated compromise that eventually emerged.

So it may be the case people were talking about an earlier timetable that was already subject to political change, and if you are looking back to the early period of the autumn of 2003, I don't think we did realise at that stage how corrupt the Iraqi police would be, that it was wrong to put so much of an emphasis on that, that the emphasis on the Iraqi army as the prime source of our Iraqi-isation came a little bit later and the structures on the Iraqi side did change during the course of 2003 and 2004.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Can I add to that? I think in September 2003, I don't think we thought we were in an insurgency, particularly down in the Basra area. We were thinking about security, how we could improve security, and the emphasis was very much on local security mechanisms.
So -- and there was a visit, I think, by one of our Chief Constables, Chief Constable Kernahan, who went out and did a report for us for the FCO, I think. And the result of that was an agreed security package to be put forward with an emphasis on police training and a police training arrangement that would be done in part in and around Basra but in part in Jordan.

But there was also emphasis on the British military taking charge of some training of what was called the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps, who were -- it was an armed body of people who could do guarding, convoying, some of the things the British army needed, to have an Iraqi partner to try to make sure that security was maintained. And that business of building up the Civil Defence Corps went on for quite some time. I mean, that was the main body partner of the British armed forces right the way through into 2004. And in due course it became -- it was transformed into the National Guard and it became part of -- or belonged to the Ministry of Defence.

But that was very much the focus, that and the police. And the idea of building up the Iraqi national army was something that came later. And at that stage I think the thinking was that you needed an army to deal with external threats, not an army that would deal with
internal security.
The other thing I would just mention is there were various other bodies. There was a border protection agency or something of that sort, and there was something called the Facilities Protection Agency, a body that was designed to look after pylons and power stations and other things. Because of the understanding of looting and destruction that had gone on, there was a desire for a range of different organisms that were Iraqi based which the British army helped to train.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: By this stage, in the autumn of 2003, we have drawn down the number of operational brigades that we have on the ground in the south-east of Iraq from three to one. Was there a debate in Whitehall about troop numbers, whether it was sufficient, were there different pressures from different departments on this subject?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I would need to check, but my recollection was that there was actually an increase in the autumn of 2003 of about 1,000 troops recommended by General Lamb and agreed by the chiefs and by ministers, and that did go ahead.

I can't remember how long it lasted for because we probably did go back again to 9,000 or thereabouts in 2004, but temporarily at least there was an increase.
I don't know if Desmond remembers that or not.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: There was certainly an increase to help with training the Civil Defence Corps, but there was also the fact that there were other nations that were coming in who were enthusiastic about working with the British and whom we wanted to engage fully: Danes, Italians, Australians and some Japanese engineers in due course. So there was quite an effort to balance out some of the withdrawals that we had by new arrivals from elsewhere.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I mean, broadly speaking, the numbers that we have been given just in overall numbers are that at the end of August 2003 we were down to 9,500 altogether from our peak. That figure doesn't change in a very radical way: You go 8,600 in 2004; 8,000 in 2005 -- it goes up a little bit -- 2006 you are around 6,000. There isn't a big change until you get to 2007, but within this we essentially have one operational brigade, although some additional units do at times get added into it. So there was never a big change in the forces level throughout this period.

Can you now just take us through, because we have got a long period to cover --

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Can I just comment on that? When I was before the Committee a week or so ago, I mentioned that
the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces in particular had been keen to reduce the number of British forces on the ground. The plan was to get it down to about 40 per cent of the conflict levels rapidly. Then that had to be slowed down, in part because of the deteriorating security situation in places like Amarah.

So the reduction, I don't think, went as far as was originally planned by the chiefs. I don't recollect in that period proposals, before the ones we received from Graeme Lamb in the autumn, for substantial increases in the force levels, and as Desmond says, we were receiving quite significant packages of forces from the Italians and the Danes and one or two other smaller countries which were taking responsibility for specific areas of the four provinces that we were in charge of in the south.

So overall I would say that the response was to slow down the rate at which we reduced our forces and to make good uses of the other contingents that were coming in at the time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There was the proposal for 3 Para to go to Baghdad.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: There was. I covered that in my earlier appearance, but that was a battalion and that was actually, as I said before, turned down on the advice of the
chiefs who decided not to recommend it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes, we discussed that this morning with General Fry.

Can we move forward through 2004/2005. Give us a sort of broad description of how the situation developed, deteriorated, how we responded to that at strategic level from Whitehall and, indeed, you know, what specific decisions we made to react to this?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Well, there are a number of stories, a number of interlocking stories over quite an important period.

The political story is actually one of sticking to the political timetable. It was of getting UN authority for that in June 2004, Resolution 1546, agreeing with the Americans that that resolution should specify a full and tangible transfer of sovereignty.

There was a debate about that in Washington and we influenced that in the right direction by being unambiguous about the change that was to take place at the end of June 2004.

Equally, in the resolution there was a lot of debate about the role of the Iraqi security forces and their relationship with the multinational force. Again, the UK had views on that, wanted to make clear that the Iraqis had their own control of their security forces.
and that had to be clearly expressed. There was a debate on that with Washington, which we were influential in.

So that resolution was very important in laying a new foundation for Iraq after the handover, and then it was a question of sticking to this very complicated political timetable of elections, constitution discussion and so on. I'm taking you through to the end of 2005?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Where was the debate about whether the elections should precede constitution or it should be the other way round?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: That began probably in John Sawers's time in Baghdad.

There was a definitive agreement in November of 2003, which set out this lengthy timetable. And then other details were added later on, for example, the nature of the consultative council, which existed briefly during the period of the interim government under Prime Minister Allawi.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: This is where Sir Jeremy Greenstock's two chickens and two eggs helped to swing it in a viable direction.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes, I think so. And throughout that process the UK was in favour of sticking to the
timetable despite a lot of debate about whether things
should be postponed or not because of security. We said
they should stick to it. We tried throughout the period
to get the Sunnis to come in. Part of that was to
ensure that the political settlement was on as broad
a basis as possible for the future unity of Iraq, but
part of it was our understanding of the insurgency and
the need to peel away from the insurgency at least some
of those who might join mainstream politics. And that
was a very slow process, it is arguably continuing to
this day.

But if you look at the participation of the Sunni
community in the December 2005 elections, it was very
significantly ahead of where we had been
in the elections a year before.
So that was another area of success enabling them to
play a much bigger role in Iraqi governance today.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And emphasis on the security side in this
period was on Iraqi-isation?
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Absolutely. John?
SIR JOHN SAWERS: Can I just say, you asked about what
happened in 2004 and 2005. What we saw was
a deterioration of the
security situation because of a number of factors.

In the months after the fall of Saddam, we saw the
re-emergence of former elements of the regime, Ba'athist
groups, former members of the special forces and so on,
who started to organise and cause difficulties. We saw,
with the assassination of Sergio de Mello, the arrival
of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and their growing presence.

What we saw during 2004 and 2005 were both these
forces becoming more prominent, both the former regime
elements and the Jihadists under the broad umbrella of
Al-Qaeda, and they were becoming more potent, more
violent and it was sometimes difficult to tell which was
responsible for which atrocity or which attack, but they
were both clearly present.

And on the Shia side there was also growing militia
capability led primarily by supporters of
Moqtadr Al Sadr, the radical young Shia cleric, who were
both vying for dominance within the Shia community and
were the main vehicle for responding to sectarian
attacks launched by the overwhelmingly Sunni former
regime elements and Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

So we saw these three various elements combining to
aggravate and worsen the security situation, and our
response to that was a series of military steps that
were taken by the military command and the initiative
led by General Petraeus from the summer of 2004, as you
say, to accelerate and achieve a higher level of Iraqi
security capability, primarily in the army but also
in the police and other agencies.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Which we were strongly in favour of.
SIR JOHN SAWERS: We were strongly in favour of. There were
always plans, but those plans were always shown to be
inadequate because of the growing strength of the
insurgency. Petraeus was the first one who started
going on top of the issues in summer 2004, but even
then his level of ambition had to be raised and the
effort required to train up Iraqi forces was
greater than envisaged.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Essentially you are describing
a situation in 2004/2005 in which the security situation
on the ground is deteriorating, it is becoming more and
more alarming and depressing, casualties on all sides,
high Iraqi civilian casualties among others, and our
room for manoeuvre is presumably very limited.
You are sticking to the same political strategy, we
are trying to hold the ring in security terms while we
wait for the time when Iraqi security forces could have
been built up to the point where they can make a real
contribution to this.
Did the government have any options? Was there any
alternative strategy, or did one just have to grit your
teeth and stick to it?
SIR JOHN SAWERS: I remember weekly meetings with Nigel and Desmond and others in Whitehall where we asked ourselves all these questions, and one conclusion we came to was that to retain the confidence of the great majority of the Iraqi people it was essential to stick to the plan for the political process.

It was taking longer than we had originally envisaged, but that was an Iraqi decision for it to take longer. Instead of being a fairly smooth and speedy transition from CPA rule to elections to handing over sovereignty to an elected Iraqi Government under an agreed constitution, we had to go through a number of more steps as described by Jeremy Greenstock in his evidence a couple of days ago.

But we concluded, and this was very much my view and I don't think any others seriously disagreed, certainly Nigel didn't, certainly Jeremy Greenstock didn't on the ground, that it was really important to stick to the political timetable in order to maintain the level of the confidence and support above all from the Shia community. Had we lost the Shia community and their support, we would have lost the political process.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But what were your concerns about the coalition's performance on the ground, particularly in
terms of getting the consent of not only the Shia but also the Sunni community? How were we doing there? Were we worried that things weren't being done as well as they should have been done?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I think we heard a bit about that from General Fry and others. We were concerned obviously about the impact of -- early on, 2003/2004, particularly the Fallujah period in 2004. We were concerned about the impact of the American military tactics on political and social attitudes and alienation in the Sunni community in particular. But, of course, in the spring of 2004 there was a flare-up on the Shia side as well. That was one of our most difficult and worst moments in April of 2004.

But I think that one of the other areas where we adjusted was not just in reaffirming the political timetable, but realising that it was only by the Iraqis being seen to take political control that we could over time improve the situation. And we were, therefore, in favour of something that they wanted themselves, which is to look as though they were in charge of security themselves. Both Jaafari and particularly Maliki have wanted to control security for themselves and be seen to.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was the coalition getting this message
across to the people? Was it good at public communications?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I am afraid not, and as you know, one of our concerns from the start was that not only was the coalition not good at doing that, but that the structure of the Iraqi media in the post-Saddam period really left an open field for Al Jazeera and others presenting their narrative of what was going on in Iraq.

So that was a worry for us as a government, and I think over time for the Americans too because there wasn't a broad-based choice of media available in Iraq.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can we just step forward to the autumn of 2005, because by then it becomes obvious that the Americans are conducting some form of review of their own strategy. Some publications have come out that tell us that something called the Red Team has been set up by Ambassador Khalilzad that was at least suggesting quite a sharp change of American policy. There was an article that was later published about this.

To what extent -- you were in contact with the Americans the whole time -- were you conscious that this was happening in the autumn of 2005, and what was the British Government's view of this?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: We had a person on the Red Team. Nick Beadle was on the team.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Would you like to tell us about the team, the Red Team? What was this all about?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I wouldn't describe it as a major review. The major review of US policy was conducted by Baker-Hamilton, the Baker-Hamilton Commission a year later, and although President Bush didn't accept their recommendations, that was the real turning point in strategy, I think.

The review set up by Ambassador Khalilzad was to look at the various alternative options and he invited us to take part in that team. We seconded a full-time member with good Iraq experience, including on the security side, to that particular team and he kept us informed of the thinking and let us have the Red Team's report early on with the full consent of the Americans.

It was an exercise which I don't personally recall leading to significant changes, but it was a good way of examining alternative approaches.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I think maybe what it did encapsulate was the greater readiness of the American system to approach this on a counter-insurgency basis and to understand the nature of what we were dealing with, to subjugate the military approach to political ends. And it combined with Ambassador Khalilzad's own outreach to the Sunni community and so on, and that was in
a critical moment in the run-up to the December 2005 elections. And we ourselves were engaging in various outreach events to the Sunni community during that period, both at ministerial and official level.

So I think if there was an encapsulation, it was that we were adopting a more politically sophisticated approach both to security and to politics in that critical period, or were trying to.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Finally, just to carry the story forward to the period at which you effectively left it, 2007-ish, you say that the major change came a bit later than that. This was one of a number of processes that began to lead to a change of approach in 2006 and 2007, and as part of that we began to look for a timetable with conditions for withdrawal of our forces by then and handing over provinces for which we were responsible to Iraqi control, dealing with problems in Basra, in one way or another, so that we could eventually get out of there.

If you could just describe that to us and then perhaps, I think Sir Lawrence and Sir John have got one or two more questions we would like to ask before we take a little break.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Can I just say something? I'm not sure I'm quite answering this question, but this business of
transition was alive and well in 2004. General Petraeus, when he was put in charge of the training effort in relation to Iraqi forces but also Iraqi police, was called the Multi National Security Transition Command Iraq, helpfully contracted to MNSTICI. But the word "transition" was in there and that notion that this was what we were trying to do collectively was to transition to Iraqi forces being in charge of their own security space -- was, you know, alive and well very early on and, of course, that went with developments on the political and economic side as well.

And by the following summer -- when the new Prime Minister, Prime Minister Jaafari, was in charge, very rapidly there was the formation of the joint committee, which was to deal with transition, which led to the process of handing back provinces according to four criteria that had to be judged not only by the British and the Americans, the coalition, but also by the Iraqis as well.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Just going back to what I was saying before, I think that with each successive Iraqi government that we have dealt with, with the interim government, the transition government, now the definitive government after elections, they wanted to
control their own security and they wanted to have a process for drawdown and ultimately withdrawal of coalition forces. And that was always going to be conditions-based.

Desmond has referred to the four criteria which were used essentially in Baghdad for the determination, but it was important to us also in Basra that it should be that way, that we should be seen to be leaving having achieved the minimum requirements of transfer, which are that the Iraqis are self-sufficient themselves in security terms and have a basic level of political and economic governance. Those are the things that we felt were needed before we could hand over.

But these were things which were in the Iraqi body politic as well as being things that, you know, we had planned for and wanted ourselves for our own reasons. Increasingly in the 2005/2006/2007 period, of course for us, as I think you have discussed before, the military issue of balancing our forces between Afghanistan and Iraq became a very important one. That wasn't so much of a factor, it wasn't a factor at all really in the early period, but did come up later.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. I think we have now very usefully sketched out the wide picture and I think in the remainder of this session before and after the break
there are a number of points of detail that we will all want to come back on.

THE CHAIRMAN: Not just detail.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Not just detail.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I pick up some of the points of detail. First, a very small point of detail. You mentioned some discussion in machinery, whether or not there was a need for a particular person to have charge of Iraq policy. The Americans did appoint somebody, I believe, Ambassador Blackwill. That wasn't seen as a model for us to follow. How did we deal with the particular role Blackwell had taken on in the American system?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: John might have a particular comment on this, but my recollection is that he was one of a number of people in the NSC who had responsibilities for different parts of the Iraq story, and his particular area was the area of political development and he was used extensively on that, particularly in the early months of 2004.

What we tried to do was match the NSC team on our side. So Dr Rice and I would have regular conversations on that set of issues, and then we had named individuals working within our systems who would deal with the different aspects. She had Gary Edson, for example,
one of the deputy national security advisers working on
economic issues. We had a number of our Treasury and
DFID people matched to work alongside Gary Edson, and
John Sawers was the person who worked with Bob Blackwill
particularly closely from London during that period on
the political issues.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Yes, I had known Bob Blackwill for some
ten years and when he was appointed to the White House
during, I think, the summer of 2003, he was clearly
going to be one of the driving forces on developing the
political process in Iraq.

We didn't have a formal division of
responsibilities in Whitehall, but the Foreign Office and
I personally were more involved on the political side
than I was on the military or security side. So Ambassador
Blackwill and I would regularly meet. We would talk on the phone
regularly and several times we were in Baghdad at the
same time and we concerted there as well.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: A more substantial point: the
relationship between Baghdad and Basra. You have
indicated your belief, and we have had it from a number
of other witnesses, that the future of Iraq would really
depend on what was happening in Baghdad, yet our main
practical focus was in Basra. Did this in a sense take
us out of the American loop? Did it limit our ability
to be able to influence American policies?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I don't think so. But, again, it is a question of maybe just a little bit of rebalancing.

Of course, our major military effort was in Basra and it was accompanied by an effort which got going in the autumn of 2003 and continued, on infrastructure and development and capacity building and police training and so on.

But many of those things were happening in Baghdad as well. I have the figure in my mind -- it needs to be checked -- that about 10 per cent of the CPA staff were British. During the course of 2003/2004 we had people attached to the Prime Minister's office in Baghdad, we had a team of people out there working on broader issues of public administration and governance, we had experts in the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Finance, a number of the other ministries, human rights and so on. We had money going into the -- and experts going into the Iraqi Special Tribunal, we had forensic experts. We had a really a plethora of people from all walks of public life here going into Iraq and trying to make -- and trying to make a difference.

That was both during the CPA period and in the period afterwards, when we were running it through embassies. So it wasn't just Basra.
Of course, that was a particular preoccupation for the Chiefs of Staff and their weekly meetings did spend a lot of time focused on the situation there for obvious reasons, but it wasn't, I think, the thing which ministers in the various committees or in Cabinet or we officials spent all our time on.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: On the contrary, I would say I probably spent about 90 per cent of my time on Iraq dealing with the national issues and what was happening in Baghdad. My team in the Iraq directorate were spending more time on the details of the Basra issues because it was about delivery, providing support. But at a strategic level, our focus was very much on what was happening nationally in Iraq and at the centre.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think we might have more strategic clout if we had not taken this box, as it has been called, for ourselves but concentrated all of our effort on a sort of more of an Iraq-wide basis and with a particular focus on Baghdad?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: That's an interesting question and as you know, Sir Lawrence, I was one of those who was interested in the idea of us providing a contingent of forces for Baghdad in its early stages. You can argue it both ways. Desmond may want to comment, but I think the military were much more
comfortable having that patch and doing it the British way on our patch than they were being integrated and being part of a US force and being expected to do things the American way.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: I think it is absolutely right, and there is a whole issue to do with logistics and maintaining the line of supply and so forth, which actually argues from the military point of view of having a concentration of forces and something which can you can support andlogistically deal with fairly straightforwardly. And there is no doubt that although the Americans and we may have had some similarities in the way we operated and the equipment we have, in fact different armies do things in different ways.

I would make the point though that although the military were, as it were, operating to a British design in the south-east, the CPA, of course, was still an Iraqi-wide project in which we had a number of people, but it wasn't exclusively British even in the south.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But as we heard from Sir Jeremy yesterday, one of the difficulties of the CPA, although it was a Coalition Provisional Authority and although under the UN Resolution we were joint occupying powers, as you described it, this was very much an American plan and, in its leadership, very American?
SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Absolutely. And the sums of money involved were ones that only America or, you know, a country with a much bigger economy than ours could possibly have afforded, the sums of money which we debated for Basra. And we got some money very quickly to Basra and other parts of the budget took longer to get agreed. But the sums of money were tiny compared with, I think, in 2004, the 3 billion that the Americans were putting in, the 1.5 billion that the Japanese were putting in. This was the scale of investment that was necessary and that we would have found difficult to achieve at any cost.

And there are a couple of other things.

First of all, as I think you have heard already, what influence are we trying to achieve here? Mainly the one of trying to get the overall American political and security approach better to mirror ours, the way we thought it would best be done. And we knew that in the case of the approach of the American army, this was going to take time.

There were conversations going on -- Rob Fry mentioned this to you this morning -- but that is not something in terms of doctrine and the actual approach on the ground which can possibly change overnight.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask you couple of more
questions because I know others want to get in.

You mentioned Fallujah in April 2004. Was this the
time when these issues came to a head in terms of the
American approach and our concerns that what was
considered to be at one point possible, which was
marines going in all guns blazing, as it were, into
a populated city -- was that the point where we really
had to decide on putting pressure on the Americans to
hold back?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Well, it was a double problem. It
wasn't just that we were worried about the
proportionality of the tactics that were used or about
the perception in the international media and Iraqi
media of what went on. It was also that it happened at
the same time as American action on the Shia side to
which the Shia reacted very violently with the events in
Najaf and elsewhere in the south.

So we were faced, I think without anyone thinking
about it a lot in advance -- we were faced with
a concurrent insurgency in the centre and the south and
both were eventually defused. But our people,
General McColl in Baghdad, all of us on the political
side were counselling care in the way that we tried to
step back from what looked like a very, very threatening
situation in strategic terms because, as I think John
was saying earlier, ultimately the strategic threat was a loss of Shia consent.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did the Prime Minister play a role in that?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Absolutely, and that was one of the key things in his discussion was President Bush in the middle of April 2004.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just lastly on this period, a pretty awful month was Abu Ghraib. Did you have any anticipation of this as an issue, and how did you respond when the revelations came out?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I didn't. John?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: We knew of difficulties in the conditions for detainees dating back to June/July of 2003. We knew that the Americans had taken a more direct, more activist approach to ensuring the facilities were secure and met ICRC standards, but we also understood that there were difficulties.

The US army called for a review of the detainee arrangements in January of 2004 and it reported with a number of recommendations privately. I'm not aware that we saw a copy that of review. But the revelations at Abu Ghraib were definitely a shock to us, as they were to everybody on the American side as well as across the world. When they
came out they were way beyond anything that we had envisaged that might be going wrong. We thought the basic problems were about poor conditions and possibly unnecessary violence, but Abu Ghraib was an extra dimension.

I would just say that that spring of 2004, March, April, May, was one of the low points in managing Iraq policy at the London end. We had, as Nigel says, the crises in Fallujah first, in March, and then again at the end of April/the beginning of May. We had the crisis in Najaf. We had the Abu Ghraib facilities.

I remember visiting Iraq then. I used to go regularly; I went three times in 2004. I visited Iraq in early May and it was the gloomiest and most downbeat visit that I paid throughout my four years of working on Iraq policy. And I think it was then that we realised the scale of the task that was ahead of us and the need to really put our heads down and be in it for the longer term, because the insurgency and the violence was clearly not at a peak and it was clearly going to get worse at that stage. And the Abu Ghraib issues just added another nasty twist to the difficulties that we faced.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Usha?
Baroness Usha Prashar: Thank you. Sir Nigel, you talked about the term "comprehensive approach" that you coined in relation to what happened in Iraq. What did that actually mean in practice? How would that be translated in practice? What were the components of comprehensive approach?

Sir Nigel Sheinwald: I think the three main components were security, political and economic. By economic, mainly the development and capacity building effort, but there were other economic elements, for example, the issue of debt relief, for example, the successful introduction of the new Iraqi currency in the autumn of 2003. So there were a number of things there.

Realising that one had an impact on the other, I think we would all say that the destructiveness of Iraqi society during this period is another point we have got to bear in mind, the unleashing of passions after the Saddam period and the self-destructiveness of Iraqi society was extreme. So I think that sense that we were always contending with a level of violence which any even well-constructed nation building effort would find difficult to contend with, that pervaded this period. So we would always say get the security right first, stabilise the situation first, otherwise your political and economic efforts become infinitely more
difficult.

So the security element came first, but then the political elements that we have talked about, the timetable, the support for the political process and then trying to help, in the ways that we have talked about, the infrastructure and other aspects of capacity building. And we would, at all the meetings, whether they are ministerial meetings or the meetings which I and my colleagues in the Secretariat chaired involving the whole of Whitehall, we tried to see it in that way across the different areas, across the waterfront, and progress chase, and we had the usual tools of the trade to do that in terms of matrices showing exactly when things should come on stream and so on.

And it is difficult to know with some of this stuff whether you should see the glass half full or half empty. I know that when Hilary Synnott's successor arrived in Basra in February 2004, he said that he had an almost full complement of specialist experts by that stage.

So, of course, they had taken some months to arrive, but most of them did eventually get there. So it was slow and painful in Whitehall. We will certainly look at the processes on funding, but what we tried to do was look across the waterfront.
BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did you adjust your approach in relation to when you were getting feedback from Iraq and what was happening on the ground? Did you actually consult with departments and on the operational side, any adjustments were made to the machine of government here in response to what was going on or in terms of resources and practice?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: In terms of the machinery of government, the whole time. We adapted our system pretty much constantly during that period. It eventually resolved itself into a strategy group that was trying to look at the big political, security and economic issues and then there was another meeting with senior officials looking at the more operational issues, all trying to feed into the ministerial discussions which were taking place. And a number of individual branch line discussions on particular areas like detainees, we were just talking about, like aspects of the economic situation.

But I would want to stress one thing, which was that there was constant dialogue with Baghdad and with Basra. They were on the videolink the whole time, when people were back in the UK for breathers, they were always part of our meetings, always brought in to see ministers so that they could express themselves directly to the
Prime Minister and others.

So we were always trying to adjust to what they were saying to us, Jeremy, Hilary and all the others and the ambassadors who followed.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: At the meeting in September with the Prime Minister to work out this strategy was an assessment made of the level of resources that were required? What were the risks of not achieving this strategy? Or it was just that the strategy was laid down with no real assessment or whether you had the tools to let you deliver?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It was an opening meeting at the beginning of the autumn period, and that was precisely you know -- that series of questions, one of the questions you were asking at the end of meeting - what would be required, how are we going to do this? Later in October there was a Whitehall-wide strategy on Iraq which was agreed by the ministerial group, which did indeed look at the risks involved for the UK in a series of categories. So we did try to assess the risks at the same time.

But I have to say our main desire that autumn was to get the show on the road and to try to respond to the insistent requirement from our military commanders, from Hilary Synnott and from others, to begin this programme
on services.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: If I can just come in, Lady Prashar, on
the question of resources. The military had access to
the reserve for funding their operations in Iraq. Other
government departments did not, but that didn't mean
that we didn't reorganise our resources. We did, and we
gave a very substantial redirection of our finances
within departments, certainly the Foreign Office did,
I think the civilian side of the MoD did, certainly the
Department for International Development did. And at
one stage I was responsible for Foreign Office resources
covering the whole of what you might call the arc of
instability, central and eastern Europe and Russia, the
former Soviet Union, south Asia, the Middle East and
north Africa. And half of it went to Iraq
and the other half went on the rest, such was the level of
the redirection of resources that we made within our
existing departmental budget.

We also re-directed the cross-Whitehall funds such as
the Global Conflict Prevention Pool so that an
increasing proportion of the pool's resources were sent
to Iraq. I think at one stage well over a quarter of
the pool's resources were being directed to Iraq, and
that was squeezing heavily the operations and activities
that we were funding elsewhere in the world, but it gave
a sense of the extent to which Iraq was the priority in
government at this time, within existing departmental
budgets.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We keep hearing from witnesses about
the tension between the short-term and the long-term and
how the DFID resources were not being made available,
how these could not be used locally. Was there any
effort to arrange flexible arrangements to make sure
there could be some synergy between the short-term and
the long-term?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: The funds were available for what were
called quick impact projects, and they were primarily
funded through DFID and distributed by the military as
much as anyone else. But DFID were rightly concerned to
ensure that what was done was sustainable, that we
didn't just run a project one day, make people feel good
for one week and it all fell apart after that.

They wanted to be able to see that the improvements
we were delivering would be durable, and that was one of
the advantages of involving DFID on the ground.

Now, we were all impatient for progress, no one was
more impatient for progress than the Prime Minister, and
we were trying to achieve the right balance of effect.
And we can comment later as to whether the overall
project, the whole programme, was successful or not.
I think there is a strong case for saying that over the six years of this, from 2003 to 2009, we achieved a great deal, but each week, each month, there were arguments, there were problems, there were complaints and there were issues that we had to sort out back in London.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Can I mention one machinery of government point which had a more permanent effect, which is what was called the post-conflict reconstruction unit, now the stabilisation unit.

That was created in, I think, 2004 deliberately as one of the lessons learned, and they did play a useful role, for example, in setting up our operation in Helmand and helping with the civilian aspects of that operation. So that was one area of innovation.

You are seeing the DFID people tomorrow. I think they would say they did put substantial funds into Iraq, but I keep coming back to the scale of what is involved -- I mean, the Americans at one point in 2004 were asking for a $16 billion supplemental for Iraq.

These are astronomical sums and it would have been very difficult for us to have matched that. Most of the money which came into CPA South -- and maybe this is
a good point to mention this -- you know, was American
money. One of our tasks all the way through from the
summer of 2003 all the way through to the period of
Mr Maliki's government, had been to try to get Baghdad
to devote enough resources and attention to Basra. And
we had that debate with the CPA, with Ambassador Bremer,
and the Prime Minister raised this with President Bush
as well. The money did eventually flow, but I think the
story is that it took a long time and it was fitful.

Getting the Iraqis themselves to devote their
political energies to Basra, their second city, the
great Shia city of Iraq, only came when Prime Minister
Maliki was appointed, when he went down to Basra in,

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We hadn't thought about those sums before
we went in?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: We had no plan for handling Basra, as
you heard, because that was something which emerged only
during the course of the military action.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's pursue that after the break. This is
the right time to take about ten minutes.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Thank you very much.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Thank you.
THE CHAIRMAN: Let's restart, if we may.

I would like to start myself with a question that has really developed out of the first half of this session, and I think I would like to start it with Hilary Synnott.

He gave us evidence the other day and we have read his book "Bad Days in Basra", and he was very critical of the effective delivery of the UK effort so far as he could see it from CPA South in Basra. He says:

"Blair put a constant public emphasis on the importance and urgency of making progress but was seemingly little interested in the processes within government by which this might be brought about ... unable to mobilise government departments to produce the necessary results."

We have heard a great deal about all the efforts that were being made in the period both when he was consul general, head of CPA South, but also later, when the situation on the ground was getting worse but the efforts were getting better.

Is it fair or unfair of Hilary Synnott to say that his critique was simply because he was there too soon?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Well, he certainly didn't see the full fruit of what he set in train in the summer and autumn
of 2003. You know, he may well be disappointed even to
see things as they unfolded later in 2004.

THE CHAIRMAN: 2003/2004?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: But I think he was right that some
things went slowly, but a lot of what he was asking for
was expert help and it wasn't easy to persuade either
British people or our partners internationally to second
people to what were increasingly difficult and dangerous
conditions in Iraq, even in Basra.

I mean, in the period we started, it was relatively
quiet compared with the rest of Iraq, but nevertheless,
when you visited that compound, you were aware of the
security threat to everyone there.

So of those two things you mentioned, Chairman, the
first one—was the Prime Minister uninterested in the
processes of delivery? No, he wasn't. He was interested
in them and chased things regularly, and within
Number 10 he was given, you know, regular feeds of
information on how we were getting on and chased his
colleagues in Cabinet about it.

Was it difficult to deliver? Yes, it was, partly
because of the Baghdad/CPA, Basra/CPA disconnect and
because it took time for the Americans to respond to our
request that they give us more priority and funding than
they had initially.
THE CHAIRMAN: The reason, I suppose, an alternative critique to Hilary Synnott's, which is that actually we were simply in our efforts, the UK national effort on Iraq, too small, too slow and too few in numbers to manage and handle what we had taken on in the south-east in particular.

Now, it depends, I suppose, where you draw your baseline and when you make your final judgment about the success or otherwise of our effort, though there is a very large volume of blood spilt along the way however you measure it. But you mentioned the United States resources. Were we actually, with our own national resources of expertise, of funding, of skills in government, up to it?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Can I respond on this? I think we delivered very substantial resources to the reconstruction effort in Iraq and in particular in the south.

I was looking through my notes. For example, at one point we employed 130 advisers for police training, this was in early 2005. We built up to that number. As Nigel says, we built up to pretty much a full complement of staff in southern Iraq in the consulate general there.

The problem wasn't the scale of our effort, because I think if we put in more effort, it wouldn't
necessarily have been enough to overcome what was the
great problem, which was the huge onslaught of violence
that the coalition and the reconstruction effort and,
indeed, ordinary Iraqis were facing during this period.
Every time we tried to build a new facility or we
would repair a pipeline or we would put
back up an electricity line, they would be
taken down by people, either criminals who wanted to
steal the materials or, more often than not, insurgents
who wanted to undo what we were doing.

THE CHAIRMAN: But we failed to foresee that situation and
if we had foreseen it, it would have been beyond our
compass to deal with it.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I think you are right that we failed to
foresee it. The planning for the post-war, as we all
know, was inadequate. The level of violence that we
faced was not foreseen and we didn't have enough in the
way of sheer military presence, either we or the
Americans, to deal with the scale of the violence that
we were facing.

But I think we do need to recognise that the reason
so many Iraqis lost their lives, the reason it took
longer than we would have liked to put Iraq back on
a reasonable footing, the reason why the reconstruction
effort was so difficult was because of the scale and
determination of the insurgents to destroy what we were doing.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Can I just -- your point, Mr Chairman -- was whereas the Ministry of Defence organises itself for emergencies and crisis and has Permanent Joint Headquarters and a whole structure which is meant to have respond very rapidly to developing situations, in the civil departments there isn't that same capability, other than for the immediate humanitarian response that one sees to hurricanes and other things.

And I think it took us a bit of time to -- it took Whitehall a bit of time to adapt, and may not have adapted sufficiently far to really support a long-term campaign such that we found ourselves in.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did we actually have the capability potentially to do it at all at that scale?

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Well, I recall --

THE CHAIRMAN: Did we not bite off more than we could chew?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Again, I think you have to define your terms. I would say did we have the national capacity to develop the economy of the south-east of Iraq? No, we didn't. Was that actually what we were asking ourselves to do? Actually, we weren't because the fundamental assumption was that the funding would come from the CPA and from the United States, and by and large it did, and
it took a hell of a long time to come through.

THE CHAIRMAN: But we set objectives at the start or, indeed, before the start, certainly disarming the Saddam regime from the WMDs and bringing about a democratic stable Iraq, no threat to its neighbours and all the rest of it.

Along the way, between 2003 and 2008/2009, we gradually have to scale back the achievability of our broad objectives, don't we?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes, and we did and there was explicit discussion of this, I think, towards the end of 2006 where we asked ourselves whether we should explicitly change the overall aim, the one that you have mentioned, Chairman. And I think ministers felt that in its literal form it was very, very unlikely to be achieved in full.

But it was still a reasonable set of headline objectives, and some elements of them -- and we could discuss this, if you like -- some elements of them have turned out to be achievable and achieved.

THE CHAIRMAN: There is a less harsh version of the critique, I think, which is that actually the inherent timescale for taking a society like immediately post-Saddam Iraq and bringing it even to the state it now is at in 2009 was going to take six years or about,
and it was never going to be done in one or two. It couldn't have been done by anybody, not by the Americans.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: When you look at the problems we are facing in Afghanistan now, which began before Iraq and is carrying on for long after Iraq, it is a good example of what you are saying. When we looked at the post-conflict situation in Iraq, the government set itself an objective, and it is not exactly a bumper sticker but if I could just read out what the objective was, it is:

"A stable, united and law-abiding Iraq within its present borders, cooperating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective representative government, sustainable economic growth and rising living standards for all its peoples."

Now, in this period of six years we have achieved that political transition and we will see further elections under the constitution next March. Iraq remains unified. It has got substantial self-government for the Kurdish people, more so than other countries in the region where there are Kurdish minorities. There have been no border changes. Iraq is not posing
a threat to its neighbours or to international security. It is abiding by its international obligations and there is scope for the Security Council to lift its remaining constraints once Iraq and Kuwait resolve some outstanding practical issues.

And economic growth has been achieved. In one year is achieved as much as 50 per cent in a year, and has been sustaining 5 to 10 per cent of growth since then.

There are still areas where there is further to go. It is not as stable or as law-abiding as we would like and the government is not as effective as we would like. There is still further investment to be made in these areas, but when you look at the objective that was set in early 2003, we have achieved in six years with a lot of pain, a lot of blood spilt, a lot of money spent, but we have nonetheless achieved those goals.

So it would be wrong to think that somehow we haven't focused continually on the scale of the objectives that we were set, even though in some areas we had to scale back on some of the practicalities.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, and some of the quality. The picture that is painted in that statement of objectives is not, I think, what you would find in Iraq today.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Except that you do have a --

THE CHAIRMAN: Technically on some, I agree.
SIR JOHN SAWERS: It is not just technical, Mr Chairman.

For example, the deaths from violence in Iraq this year is significantly less than deaths from violence in Pakistan, for example. That's a scale of the way things have improved. They are down to about 10 per cent of the level of civilian deaths of three or four years ago.

THE CHAIRMAN: Proportionately?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Probably not.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know whether we will find ourselves visiting Iraq, but it would be interesting to make the qualitative comparison, particularly with 2004 when I was last there.

What I would like to take us on to in terms of resources delivery or whatever, is the impact of insurgencies. Establishing and holding security is absolutely the sine qua non for any other development, political, economic, social action. And we were facing in 2004/2005 the rapid worsening in both communities, Sunni and Shia, of that situation.

I think it is reasonable to ask it must have been a very dispiriting experience to have to cope with that?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Of course it was, and it was difficult because every week there would be tragic news, whether it affected our own forces, our own nationals -- handling, obviously, the series of kidnaps involving
British nationals was very difficult for everyone concerned, obviously their families particularly, but also for those who were trying to support them in government.

So it was a very, very difficult period, but not just for ourselves. Trying to keep the international community involved despite the insurgency was one of our big political tasks. Trying to get the United Nations to re-establish itself in Iraq after the trauma of the August 2003 attack was one of our major efforts. It eventually succeeded, but they took it slowly and deliberately for reasons one can understand.

But getting Brahimi involved in spring 2004, getting the special representative established, getting the UN support for the election effort was absolutely critical to getting things moving, but that was very, very hard for us.

And the main worry -- there was a worry obviously about the political seeds of the conflict back in the 2002/2003 period, but the main worry was the security of their people and we had to keep coming back to that, all the way through.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to take that point back home, as it were, because a constant stream of bad news, risk levels rising rather than falling, you mentioned
yourselves earlier the difficulty of finding volunteers
to go and help out with reconstruction and capacity
building. What was the -- can I put it -- the mood in
Whitehall from -- not the MoD, given what Desmond Bowen
said, but from civil departments who may have had a more
or less significant contribution to make but not
a central one.

The currency had been re-established earlier before
this phase anyway, but there is the matter of easing up
resource flows in the face of the challenges that were
emerging through the insurgencies. Did that happen?
Policing has been a continuing and, I think, still
present failure. Baker-Hamilton say just the same
in 2007. So that hasn’t worked.

Were all departments putting shoulders to the wheel
as best and as strongly as they could?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I think it is probably right to say that
the principal departments, Foreign Office,
Ministry of Defence, the Department for International
Development, were the ones that were engaged most
practically on the Iraq issue and we worked very closely
together during the period under the chairmanship of
Nigel at the centre.

In terms of the other departments, I think there
were contributions that individual departments made,
certainly it wasn't so much the Home Office on the police training, we were working closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers, ACPO, and they gave regular advice and visited regularly to advise on what support they could give.

I think it probably is true to say that, as the years went by and when the violence was at its height, there was a bit of weariness around about dealing with Iraq. It became, for example, more difficult to persuade people in my then department, in the Foreign Office, to take postings to Iraq. It was the most exciting place to be in 2003/2004, but once you had got to 2006/2007, there were attractions elsewhere and also people like to be associated with success and it looked for a long time as though Iraq was not going to be a success.

But I wouldn't say that there was resistance around Whitehall on this. Indeed, the figures I gave to Lady Prashar earlier about the scale of reorientation of Whitehall resources show, I think, that a sustained effort was made and not just in the three principal departments.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Can I just add in terms of resources, I can't remember whether there were two or three quite big
packages of gifted equipment, which were organised, some of which was money that was drawn from established budgets, but some of it was new money that came from the reserve and that was to equip both the 10 Division that the British armed forces were responsible for, bringing it up to standard and bringing it into being, and some of it was for the police.

So there was very much -- and particularly as the insurgency took hold there was a sense of needing to up the game on bringing Iraqi forces up to a standard where they could deal with this themselves. So there was certainly a change of not just mood, but change of emphasis and more money extracted from the reserve than had been the case before.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I would like to -- and I think I will invite Sir Lawrence to do this -- bring Afghanistan into the equation again.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Chairman, before we move to Afghanistan, can I ask a question in relation to the police, because we heard from Sir Hilary Synnott on the issue of duty of care and the difficulty they had in getting police force, ACPO and others. So there was a real practical difficulty because, you know, staff are not being released because of duty of care. And the other thing we heard from other witnesses was it was
kind of the training provided by the Italian police force which was more relevant. So was there enough analysis being done in terms of niche training, in persuading other coalition partners to work and how were you hoping to unblock issues about duty of care?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Could I just take that question, Lady Prashar? It was important that people who were deployed to Iraq had proper security arrangements for themselves, which was one reason why our biggest police training effort was carried out in Jordan and we took the police trainees from Iraq to Jordan in order to train them there.

A second factor was that the Iraqi police were armed and needed to be trained in the use of arms and the discipline relating to arms, and there was only one police force in the UK that is systematically armed and that is the Police Service of Northern Ireland, formerly the RUC. So we did have a particular contingent from Northern Ireland who took part in this police training effort, because in many other forces they didn't have that familiarity and training with firearms.

I think a third point is it was difficult to persuade people to take these jobs. It was quite difficult to attract the people, the police officers, either serving or retired, to do the sort of training
role. We had wonderful leadership early on from Chief Superintendent Doug Brand, who was the chief police adviser for a year or so during 2004, and he inspired a lot of people to come out and work on police training. But it was a struggle and we needed to provide security, needed to get the right people and you needed to have the right terms and conditions.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But you still had two senior diplomats, Sir Jeremy Greenstock and Hilary Synnott, there working on the ground?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Yes, we had a very substantial Foreign Office and MoD and DFID effort on the ground. One aspect of this was the security of premises. Those who were working in Baghdad and Basra were in broadly secure areas: in Baghdad in the Green Zone; in Basra in Basra Palace Compound, and these were protected.

If you are going to be training police officers, you need to be in the police academy and travelling back and forth each day to do this, and you are more exposed. For example, as our adviser in the Ministry of Finance was exposed when he and his protection detail were kidnapped two years or so ago.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Duty of care was a problem, but it was a problem actually that was gripped, or we tried to grip
it at a very senior level. Permanent secretaries were
engaged in this, and tried to resolve issues. And it is
something that went on through into the Afghan
experience.

I am not sure that you have got the right solution,
but there is a problem and there is a difference between
those who, as John said, were in one place and others
how are out maybe mentoring and monitoring in the front
line where it is very difficult to provide security.

THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just a couple of points to follow this
up. On this particular point, it's obviously very
difficult to get people to serve in dangerous place like
this and as Mr Bowen has said, civil departments didn't
have the same capacity as the Ministry of Defence.

In an ideal world it would have been better to have
thought about that in advance rather than after the
event, but what lessons have been learned from this? To
what extent does the stabilisation unit now provide us
with a corpus of people who are geared up to do that and
prepared to take the risks and be deployed at short
notice?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I'm a bit out of date on that, but
this was one of the initial purposes of the PCRU, now
the Stabilisation Unit -- was to have a bank of people
who could, indeed, be deployed quickly across the range of competences. Not just that, we have also tried to apply that and suggest that model to the United Nations as well, that there should be an international pool of people who can be rapidly deployed to post-conflict situations.

So as I understand it, that was one of the aims of the --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Mr Bowen, do we need a branch of our military that deals with post-conflict reconstruction, as the Americans have?

MR DESMOND BOWEN: Can I just jog back to the stabilisation unit. Douglas Alexander I think made an announcement today of having a database of 1,000 people, people who are trained and capable, of which 200 would be available to be deployed.

I just make the point that 200 still isn't a very large number if you are taking on a task the size of Iraq or even a small part of Iraq.

In terms of the military, should they have their own stabilisation element? It is something that has been thought about and, indeed, I think the review -- and I'm out of date and, indeed, out of the Ministry of Defence, but I think there was a review of the Territorial Army some year, year and a half ago, which talked very much
about the possibility and that there was particular
expertise that was located or could be located in the
Territorial Army which could be drawn upon and that
would enable people who were militarily trained to go
out and undertake tasks that would otherwise be done by
civilians.

And some of the thinking on that derived from
experience in Basra, where there were bankers who helped
banks to operate, engineers who helped the sewage system
to operate and so forth. So it is not completely new,
but one of the issues that arose interestingly in Basra
in 2003 was that TA soldiers who had in their full-time
life been bankers or engineers had joined the TA to be
soldiers and were slightly surprised to find themselves
doing their old job in rather different circumstances.

THE CHAIRMAN: We had evidence from more than a couple of
reservists to the exact opposite effect, that their
professional skills in civilian life were not being used
although they were needed.

MR DESMOND BOWEN: I'm sure it worked both ways.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Second point. Sir John rightly says that
the fundamental problem was the onslaught of violence.
What had led us to underestimate the onslaught of
violence so badly? Some people had warned about it, we
heard of one from Sir Jeremy yesterday. To what extent
was it the false analogy that ran through Sierra Leone,
Kosovo, Serbia, the initial victory in Afghanistan, that
made us think -- when I say "us", I mean perhaps the
American leadership -- that this was going to be so much
easier than it turned out to be? And could we, if we
had prepared for Phase 4 much better than we did, have
mitigated, if not prevented, the level of violence that
followed?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Well, we probably all have our views on
this, and what you were asking for is views because it's
a hypothetical scenario that you are painting.

I think there is little doubt that had we planned
for the post-war period more thoroughly and in a more
joined-up fashion with the United States, we would have
thought through some of these scenarios and we would
have been better prepared, for example, for issues like
guarding the arms dumps, rebuilding government
departments, controlling the borders and issues like
that.

I think it was unprecedented the scale of
violence that we faced in Iraq. The mindset of our
American colleagues was Germany 1945, and we all have an
image of that: a sullen population, defeated, but no
sustained violence against the victorious forces. And
still it took several years to put that all back
together again, and you yourself remarked the other day that planning had begun three or four years beforehand. Very few observers actually highlighted the scale of the violence that we could face. I think about the only person in my recollection who got it right was President Mubarak who warned of unleashing 100 Bin Ladens. The combination of an undefeated Ba'athist regime melting away and coming back as a gradually more potent insurgency combined with the attractiveness of Iraq as a means for international terrorists under the umbrella of Al-Qaeda to have a go at the Americans, combined with Shia extremists supported from Iran, this combination creating the level of violence, the onslaught of violence that I have mentioned, this was not thought through by any observer.

I think had we known the scale of violence, it might well have led to second thoughts about the entire project. And we could certainly have mitigated some aspects of it had we had a clearer appreciation of it in advance. But even with all that said, I think the fact that we were able to weather that storm, that we were able to work with the Americans, to get to the position that we have got to now in 2009, where the British military mission is complete bar some training of Iraqi military forces at a fairly low scale,
which is fairly typical of work we do in other
countries, I think it is quite remarkable that we got as
far as we have in this six-year
period.

But I don't think it is reasonable
to assume that we should have predicted all this
violence in advance, because very few people did
actually do that. That wasn't the anticipated scenario
that we were stepping into and it was an unprecedented
scenario that we found ourselves in.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Another issue that might have
produced second thoughts was the knowledge that there
were no weapons of mass destruction, not necessarily
with everyone, but the knowledge that there were no
weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

We have heard that obviously the UNMOVIC had not
found what we suspected they might find. We heard this
morning from General Fry the surprise that he felt and
others felt that we didn't find anything. In December,
the first head of the ISG in resigning said we were all
wrong, and later that year we had the Duelfer report
which confirmed all of that, although it did of course
talk about the actual aspirations that
Saddam Hussein had.

Why did it take so long for the Prime Minister to
acknowledge the fact that what we had expected to find wasn't there?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Well, because he was waiting for the ISG to -- the Iraq Survey Group to produce the report, and it did so in stages, interrupted by David Kay's departure -- I think, as you said, Sir Lawrence, I don't think they produced their final report until some time in 2004.

So he was waiting for them to pronounce, but he was aware of their interim findings, aware of the advice we were getting from them that they were unlikely to find any actual WMD. But obviously there were a number of other things that they were exploring and a huge amount of documentation which they were trying to get through along with a lot of detainee interviews which they were conducting. So that was continuing.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But it was reasonably evident, certainly by the time David Kay reported, that it was unlikely that -- that anything large-scale was going to be found. Yet until Christmas 2003, things were being said by the Prime Minister that suggested people should wait, that he still believed that stuff would be found.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Or might be found. And I think within our system views varied on this and some people felt that something might emerge.
Others didn't. And, you know, that
that was its position within Whitehall.

I think it was January of -- I was going to say 2004
when the government asked Lord Butler and others to
conduct an Inquiry based on a very clear interim view
from the Iraq Survey Group that there were no WMD and
that the fundamentals of intelligence were wrong and,
therefore, we had the Butler Inquiry.

THE CHAIRMAN: So it was not until Charles Duelfer's final
report, which was based on the intention, that it became
clear and that's several months later still,
December/January 2004?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: That's right.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sir John mentioned the sense of
gloom around April. Was this compounded by the fact
that the purpose for which we had set in motion this
whole enterprise didn't seem to have warranted it?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I think most of us by then had
internalised that we were not going to find the scale of
weapons of mass destruction that we had
understood there to be.

I don't think it did add to that gloom. We were in
a different situation. We were on the ground in Iraq,
trying to put the country back on its feet and facing
a great onslaught, as I have described, from various
directions. That was the challenge we faced. The fact
that we didn't discover weapons of mass destruction
didn't actually alter the scale of the problem we faced
on the ground.

I think it is worth pointing out that the Iraqis
themselves did not see WMD as the primary issue.
Obviously it was very important for us and it was
a surprise that we didn't find weapons of mass
destruction. For Iraqis themselves, their great concern
was to ensure that Saddam and his ilk could never come
back, that this was the end of the tyrannical regime
that they had suffered under for 30 years, and they were
fighting over who was going to be in control.

Frankly, the great majority of Iraqis wanted us to
succeed. It was a minority that we were dealing with,
and in all my many visits to Iraq and during the three
months I spent there, weapons of mass destruction was
primarily an international concern rather than an Iraqi
concern.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Can I just say, for the
Prime Minister, what it meant in the aftermath of that
statement from the ISG was that it was important to
restate what we were now in Iraq for, and I think if you
look at his speech, I think in March 2004, so just after
these events, what he was trying to say was whatever the
divisions, nationally and internationally, over going to war, we did hope that people would rally to the new Iraq, both within the UK and around the world, and that cause deserved people's support.

He went into some detail about the decision-making leading up to the war, but said actually we now need to focus on the task at hand.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I just want to jump ahead now to another issue we discussed with General Fry this morning, which was the decision to go into Afghanistan, not as a decision particularly about Afghanistan -- not obviously relevant -- but how it affected our troops in Iraq.

When we were talking before the break, you mentioned that we decided that Iraq was our strategic priority. At what point did it stop being our strategic priority and Afghanistan started to at least compete?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It took towards the latter stage of the period that we are talking about.

Just two points really: first of all, there was some discussion in, I think, 2004 about whether the ARRC should be --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Explain what the ARRC is.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: It is the major headquarters run by the UK, attached to NATO, which can be used in major
combat situations, and there was a proposal that it
should be used in Iraq for us essentially to expand our
command area from MND South East to include the southern
sector of Iraq based in Najaf, which the Americans and,
I think, the Polish were running. And ministers decided
not to do that.

They didn't think there was a sufficiently
compelling case to do it anyway, but there was another
reason, which was that the ARRC might be needed in the
future should we move into a more ambitious military
role in Afghanistan, which, indeed, of course, we did
in 2006.

That was only one of the reasons why the ARRC wasn't
used in Iraq, but it was --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were the other reasons?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: As I have said, that it wasn't obvious
that it would help, it would leave us in a difficult
position commanding a very diverse group of forces in
the south, an area which we didn't have any prior
experience of. It wasn't obvious that it would lead us
to greater influence over the whole campaign strategy
than we had already, nor that there was a huge amount of
American pressure to do it.

So overall it didn't seem to us to be necessary to
move beyond our responsibility for MND South East, and
that, I have to say, was the pretty consistent view of the Prime Minister all the way through, that we should concentrate on MND South East where we had the responsibility.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But already we are starting to think that we daren't extend ourselves more in Iraq because we may have other tasks to come in the future?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I think the decision was taken the other way round, that we didn't need to extend ourselves further in Iraq and, therefore, the assets could be available, subject to separate decisions, for other theatres.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But as we heard this morning, this depended upon a drawdown of our forces quite quickly if we were going to had insufficient slack to be able to cope with a new significant commitment in Afghanistan.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Initially, I'm not sure that's right. The operation which, of course, began in Afghanistan in 2006, was, by today's standards, a relatively small one. It was 3,000 or 4,000 troops, and that was manageable with the numbers which we then had in Iraq, in 2005/2006, which were probably in the region of 8,000 or 7,000, something like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just to interject, we have figures for 2006 between 5,500 to 6,500 in Afghanistan.
SIR JOHN SAWERS: That probably includes the ARRC.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: That will include the ARRC, but I think in terms on the ground in Helmand it was initially just under 4,000, but that can be checked. So that was not, as it were, in conflict with the level of forces that we had. The issue came much more into people's minds in the 2006/2007 period, where there was explicit discussion based on papers from the Ministry of Defence about the balance of effort. And as our requirements in Afghanistan went up, it obviously made it necessary to think very much about the numbers in Iraq and the speed of the drawdown, which was already in train. And I think we were given advice by the Ministry of Defence that there was a finite number of battle groups and that they have to be apportioned between the two theatres. And that's what was discussed and debated by ministers ahead of the Prime Minister's announcement in the House of Commons in February 2007 where we talked about moving from, I think, 7,000 to 5,500 during the course of that year.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was it 2006 that we made the commitment to Helmand?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: 2006 was when we went into Helmand. The ARRC came in, I think, around that time as well into Kabul.
MR DESMOND BOWEN: Can I just add to what Nigel has said?

There was in 2006 a military calculation as well, as to where troops could be deployed to best effect, where they would be able to deliver effect on the ground, and there was a sense that they would be more usefully deployed and the concentration and the focus ought to be in Afghanistan and not in Iraq, where there was a training job to be done, but it was a diminishing role that we could see.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I do not have the transcript of this morning in front of me, but paraphrasing General Fry, what I understood him to say is this: that through 2004, certainly through 2005, there was a growing realisation that Afghanistan might demand more, that there was exactly as you have described in terms of the feeling that's where the army would feel it would be doing most of the things armies do and would prefer to do, rather than a training job, that in Iraq no doubt had become very difficult, but that two parts of the calculation were not wholly accurate or had to be shifted. One was the timetable for actually getting out of Iraq, that a lot of these decisions were taken on the assumption of an earlier timetable for getting out of Iraq, and secondly, that perhaps once again we went into a part of the world where we didn't have quite as full an
understanding as we might like to have had of what we
were getting into. Would you like to comment on those
two observations?
SIR JOHN SAWERS: That last point is a completely separate
point from this Inquiry.
SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is not wholly, because there is
a lessons learned question. And I think that's one of
the lessons we might have learned.
SIR JOHN SAWERS: I think it is fair to say that we were
facing two very substantial political/military tasks:
one in Iraq; one in Afghanistan. Our approach was to
focus our efforts on Iraq primarily, and to do what we
could in Afghanistan, but for that to be second,
we aimed to prevail in Iraq whilst we held the situation in
Afghanistan.

As the Iraq deployment came towards an end, all
departments in government and the then Defence Secretary
John Reid took the lead in analysing this and working it
through the Whitehall system, it became clear that we
had some headroom militarily and politically to get more
involved in Afghanistan, but the constraint was we
couldn't do that until we were confident about the
drawdown of our forces in Iraq, which, as you say, took
rather longer than we had envisaged, say, in 2005 and
early 2006.
But it was clear that we could only build up in Afghanistan if there was confidence in our ability to reduce our level of commitment in Iraq. And so we needed to have that confidence first, and all this was work which I recall, the Foreign Office was closely involved with it, but the work was led by the Ministry of Defence and it was very much done on military advice, the level of commitments that could be entertained and considered and were within the capability of the armed forces as they were then.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Just to add -- and I agree with that. Everything took longer. I mean, that's one of the lessons, that certainly in relation to our drawdown, not least because as time went on, there were more people to consult, as well as the situation getting more difficult in Basra itself. We needed to fit this in at every stage to the Iraqi Government's own narrative on building up its own security.

There were delays, as we all know, in getting those two Iraqi governments stood up, which in turn had an impact on everything else and so on. So everything took much longer than first planned.

As far as Helmand is concerned, my recollection is that the real preparation for that was more 2005 than 2004. I don't think there was very much going on
then. The ARRC issue was in a way separate, because the
ARRC could have gone in whether or not we were involved
in Helmand. That was to do with the command of ISAF.
And, Sir Lawrence, I do think that those of us who were
working on the possibility of our taking the role in
Helmand were very conscious of the need to prepare it
extremely thoroughly and to try to think through these
things.

It comes back to what a reasonable expectation is of
your level of knowledge as you go into a theatre like
Helmand or even a place like Iraq, and we did try to
amass a huge amount of information from intelligence and
other sources of what we were going to find when our
forces went there. But as John said, this was
a proposal to change our role in Afghanistan from the
north to Helmand, which came from the Chiefs of Staff.
The Defence Secretary and others made sure that the
reconstruction and economic angle was handled at the
same time. Hugely difficult for some of the reasons we
have been discussing today, to get the civilian
expertise in there at the same time, but we did and we
made sure that in Lashkar Gah we had a civilian head of
our provincial reconstruction team who had the
expertise, which was built up over a period of time, to
deliver the civilian and development effect.
Far from perfect, I'm sure, today, but that was precisely what we were trying to do in the run-up, and something that Dr Reid insisted we should think about and was clear in the papers that were put to Cabinet in January 2006.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How conscious were you while you were doing that of the Iraq experience of three or four years earlier?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Virtually everyone involved in the Afghanistan work had been involved in Iraq at one stage or another from 2002 onwards, so we were very conscious of it whilst, of course, accepting that the two different countries are very different and the military operations are very different between the two.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we want to talk to military witnesses, and we will have a chance to do so, more about this.

The question of the influence of Iraqi experience on Afghanistan is very interesting, but as we don't have much time left, I would just like to follow this line through in terms of the demands on our forces, because one of the things that is also happening in 2006 is there is a major policy review in the United States, which ends with the President's decision on the surge. Just at the point at which we are looking to draw down
our forces, they are preparing to surge.

What discussions were there with the Americans about should we surge too or should we at least hold our position until the Americans had a chance to develop and see whether they can make their surge work?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: There was no proposal, certainly at the political level, for us to surge too. And one of our objectives as the President's policy became clear was to make sure that the situation in Basra should continue to be seen as different and that our own drawdown plans, which were based on conditions there, should not be affected. And that was explicitly discussed with the Americans during that period.

It was after all only a month or so after the President's announcement that the Prime Minister made his about our own transition plan in Basra when he announced that to the House in February 2007. So, you know, that was one of the things.

The other thing that we said, which was, I think, implicit in the American plan but we certainly encouraged, was that the surge in forces needed to be accompanied by a political effort, which in the event Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus undertook with great success. But that was the Sunni outreach, the emphasis on providing security for the populations and
so on, which was the hallmark of that period in 2007 and 2008.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What was your assessment of the prospects for this policy, because to some extent it came a bit out of the blue from the Baker report and so on, and the Baker-Hamilton report, and the pressure seemed to be in the same direction as the pressure in the UK was to draw down forces and get out as soon as was reasonably possible?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: This was an example of what I had said earlier. In the latter part of 2006 this was the President and his team grasping Iraq policy themselves, making the decisions himself after a great deal of deliberation. I think that within the UK system there was some scepticism as to whether it would work, but an understanding of the reasons for it.

The key thing, looking at our narrow UK interest, was that it did not affect the rationale for what we were doing in Basra, where conditions were different, both security and in terms of what we intended to do.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would be very difficult for us to do any more, given what we have just been discussing about our commitments in Afghanistan?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: And they understood that as well.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I think it is fair to say that the
Baker-Hamilton Commission reported along lines that to some extent reflected a concern that we weren't going to be able to achieve wider objectives. It was about working more closely with the likes of Iran and Syria and about finding a basis to withdraw US forces sooner rather than later, and President Bush to his credit said he wasn't prepared to lower his expectations. He would provide the resources necessary to deliver on the goals that he had set.

So there was a separate review within the White House after Baker-Hamilton that led in the end to the surge, and this was something which, as Nigel says, many other observers, including many people in the British system, military and civilian, were sceptical about. But in the end it was proved the right approach, and coupled with the political strategy, the Awakening Councils, the effort to quell the insurgency in the main Sunni areas, it proved to be a success. But at no stage do I recall, you may want to ask our military colleagues at some point, but at no stage do I recall a request from the Americans to us to increase our force levels because the situation they were dealing with was essentially how to deal with the Sunni insurgency, a combination of the former Ba'athist elements and the AQ-inspired violence, which of course is Sunni, and it
wasn't directed primarily at the issues that we were facing in the south and which were in a more mature phase and closer to a position whereby we could withdraw.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sorry --

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I was just going to add one point, which is that what the surge in the end enabled the Bush Administration to do -- and, of course, American public opinion was changing over the course of the period that we are discussing today, but what he was able to do when he came to give a timetable in the middle of 2008, he was able to do so on the basis of recent success, and that is the ideal position for a drawdown strategy.

We tried to do something of the same by pointing, as I was suggesting earlier, to certain conditions which we thought had been met in Basra as well, as we were drawing down. But undoubtedly it helps to be able to say that you are doing so in conditions where you have achieved at least the good part of your aims.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So just closing the circle, we started by saying that it all depended on what was happening in Baghdad and in the end the reason that you have been able to give a more positive account of the situation in Iraq today is because of what happened in Baghdad and the ability to sort that out. And through
this period we were doing what we could, but it was to
some extent a -- sideshow maybe would be a bit harsh,
but in the end it was Baghdad that was the key?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes, but against a backdrop where, for
all the difficulties in Basra, Basra did not present --
Basra and its population of 3 million or 4 million
people -- Basra did not present a strategic threat to
the overall effort and there was no ultimate withdrawal
of Shia consent.

So okay, it was a rough and ready estimate that we
gave of how we were getting on in Basra and we
deliberately chose as a government to accept that as we
left Basra it wouldn't be perfect; it was going to be
rough and ready and difficult. We developed
deliberately this doctrine of sufficiency for what we
were doing there.

But the American effort nationally was predicated on
at least a basic degree of Shia consent and that was
what we were the guardians of in Basra.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So we started off with exemplary and
we ended up with sufficiency?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes, and I don't think we should be
apologetic about it, and we discussed this a lot,
debated it a lot, and as time went on, the logic of the
political process was that we had to accept ultimately
that there were Iraqi standards which needed to be met
and that they were ultimately the arbiters of their own
destiny in Basra.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: And it was evident from very early on that
the key to a successful transition lay in the capital,
it lay in Baghdad, and we had to put the transition, the
political, the security situation, the economic
situation in the capital first.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let me just follow through on the logic
of the political process. By late 2006/2007, the Maliki
government is there, it has sovereignty, and we have to
operate with its consent. How much influence did we
have over that government and how much did it constrain
what we could do in the south of Iraq?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I think there is both good and bad
news on that. The good news is that Prime Minister
Maliki responded to our request that he put more
emphasis from the start on Basra, as a priority for his
government. He visited there very early on, he took
a close interest in security and saw it as part of his
national strategy.

And that's one of the things that had been missing.

There was a disjuncture between Baghdad politics,
national politics, and politics in Basra. In a way it
is rather surprising, that the Shia
majority in Basra didn’t translate easily to the Shia
national parties in Baghdad.

So that was the good side of it. But I think that,
it was at times a difficult relationship with
him. He wanted to do things his own way with his own
security forces. I think Dominic Asquith told you that
there were times when the Iraq national leadership was
more comfortable dealing itself with the problems of
Shia militia and so on than authorising --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How did this translate specifically with
regard to our role in Basra?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: The easiest example to give you is
when we were constructing Operation Sinbad,
really our last heave to improve
security and economic conditions in Basra before we
started to substantially draw down. At that stage, in
the autumn of 2006, Prime Minister Maliki was unwilling
to authorise the strike operations, offensive strike
operations, against militias, which we had originally
intended would, not the main part of, but be part of that
overall operation. That undoubtedly changed the
nature of the operation and meant that some of the
issues which we had intended to try to deal with were
left unresolved for later on, and that was what ultimately led, I suppose, to -- beyond my period -- the Charge of the Knights in the spring of 2008.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But essentially in this latter period we were sort of hanging on in Basra, unable to do very much and just waiting to get out?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: We had continuing roles, and I think those were set out and they are not negligent. They were the roles of continuing to train Iraqi forces, finishing the training of the 10th Division, continuing the training of the 14th Division. We had the role of continuing to protect the supply routes, continuing to keep an eye on the border and having an intervention facility, should it be needed by the Iraqi Government.

Given what I have just said, I suppose it wasn't obvious that we would be invited to take particular action in normal circumstances, given their reservations in the autumn of 2006. But those were the four continuing requirements, which justified the force of about 5,500 which we came to towards the end of 2007.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How much had our traction with the United States declined by this point? General Cooper said that 5,000 against their 140,000 didn't give us a lot of traction. They had done the surge, we were going in the opposite direction. Maybe they were taking
a rather negative view by this stage of performance.

Their had improved, perhaps ours hadn't. Were we left
with much traction with the Americans?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: By that stage I would say Iraq
occupied probably a less central position in dialogue
between the two countries than it had at the beginning
of the period we have been discussing. By 2007 there
were probably other issues which had risen up the
agenda, like Iran, like the Middle East peace process.
That's not to say that there weren't continuing
discussions about Iraq, but maybe in terms of what we
have just been talking about, the national decisions in
Baghdad, there were fewer of them that needed to be made
at that stage. You had had the surge decision. It was
being implemented in a way that we agreed with, given
that there was a high degree of political subtlety and
activism in the way that it was being implemented by
Petraeus and Crocker, and you were in a post-election
period in Iraq with no immediate Iraqi milestones, and
for once in this story things were starting to go a bit
better on the security side. So it wasn't the
preoccupying issue of UK/US dialogue that it had been

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So at the beginning of this story we go
in with some quite ambitious objectives for what we
would achieve in Iraq and also for the degree of influence that our large contribution initially would give us with the Americans. By the end of it we were in a very different situation. As you said earlier, we were just trying to achieve the minimum requirements before we could actually leave Basra: sufficiency.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes, but reading into that that the Iraq that we were leaving is one that we had had an imprint on because of our contribution on the political process, to the international framework in which Iraq operated, both regionally and multilaterally, and so on. And those were things where the decisions had essentially been made in the 2004/2005 period. But those have to be, I think, read into one’s overall account.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I just revert to my first question to you at the beginning of this conversation? You came into this issue from a completely different area, from dealing with the European Union, and you had perhaps the bad luck to come into it at a time when things were already going quite badly wrong. You then had the unenviable task of leading at an official level work in Whitehall of a very intensive kind, a very draining kind, I should imagine, a depressing kind, looking at the papers, through the worst period and making the best
of a bad job.

Now, as you look back on it, do you think that Iraq was worth the very high cost, especially in lives lost and people seriously injured?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: That's a very difficult decision and a very difficult debate and I can't answer that even now. I know that at the time it did require a high degree of resilience and energy on the part of everyone concerned but it was a hugely important issue for our government, for the reason I gave at the beginning, that ministers realised that our reputation internationally, in everything we did, would suffer if we weren't able to see some measure of success in Iraq.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So what has it done for our reputation in the world? Has it been a plus or a minus?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: I would answer it in the same way as other people have answered that question to you: It depends who you are talking to and whether you are talking publicly or privately. I'm sure that the professionalism that our armed forces showed has enhanced our overall reputation. I'm sure that the effort that the UK put into the political process, to the international framework for Iraq, has done us no harm. But of course there were areas of the Muslim world and the Arab world in particular where what we did
was extremely controversial. That has probably --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And in the European Union.

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: Yes, but I think in the
European Union -- maybe we should have had a discussion
about this but there was a period of reconciliation and
repair to relations in the European Union really quite
rapidly during the course of 2004. It didn't translate,
as I said earlier, into fundamental decisions by the big
European countries to get into Iraq to help with
reconstruction and redevelopment and so on because they
were, I think, worried about the security situation and
had no direct motive to do so. They did things like
training outside the country and helped through the
multilateral organisations.

But I think the political divisions in Europe -- and
they were divisions; it wasn't Europe versus the UK --
remember that it was very evenly divided in 2003 --
those divisions did heal reasonably rapidly and if you
remember, one of the things that all of us round this
table were dealing with during the autumn of 2003 was
our initiative on defence with France and Germany, part
of the effort by the government of the day to restore
some of the equilibrium with two of our major European
partners.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Can I just add: The question which
Sir Roderic asks is one which all of us involved with Iraq have asked ourselves many times during the years since this began and there is not a clear-cut answer. One issue that is clear-cut is that Iraq is a better place than it would otherwise have been and that the people of Iraq, in my experience, the political leaders of Iraq, are enormously grateful to this day for the effort that Britain and America, and in particular our servicemen, played to liberate them from Saddam Hussein.

I have been concerned at times over the years that the success in Iraq was overshadowed by the damage to the West's reputation in the wider Islamic world and the damage to our capability there. But I have been struck, not least by what my successor as Ambassador to Egypt, Dominic Asquith, said to you earlier, that even in Egypt, where there was very strong popular concern about the conflict in Iraq, even in Egypt the mood has changed and moved on. Our leaders have changed but our values persist and the attractiveness of our values persists across the Islamic world.

So I don't think there has been that sustained damage to our reputation in the Islamic region. We have learned a lot of lessons from all this. The Iraqis, undoubtedly, have benefited enormously from the sacrifice, above all the sacrifice of the 179 servicemen and women
who died in the conflict and in the years since the
conflict ended.

We do have to weigh that against wider issues
and the wider reputational costs of it. But I think
there is a risk of us here now exaggerating the scale of
that reputational cost because certainly many of the
countries that we deal with now, Pakistan,
Afghanistan, the Arab countries, Egypt, Turkey, have
moved on and they are now dealing with a better situation
that has been left behind in Iraq than they had when
Saddam Hussein was in power.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we have probably come to the natural
end for this session. I'll ask in a moment whether each
of you has final comments or observations to make. But
I would just like to pick up a tailpiece because,
Sir John, you went from that role to New York. So the
reputational assessment you could make in terms of the
United Nations at large is not different from the one we
have heard, namely there are pros and cons, some for,
some against, some say things in private they won't say
in public and vice versa?

SIR JOHN SAWERS: I certainly found that Britain's standing
in the United Nations remained very high. It certainly
was when I was in New York, from 2007 until just
a couple of months ago. We were seen as a nation,
perhaps more than any other of the big powers at the
United Nations, as being committed to making the
United Nations work. We weren't there simply advancing our
national interests, we were there trying to advance and
promote a global system which was in everybody's
interest, and I think that's one of the abiding values
that we have in our foreign policy.

Yes, there were some individuals who remain
aggrieved about some aspects of the Iraq policy
and, yes, the UN still mourns the loss of one of its
great leaders, Sergio Vieira de Mello and the 19 others
who died in the bombing back in August 2003, but our
standing, our role in the Security Council, our capacity
to exert influence in the United Nations, has not
suffered enduring damage. I think straight after the
conflict, yes, there was a concern and a problem that my
predecessor faced in the months and the year or two
straight after the Iraq conflict but it was not still
there when I was at the UN.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Well, final comments. Mr Bowen,
any?

Right. I thank our witnesses and all those who have
sat through this afternoon's session. I think we have
talked a lot about potential, if not final, judgments,
at any rate provisional judgments, about the whole
six years and I think the committee itself is extremely lively aware of the casualties, the blood. The Treasury you can rebuild, blood you can't get back, and I don't know whether at this stage we shall come to the kind of final judgment that these last questions have raised; this may be the first draft of history. But we are conscious throughout of that cost that has been incurred by humankind.

I think I'll close with that. Thank you again.

We are starting again tomorrow morning at 11.30 and then going off into the afternoon, where we will have senior officials from DFID and from the Treasury.

With that, I'll close the session. Thank you very much.

SIR JOHN SAWERS: Thank you very much.

(4.55 pm)

(The Inquiry adjourned until 11.30 am the following day)