Monday, 14 June 2010

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN and MR TIM DOWSE

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, welcome to our witnesses this afternoon, Sir William Ehrman again and Tim Dowse again. I expect the session to go up to three hours, but we will take a break in the middle.

For the record, unlike our earlier hearing of these witnesses, this session is being held in private because we recognise much of the evidence on the areas we want to cover will sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's Protocol on Sensitive Information -- for example, on grounds of international relations or national security. In particular, we want to use this session to explore issues covered by classified documents.

We will apply the Protocol between the Inquiry and HMG regarding Documents and Other Written and Electronic Information in considering whether and how evidence given in relation to classified documents and/or sensitive matters more widely can be drawn on and explained in public, either in the Inquiry Report or, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.

If other evidence is given during this hearing which neither relates to classified documents nor engages any of the categories set out in the Protocol on Sensitive Information, that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry Secretary's letter to you.

We recognise witnesses give evidence based on their

recollection of events. We of course check what we hear against the papers to which we have access.

I remind every witness on every occasion that they will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence given to the effect that the it is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons, we will not be releasing copies of the transcript outside this building, but you can access it whenever you want.

With that out of the way, I'll turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman to start the questions.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We are going to spend most of the time talking about your time with JIC and the Assessment Staff, but because you were both involved in the FCO with counter WMD proliferation, I would like to start with perhaps a couple of questions on that.

It really relates to what was going on with Iraq and the other countries. When we met in public we talked about Libya, Iran, and North Korea and the priority that that they had.

I would just be interested to have your view on how this affected actual collection priorities in the 2002/2003 period.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Perhaps I could start off on that.

I think, first of all, it might be worth referring to a section of the strategy, the counter proliferation strategy, which dealt with priorities. It read as follows:

"In country programme terms, our top CP priorities are: Iraq - because its WMD may be the exception to the rule that such programmes are usually driven by defensive needs

and, more importantly, are the most likely to be deployed against UK forces and those of our allies."

Then in the other top priorities, and they were not themselves listed in order of priority, but the other top priorities were the Libyan nuclear programme; the Iranian nuclear and missile programmes; [redacted] the North Korean nuclear and missile programmes.

In terms of --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When was that?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: August 2002. In terms of --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did that represent a change from where you were before or was that a supported and established policy?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: It represented a change from 2001, when we started that paper. We gave an early version of it to the Americans. The final version was a UK eyes only paper, approved by the Prime Minister in August 2002.

[redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: [redacted]?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

Perhaps if I could just add a bit to this, until I think it was 2000, anything to do with WMD proliferation was in the top rank of priorities for intelligence collection, no matter what the country, what the programme.

We had a look at the way we did set our intelligence priorities at that time. I'm familiar with this because I was at that time in the Treasury as head of defence and intelligence spending and foreign affairs spending.

We came at it from the point of view that the agencies were really quite stretched. We needed to reduce the number of very top priority collection targets. In a way this was bringing the formal priorities into line with what was actually happening. But we decided that we should, instead of having this blanket approach of everything to do with proliferation is top priority, we should distinguish between countries and between programmes.

[redacted] We approached it very much more from the point of view of what's going to threaten us.

So the WMD intelligence priorities were rejigged across the board, but Iraq always stayed in the top rank.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: More specifically, to answer your

question about where Iraq was ranked in 2002/2003 in the JIC requirements and priorities, it was generally a priority 1, with priority 1 requirements for regime stability -- so the political side of things -- armed and paramilitary forces, Iraq's intentions towards the no fly zones and the Kurds and the Shia, Iraq's attitude to compliance with Security Council resolutions and political, military, economic and commercial relations with other Arab states, Iran and Turkey.

But there was a separate WMD annex as well, and Iraq was listed as category 1 for nuclear weapons in almost all contexts, the political programme status, the vulnerabilities. Operational context, only priority 2, and the role of supplier only as priority 3.

For biological weapons, it was 1 throughout. For chemical weapons, it was 1 throughout, except as a supplier, where it was 2, and for delivery systems, it was 1 throughout, except for role as a supplier, where it was category 2.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Category 2 means it was less?

TIM DOWSE: Lower priority.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Lower, because we had less of a worry about it as a supplier compared to, say, North Korea in some of the programmes, AQ Khan --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Although part of the debate on the issues about the Iraq threat was the potential that it could be a supplier, including to terrorist groups. I know the assessment that we reached on that, but does that

prioritisation indicate you were very confident on --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: No, it doesn't mean we were very confident, which is why that was priority 2, which itself was a high priority. From 2003, there were seven bands of priorities. So it was still a very high priority.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would be helpful if you could just perhaps explain the priority system then.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes. Perhaps I could just explain how the R&P are put together.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: In the spring of each year, the JIC issues strategic guidance, which sets the overall framework for a lot of working groups to go away and look at the individual priorities.

Following that, the working groups get to work, and there are a great many of them. Their work comes together in the summer, in a JIC sub-group that looks at the requirements and priorities every year. Then it comes to the full JIC at the beginning of the autumn.

After the JIC has approved it, it goes to a committee called -- I don't know if it still exists. It was then called PSIS, Permanent Secretaries committee, and after that it went to CSI, the Committee on Security and Intelligence of the Cabinet. When that committee approved it, by late autumn, it was then definitive.

TIM DOWSE: The committee structures have changed in the last couple of years, but essentially it's the same.

The other thing that has changed: we modified the system

in, I think, 2007, to try and make it a little less labour-intensive. But the approach has always been to try and ensure that the things we have at the top priority really are the top priority, because it's a feature of these requirements systems that you tend to get priority creep. Everything moves up. Nothing ever moves down, and the agencies were always complaining that it wasn't very useful to them in deciding how to allocate their resources. If you get to the point where everything is a top priority, nothing is.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: To give you an example, in 2004, jumping ahead to when I was in the JIC, the threat to British forces [redacted] was priority 1. It was one of only five that were priority 1.

WMD, because by then we had had the ISG report, that dropped to category 4, because by then we had had most of the answers. So it was a residual role for intelligence.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And there are four categories?[1]

THE CHAIRMAN: It's not a risk assessment. It's a priority for collection.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would this priority apply to all agencies, or would you be saying to a particular agency, as far as you are concerned, we would like you to --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: It applied to the SIS, to the Security -- well, some of them to the Security Service, to

[1] Witness's note: in 2004 there were in fact 7 categories.

GCHQ. DIS took it also, but they had their own separate priorities which were given them by the MOD.

How those were then implemented was a matter of discussion between the agencies, and the individual agencies had to decide on the actual resources they put into each of those priorities.

TIM DOWSE: It's worth just making the point, and it's a point we sometimes had to make to ministers, that the intelligence collection priorities are not a direct translation of the policy importance of a particular issue or country, because they are governed by the added value provided by secret intelligence. So if we have a very large quantity of open source or diplomatic reporting from an open society, we don't usually need very much intelligence. So that could be quite a low priority country for intelligence collection, but nevertheless it still might be important for policy terms. Iraq, of course, fitted into the high priority for all reasons.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just on this DIS role, you have DIS setting its own priorities. In general, in this area, did they --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Not all of its own priorities. I mean, a lot of the intelligence that they were required to collect was tactical intelligence that the military were requiring in military operations. That did not come before the JIC.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I can understand that, but would they have been putting the same effort proportionately then

at the strategic level into the areas that the others would have been putting?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I would have said yes, and they did a huge amount, particularly on the technical side, where they were considerable experts.

TIM DOWSE: The very top priorities tended to be Iraq, Iran, for WMD, but also other particular reasons; in more recent years, Afghanistan, obviously; terrorism, particularly Al Qaeda, which would be less of a DIS collection priority, more for the other agencies.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just on a side point, DIS have, certainly in the past, described themselves as an all source, including open source, analytical capability, whereas the secret intelligence services would rather narrow their focus, wouldn't they?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes.

TIM DOWSE: We wouldn't look to GCHQ or SIS to tell us things with an open source. It would be a misuse of their --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: During my year in the JIC, DIS decided to come much more into line with others -- previously they used to rather emphasise, 'we are given our marching orders by the Ministry of Defence', but during my year in the JIC, the then CDI said that he would be also guided by all of the JIC programmes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it would have been possible then in 2002/2003 that there would have been different emphases?

It's just relevant because of the dossier debates and so on, there were issues from DIS more than it seems from other agencies.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just unpacking Lawrence's question one more level, DIS distinguishing at that time between their military directed efforts, mainly on a tactical level, but within that part of their effort was devoted to, as it were, strategic targets. They would also balance the degree of priority they would give to the broad JIC strategic target selection to what they could do, by reason of their scientific, engineering and other expertise.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes, that's correct. But they were particularly strong on all the scientific and technical side of it.

TIM DOWSE: And of course they had been, through the Rockingham Cell, had been supporting the UN inspectors since the early 1990s. Personally, I think that is one of the difficulties we had when it came to the assessment of Iraqi WMD, that there was really nobody in Whitehall, I think, who would have thought of questioning the views of the Rockingham Cell. So if they were content with an assessment, we probably didn't challenge as much as we should have.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Interesting. Can I just ask one other question relating to this early period?

I think I'm right, when Tony Blair gave evidence, that he sort of indicated that Iraq had been picked upon, because it could be picked upon, because it was in

violation of UN resolutions and so on, in the hope that this would have an exemplary effect on the others, on Iran and so on.

Do you recall this being part of any assessments you were making or any policies you were developing at the time?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Certainly that was a policy issue. It wasn't an assessment issue. It certainly was in breach of a great many more Security Council resolutions than any other country.

We did actually look at, had it had a salutary effect on Iran, afterwards on Libya, and we thought that there was some evidence that it had affected the Libyans in some way, but it wasn't the only reason why Libya acted as it did.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's interesting. That was my next question. When did you do this?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: We did this after we brought down the Libyan programme. There were other reasons why the Libyans also took their decision. [redacted]

They also -- one of the most interesting reasons that we assessed subsequently was again related to 9/11, when, if you will recall, Saudi Arabia fell very much out of US favour. Some of the people who flew the planes came from there, et cetera. [redacted] So there were a number of reasons why he acted, but we felt that Iraq was probably one

factor.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was this done as a JIC paper?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: No.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm not sure if we have got it, but I'm sure it would be very interesting for us to see it.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: If anything, it would have been in an FCO paper, I imagine.

TIM DOWSE: I must say I don't recall a specific paper.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I'm not sure.

TIM DOWSE: Certainly there is a -- I was thinking there was a note here that I wrote in the end of March 2003, just after the beginning of the conflict. It was an internal Foreign Office discussion of the long-term consequences, which does pick up a little bit on what are the consequences for future counter proliferation.

I think you referred to Tony Blair's comments. I think from my perspective, from rather further down the pecking order, it was rather the other way round, that once it became clear that Iraq was going to be an issue, whether there was actually going to be a conflict, or however it was going to be resolved, we certainly did start to think, well, how can we exploit what we confidently thought was going to be the discovery of Iraq's WMD programmes to, if you like, raise international consciousness and awareness of the problem of proliferation. We put quite a lot of effort in, within the Foreign Office, to saying how can we take this forward in the United Nations and elsewhere, with an information campaign, to show the rest of the world,

many of whom we felt didn't really appreciate the threat from WMD. How can we use this to demonstrate this is something you have to care about?

Now, of course, as it worked out, because we didn't find the WMD, we couldn't take that forward, although, perhaps quite surprisingly, we did get a significant Security Council resolution in 2004 which set up a Security Council proliferation committee.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I won't pursue it now, but I think it would be interesting, if these papers do exist, if we could identify them, because it is something which obviously is part of the arguments around the war.

Can I move on to the reassessment of the pre-conflict intelligence on Iraqi WMD after the war?

Now, we know the story. Some parts of this intelligence were withdrawn in July 2003, others in September.

But, Sir William, it might be useful if you started, perhaps, by just summarising for us the situation when you took up post in August 2004, what the position was looking like then and how you thought it should be dealt with.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes. Well, at that point the ISG was close to reaching a conclusion. They did so at the end of September/beginning of October of that year.

My job, as soon as I was in the JIC, was to report to Nigel Sheinwald in Number 10, and to the private secretaries of the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary and other senior officials, what conclusions Duelfer was coming to.

He didn't totally complete his report at that stage. He

did some residual work through into the beginning of the next year, but I think when it was published, in the autumn of 2004, that was taken as the definitive report. So my job was to report on that, and then I decided that the JIC should do a reassessment of the 2002 conclusions that we had reached, and we did that in December of that year. That was then -- the main conclusions of that were then included in the ISC's annual report of 2004/2005, published in April 2005.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that was the process. Substantively how did you view the situation?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Well, in terms of assessment, I think it's summed up in the conclusions of the December paper, which I think stood up really reasonably well since then. I don't think there has been anything major which has changed the views of that assessment since those times.

I think you have got a copy of the papers, so I won't go through all of the conclusions, but one thing I would highlight, which we were quite careful to do. We didn't say there were no CW or BW. We said this assessment of 2002 has not been substantiated. It was close to saying there were none. Maybe it was saying there were none. But Duelfer himself had made clear that he didn't say that his report was necessarily the definitive last word on the subject. So it could be that subsequently something was found. I don't think it has been.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So you don't think, writing it now, you might be a little bit more definite on that matter?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: You probably could be, as time passes, yes. But it was pretty definite at the time.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I have obviously read the assessment, and it goes through very methodically the different capabilities and goes through what's there and what isn't, what's been substantiated and what hasn't.

Was there somewhere else perhaps a more critical analysis of the JIC process, or are you content to have left that to Butler?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Of the JIC process?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: We were doing a huge amount. Not something you mentioned you wanted to go over today, but it was all covered in the report we did, which went to Parliament and was published, on implementing the conclusions of the Butler Report. So the processes in the agencies were changed very substantially. That was all reported to Parliament.

TIM DOWSE: We definitely felt that the process had been reviewed in considerable depth by Butler, and therefore -- and by the time that we were publishing this JIC assessment in December, we were really quite deep into the process of Butler implementation, with a specific group working on that. There were a number of work strands in train by that time, for example looking at source descriptions, the agencies, where SIS in particular were looking at the way -- how could they improve the validation of their sources. We were looking at -- I think by this time we

might have introduced the assessment base box on the front page of every JIC paper.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes, in October 2004.

TIM DOWSE: So I think we didn't see the need to, if you like, do another Butler. We were pretty heavily occupied in implementing that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There hadn't been a similar sort of assessment done earlier by JIC; this was the first review?

TIM DOWSE: It was.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: There were two done in the summer of 2003. That was before the ISG had really got down to work. So there was one, if I recall, on missiles and missile design, and there were one other in the immediate aftermath of the war which said that many of those that we were coming across said there had not been any chemical and biological weapons.

But then the ISG got to work, and I think our view was that we should let it do its work and not try to second-guess what it was doing while it was in the process of its work.

TIM DOWSE: That was very much our view, that the ISG was putting really a very large amount of resource into going into the evidence, and they were on the spot in Iraq. We couldn't compete with that, and it would be silly to compete with that. We were actually part of it. So it made every sense to wait until the ISG had finally reported, before we did our own evaluation of what they had found and compared it --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would that have been a normal thing for JIC to do, to do a backward-looking evaluation, or was it because of the particularities of this case that you thought it was essential?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: It wasn't that normal, maybe. I mean, we did another one also on -- reviewed our intelligence conclusions on Al Qaeda, and links or non-links with Saddam Hussein's regime. So it wasn't that unusual.

I do remember the person who is now the Cabinet Secretary saying that he thought it was really rather unusual and rather refreshing, and that the Treasury hadn't done something similar after Black Wednesday.

TIM DOWSE: Although it was unusual then, it has become not quite standard practice, but much more common since, because we did, partly as a result of the Butler Review, establish a challenge team, and there were a series of papers over the next few years, none of them relevant to Iraq, [redacted] where we reviewed our judgements.

We conducted a very major review, [redacted] on the Iranian nuclear programme in, I think, 2006. That was, for fairly obvious reasons, because of the Iraqi experience. We wanted to look at it, take a completely fresh look, and say: is this really for a military purpose?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just a final question from me. Obviously when you put out the judgement in the first place in 2002, this had been given a public forum. Was there any

consideration given to doing a published version of this assessment?

TIM DOWSE: Well, we discussed with the ISC, because they said -- we told them, first of all, that we were doing it, and they said they would like to make reference to that in their report, and as I recall --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Of this.

TIM DOWSE: Yes, of this. As I recall, we did do a little sucking of teeth at that because it's very unusual to put essentially the unvarnished judgments from a JIC paper in the public domain. Even with the Butler Report there was a degree of editorial work. But we did in the end agree the ISC should publish it.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: The Chairman of the ISC asked me if she could use this publicly, and I went to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister and I sought their permission for that, and they gave it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Inevitably, perhaps, we would like to spend a few moments on the Butler Report and what followed, although much of it is, as you have just pointed out, in the public domain and not particularly difficult to expose.

Sir William, you took over as Chairman of the JIC shortly after Butler, and there are two or three things it might be just worth putting on the record.

One that I know the Butler Committee were very seized of was the burden of work lying on the Assessment Staff, not

least with this double source of tasking, from the military on the one hand and from JIC on the other, and the calls on it particularly both for open source analysis and for very specialised scientific and engineering technical matters, and it simply wasn't big enough. That was part, I think, of the post Butler Review. I wonder, in your time, what happened.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Well, we expanded the Assessment Staff considerably. I'll ask Tim, because he was in charge of that work, to say a word on it in a minute.

He's already mentioned -- I don't know if you call them red teams, but essentially they were red teams, to challenge particularly important judgments in sensitive areas. We felt that there needed to be more research assistant capacity, as well as those who came in for a few years.

We looked also at how to co-ordinate around Whitehall, using all the resources in all ministries, so that not everything had to be done every time by the Assessment Staff, although usually they would vet anything before it came to the JIC.

Tim may remember the numbers of how the Assessment Staff was expanded, but it was considerably expanded in the year, and we also introduced a new post of director of analysis.

TIM DOWSE: Professional.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Professional Head of Analysis, who was to look at the whole profession and how the training was done.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: At what point in the process did the red teams do their critique, their stuff?

TIM DOWSE: Perhaps I can answer that.

We established a specific challenge team. We called it the challenge team. It took a little time to recruit the staff because these were additional people that we were taking on.

Initially what we did, I actually gave them a work programme of subjects that had been either controversial, when the JIC had addressed them initially, or were a very high priority subject, of which there might be quite important policy decisions resting on the JIC's conclusions, the Iran nuclear programme being one of them. I gave the challenge team essentially a work programme of about ten, I think, subjects that I wanted them to cover in their first year. It took rather longer, I think, about 18 months altogether, and other topics cropped up in that time.

In addition, they were encouraged to look at the JIC drafts as they came through the system and to offer comments. So that was an ongoing task.

Now, actually after, I think, about two years, really when they had finished the work programme I gave them when they were first established, we became a little uncomfortable that essentially we were marking our own work. They were still sitting inside the Assessment Staff, commenting on the validity or otherwise or quality of Assessment Staff and JIC work. So after that we moved them, and gave them to the Professional Head of

Intelligence Analysis who, though still within the overall Joint Intelligence Organisation, was separate from the Assessment Staff. So they were more of an external check on our work.

The PHIA now comes to the JIC and actually offers comments at the JIC on the papers. So you do have that element of, if you like, external check.

THE CHAIRMAN: There was a hidden, not paradox, but conundrum within the Butler recommendations, on the one hand to give more professional standing, permanence, career development for assessment analysts; but on the other hand to maintain a degree of challenge, as you have just been describing. The two are in tension, aren't they, essentially to be managed as best you can?

TIM DOWSE: Somewhat. Perhaps I had better say a bit about the expansion as well. In percentage terms, it was quite considerable, although in actual numbers I think we went from about 25 to about 35. So the Assessment Staff, even after the expansion, was not enormous.

Now, I didn't worry too much about that because the model that we use in this country for intelligence assessment has always been a dispersed model. We couldn't hope in the Cabinet Office to duplicate the sort of expertise you have in the rather large numbers of staff in the DIS, or the expertise that sits in the Foreign Office research analysts, or indeed the expertise that is in the agencies. The purpose of the Assessment Staff has always been to, if you like, be the intelligent customers for what the experts will say.

So we look to recruit people who can think, who can get on top of a subject in a broad sense sufficiently to be able to ask the difficult questions, and people who can communicate, both orally and particularly in writing, to be able to put complex issues in a concise and coherent and comprehensible way to a minister who may only have a few minutes to get their thinking --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: One of the conclusions, I think, of the Butler Report which I always felt was absolutely right was that we shouldn't go the way of, say, [redacted] where you could get a great deal of groupthink, and we always had, of course, the JIC who would then meet to look at whatever product was put before it, coming from all round Whitehall. It was not the top of the Assessment Staff just looking at it.

THE CHAIRMAN: How important in that particular context -- sorry, it's a postscript question, I suppose. Over the medium term, though not the short term, the medium to long term, the range of priorities, the subjects tasked and so on, will change quite materially. If you have a permanent group of assessment analysts, their expertise will become out of date or less relevant.

TIM DOWSE: Yes, but you do have a certain degree of rollover. People would come into the Assessment Staff for two to three years. Happily quite often they asked to extend because they rather enjoyed the work, and I was usually quite happy to extend people.

But we were able to adjust the, if you like, balance of the staff, depending on the pressures. So in the period that we are looking at, for most of that period, working on Iraq, I had a senior deputy for most of the period, a military officer, and then I think about four analysts or researchers, which was our single largest team. But by the end of the period, by the time I moved on from the Assessment Staff in the middle of 2009, we were down to a deputy and one desk officer working on Iraq, as this was well after, by that time, the UK withdrawal.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mentioned the FCO's research analysts. Is that still a powerful body of expertise?

TIM DOWSE: It certainly is from our point of view. I think when you're looking at analytical resource, I would say that the concern that I consistently had has been not that the Assessment Staff should be bigger, but that we needed a more substantial base of analytical resource, expertise, across Whitehall as a whole.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: In the Foreign Office, as well as the political research analysts, there's also a specialist group called the Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit, who were, and still are, very valuable.

TIM DOWSE: But there are only two of them.

THE CHAIRMAN: I've just got two other questions. Although we are sort of starting with the Butler analysis, it's important really for the future whether there are new things or different things we ought to do.

One is the -- I think it must be an age-old problem, of how far you can reach outside the closed Government vetted community for particular sources of expertise. I believe that's commonly been done, and has had to be done in the field of the nuclear business, for example.

Is there an issue there for more broad political intelligence, of a commercial kind perhaps?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: When I was chairman of the JIC, I told all of the Assessment Staff to go out every lunchtime, to Chatham House or wherever, to talk to the experts, to get to know them, because it was very important that we had outside expertise.

I also discussed with the Americans. A question that they in their analytical community were feeling quite strongly was whether, as a government, we were exploiting open source information adequately, and indeed we discussed whether an open source search engine should be established. So we were encouraging that.

TIM DOWSE: I very much agree with that. One of the things, when we were going through this process of implementing the Butler Report, one of the things we looked at was the possibility of setting up a sort of JIC advisory panel of academics, scientists. In the end that didn't find favour, but I still slightly hanker for something on those lines.

THE CHAIRMAN: That enables me to deal with a loose tendril from the Butler Report, which was its distinguished Chairman's advocacy of a distinguished scientist, not the

Government's chief scientific adviser, but who would be available on a part-time basis to the Cabinet Office, and after some diligent searching I have found the name is Dr Frank Panton, the model that had in mind. I don't believe that that seed fell on fertile ground.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: No, although we often had the Government chief scientist coming to the JIC.

TIM DOWSE: Either the chief scientist or the MOD chief scientific adviser. That was the way we, if you like, took on board the Butler concept that when there was a paper, not by any means just to do with WMD -- I think we had them when we occasionally wrote about climate change -- we would invite scientific expertise to attend.

THE CHAIRMAN: And am I right that its essential purpose was seen not so much as the individual's take on a scientific issue, but rather the communication with the broader scientific community?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes.

TIM DOWSE: Butler did, I think, also recommend -- actually I think maybe it was the Butler implementation group recommended that we should have a scientist in the Assessment Staff, which I found slightly odd because it's a rather old-fashioned view of science. But I did in the end employ a microbiologist, who came to us from DEFRA, and actually proved very good at analysing missile programmes. So it may be there is some translation between the specialisms.

THE CHAIRMAN: On a different tack, my last point of

enquiry, or nearly last, is the issue of validation of intelligence.

Now, at the level of the Assessment Staff, that's really something to be done by the agencies. But we have had some evidence before this Inquiry that in some cases, notably with human intelligence collected in very difficult environments, there's not much you can do about validation, certainly in the short run. Either you believe it or you don't. You assess it as credible or not.

Do you want to comment on that at all? I had some sympathy with that view, I must say.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Maybe I can make two comments. They are at a rather higher level than validating a specific piece of intelligence, but I think one of the bits of Butler implementation was that we got better, I think, source descriptions. So that those who were reading the intelligence -- in the past it had all been a bit of a mystery where this intelligence came from. So we got much fuller source descriptions which we asked all the agencies to use. They didn't always use exactly the same descriptors, but they all produced their list of descriptions, which was helpful, I think, to readers.

The second was that in October 2004 we introduced into the JIC reports the intelligence base box, which told readers how strong or weak we thought the intelligence was, which I think was a helpful addition.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was the footnote-ing of the sources part of that October 2004 change?

TIM DOWSE: We started doing that before, before the invasion of Iraq. I think that started in about 2002 actually.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes. But again, it didn't go into validation. It just gave the reference to the report.

TIM DOWSE: It was, frankly, something we wished -- when we came to the Butler Review, we wished we had started doing it much earlier because it would have made life much easier to discover the basis for certain statements in the papers.

Perhaps I would also add that in one way you are right, it is difficult. But it is important -- it's one of the things that I used to emphasise to members of the Assessment Staff going to Current Intelligence Group discussions -- that if they were using a piece of intelligence from one or other of the agencies and putting a lot of weight on it, it was their job to test the collectors, to put, if you like, their money where their mouths were and to assure us that they were confident of the reliability of the source. Now and again, one would get some quite surprising piece of reporting, and it was quite important to test that.

I do know also, and it's something that you really need to ask the SIS in particular about, they put a lot of additional effort into their own source validation, into checking the reliability of their agents. They have various ways of doing that, and they're better placed to talk about it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Really just trying to squeeze the

Butler lemon dry, it made a number of observations. You have dealt with one of the central ones, I think, about attaching clearly in JIC assessments the limitations and caveats and whatever.

Have we got as much out of the lessons of the pre-Iraq intelligence business as we need to get now? Is that one done?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I would say, as a matter of philosophy, nothing is ever done. But --

THE CHAIRMAN: But nothing strikes you as significantly unattended to at this stage?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Well, up to when I left the JIC in 2005, I think we added one or two more things in Butler implementation which had not been brought out fully in Butler. But beyond that, I think we'd done a fairly thorough job at the time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Over the much longer span --

TIM DOWSE: Well, I left last year, and I still occasionally attend JIC meetings and am quite closely involved with the process.

The straight answer to your question is I think we have learned the lessons. I think we have to keep learning them. The real task now is to ensure that these things, as people move on, as generations move on, that we don't forget the Butler lessons.

One of the things we do do -- again, I think, this did come directly from Butler -- there was the conclusion that the readership of JIC papers didn't always understand what

they were getting, and that essay that the Butler Report included about the uses and -- I'm not quoting -- the nature and use of intelligence, we took that and paraphrased it slightly, and turned it into a document that we now give to all new readers of JIC papers. Indeed, I was handing them to new Foreign Office ministers just within the last couple of weeks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Something the Butler Committee did ask about, and has come up in some of our public evidence in a very general way, is the extent to which new ministers are inherently able to read, understand, professional intelligence material, without indoctrination.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I have been asked that at a number of these inquiries.

In my case, when I was in the Foreign Office, I think Jack Straw had been reading intelligence for a very long time, did read everything very thoroughly. He used to pretty much carry the key bits of the JIC reports around with him, when he was allowed to. But I think that booklet that Tim mentioned is extremely important. I didn't know that, that it had been handed out to new ministers. But I do think it's very important because I don't think ministers, new ministers, necessarily do know how to read intelligence and intelligence assessments.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When you were looking back at your performance on Iran, did you see the benefits of post-Butler methods?

TIM DOWSE: Yes, I think we did. Iran was one of them, and

we certainly applied quite a lot of the experience we gained from Butler to the review there.

The other cases that we looked at as well, a lot of it simply involved coming at this issue with a fresh set of eyes, a new angle, and checking through the sources.

It was slightly worrying -- reassuring in one way, worrying in another -- that in pretty well every case where we set the challenge team a task to say, "Have we got this right?", they came back and said, "We have been through it and yes, we think you did". That was actually one of the reasons I thought we probably ought to move them outside the formal JIC process.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would that have made a difference?

TIM DOWSE: We will see. But it's important that we do it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we will move on, and regard the war as having happened, at least the opening stage.

Rod, over to you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would just like to take a fairly quick look at the process of assessing the deteriorating security situation in Iraq between mid-2004 and mid 2005, at a time when Sir William was at the JIC and you were both there. There are three particular papers -- I don't want to go through them all point by point -- that the JIC produced, starting on 30 September 2004, and they came back, 27 October 2004, with a paper on the insurgency, and again the state of the insurgency in Iraq on 14 July 2005. I think the reason why I don't want to go through these papers in detail is because, looking at them six years

later, they read pretty well, I would say.

In approaching these subjects, and let's start with the September paper, was that something that the JIC, do you recall, decided to do off its own initiative, or were you actually being tasked with taking a look at this?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I decided to do that. We did it in a rather unusual way in that we didn't have the normal CIG process for that. I got together all the partners, and we had essentially a brainstorming session, and I think it says so at the beginning of the paper, "Discussion led by the JIC Chairman".

You are quite polite about those papers, but I would actually refer to a minute that we wrote, a JIC minute, in February 2005, which said:

"We have a strategic perception of the insurgency, but lack the information to support an operational counter insurgency campaign plan."

Our intelligence -- I would distinguish our intelligence and our broad analysis of the insurgency. Some of that broad analysis has stood up or did stand up quite well. The intelligence was always extremely limited, especially on the Sunni Arab areas. We had slightly better on Shia insurgencies, and we knew a little bit more, as we may come to later, about what the Iranians were up to. But certainly to start with, our intelligence was, I would say, not very good on the insurgency, [2] [redacted]

[2] The witness outlined in some detail the ways in which the UK had sought to improve its intelligence, including through closer working with the US.

[redacted]

What else did we do to try to improve matters? [redacted] We offered training at the more lower levels, operational level, to the Ministry of Defence. We had advisers helping the police as well.

[redacted]

[redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted].

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

So gradually the situation improved, but I would go back to that note we wrote in February 2005. We brought out those five groups in the September paper, and I think broadly we were right and it stuck. Who made up the insurgency, and broadly we identified numbers, et cetera.

But our intelligence was limited. It was also extremely limited on Zarqawi during my time, early time, and we had really very little on him. That started to change in May 2005, [redacted] But that, again, was a slow process.

So our intelligence on the insurgency was actually not as good as our intelligence on, say, Iranian, Syrian activities and intentions, on the political manoeuvrings in Iraq, and it was a slow process in trying to improve that.

TIM DOWSE: Can I add a couple of things? William is right in the period that he said. I do think things improved on the Sunni insurgency in later years, and in particular on the Zarqawi / Al Qaeda front. [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just one question on making sense of it all. One of the issues with these groups was there were links with criminal gangs and so on, and of course that also relates to the general problem of law and order in the area.

Did you get into those areas which were not political, strictly speaking, but could have quite a bit of an impact on who was doing that?

TIM DOWSE: In a sense. I recall we made the point several times when we made specific assessments of the situation in the south east, in Basra, that Basra was a very lawless

place. Even if you took the politics out of it, the levels of criminality were high, kidnappings, intimidation. But did we get below that level of general statement? No, I don't think we did. The DIS may have had a better picture. They may have had a better picture in theatre, but we were doing strategic assessments.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It's just one element of interpretation as to whether a group which may claim to be fighting for a noble cause was actually fighting for something a bit less --

TIM DOWSE: Absolutely, or may be fighting for both.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: And even the Sunni areas, when we did our five groups, one of the large groups were opportunists.

TIM DOWSE: We did spend a lot of time -- almost, I wondered at the time, too much -- trying to impose some order on the insurgency in 2004, and the five groups, which was essentially, I think, a DIS construct that we tested out and thought it was -- it does stand up pretty well, but I did wonder at the time, are we trying to put order on something, a level of order that doesn't really exist?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the things they had in the States was a political difficulty from actually talking about it as an insurgency.

TIM DOWSE: We never had that problem.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You were able to call a spade a spade?

TIM DOWSE: No problem. One thing I think we did get

right, right from the beginning [redacted] and that was that the Ba'athists -- particularly they eventually called themselves the New Regional Command, sitting in Syria -- were marginal to the whole event. [redacted]

For quite a long period the Americans, particularly the US military intelligence, tended to regard the Sunni insurgency as being Ba'athists.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Former Regime Elements.

TIM DOWSE: Former Regime Elements. We used that terminology for a while, but I think by the end of 2005 we were calling them Sunni Arab Nationalists, which I think was a more accurate phrase. Some of them were former regime elements, but the driving element wasn't to bring the Ba'athists back.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One more question on this. How did this relate to the American debate, your regular contacts with opposite numbers? [redacted] How did they view your analyses?

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: To get back to the sort of way that we did pitch together, what about were the British military? Were you getting from them what you could reasonably have expected?

TIM DOWSE: Yes. I mean, it was filtered through PJHQ and then through the DIS. I felt at times that we could have got a bit more. There are two things that I felt we were unsighted on, one of which was down to the military. We weren't really well sighted on the work of outreach to the Sunni Arabs. This is after William's time, but I think we were slow to pick up on the significance of the 'Sunni Awakening' movement. The year where things began to go right -- that is 2007 -- in my end of year review of JIC performance, one of my comments there was I thought we were slow to pick up on things and the fact that things were

beginning to go right.

THE CHAIRMAN: We had quite a lot to do with the Sunni outreach concept, but we were thin on the ground of course.

TIM DOWSE: Yes, and we had -- I mean, a British general was very heavily engaged in that work, and we had very little visibility of that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right.

TIM DOWSE: It improved towards the end of 2007 because one of my staff in the Assessment Staff went on secondment to the MNF outreach unit, and we started getting better information.

But otherwise the people in my team that were dealing with Iraq were in touch with British military people, contacts of theirs in Baghdad and in Basra. So we had a certain degree of backchannel, but the main input was via the DIS.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You've talked about our relatively better knowledge of the Shia insurgency [redacted]

Could we have had more from Baghdad and around Baghdad, [redacted]?

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

[redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: We were of course, in the political assessments, drawing on all sources. There was a lot of diplomatic reporting from Baghdad. Our embassy and ambassadors, successive ambassadors, were very active, and that was very helpful.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That would be a normal part of your procedure anyway.

TIM DOWSE: Absolutely, yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When in the 30 September paper on the Sunni Arab opposition the JIC concluded -- one of its main conclusions at the beginning -- that a minority, but numbered in many thousands, of Sunni Arabs are involved in armed insurgency, was that based on hard intelligence or was it a statement, a bit of a guesstimate, if you like, derived from a variety of sources?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I remember at the time people asked us to put a figure on it and we refused to because we couldn't. We just didn't have the information to put a figure on it. It was a judgment based on some of the insurgency that the MNF were having to deal with.

TIM DOWSE: It was a bit more than a guesstimate. The DIS, and [redacted] had done some work to say here are the number of attacks that are taking place, and they assigned a possibly arbitrary number, the number of insurgents who would need to be involved in any one of these attacks, with differences between complex attacks and simple attacks. The result was not a -- we can't claim it was a particularly scientific basis, but it was a bit more than a guesstimate, but not very much more. I think it was right.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Over the course of 12 months your judgments firmed up and they became more and more pessimistic. Those later events turned out you weren't

overstating the situation. If anything, you were slightly understating it. How was this received by your customers?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Well, I think we did an assessment of what impact our assessments had on policy formation over the course of the year, and in my JIC Chairman's report I wrote that, I think, 20 per cent of our assessments directly affected policy formation.

I think this paper and another summary that I did for DOP(I) in May 2005 did have an effect on policy, in particular our assessment of the speed at which the Iraqi security forces were developing. And we became more pessimistic over the course of the year, as the insurgency developed. The ISF did well in some limited numbers, even in Fallujah, back in November 2004. But our assessment of when they could manage the insurgency unaided was constantly slipping backwards, and I think those assessments did play into policy. Obviously people were not delighted to receive these assessments since they were bad news, but they had an effect on the policy that was then developed.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You were messengers bringing bad news to people who were under extreme stress, taking decisions. Was it difficult to get them to accept your message? Was there a lot of push back?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I remember in May, in DOP(I), being challenged by the Defence Secretary on what I had written. But I defended it, and went on defending it for a month or so. I think eventually, if not very happily, MOD did

accept it, but he asked me a lot of questions and questioned a lot of the detail. But I think eventually it was accepted. I think the Prime Minister accepted it quite readily at the time.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So would you conclude from that that the process worked and was sufficiently robust, or did it very much depend on the ability and the personality of the JIC Chair to stand up to pressure from people who really didn't want you to report the way you were reporting?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I think there was a process that was put in hand which was helpful in that I used to attend the ad hoc ministerial group which went up to May 2005, I think, chaired by the Prime Minister first. The Foreign Secretary sometimes took meetings. Then after the 2005 election, DOP(I), Defence and Overseas Policy (Iraq), was formed. The Prime Minister chaired that, and the process that was established was that at the beginning of every meeting, we didn't contribute to the policy argument, but I was always asked, always by the Prime Minister, to start with, you present the intelligence. And that was very helpful, that procedure, because the meeting then went forward on the basis of that, and people could challenge me. But that's the job of a JIC Chairman, to defend the assessments.

TIM DOWSE: You are right that we did get progressively more and more pessimistic. I think 2006 was really the low point where we began to say, well -- we actually began to question one of our fundamental assumptions, which was that

Iraqis were Iraqis first and Shia and Sunni second, and the scale of the sectarian violence got so high that we did begin to put about the words 'civil war'. They appeared in a couple of the assessments, and that was a low point.

I think, almost as a result of that, that played into the fact we were a little slow then to pick up in 2007 that things were turning round.

In terms of push back, after William's time, at the end of 2005, we wrote a couple of papers, one on the prospects for the elections, the December elections, where we particularly caused a few waves because we said it would take a long time to form the new government. I think what we actually said was it won't form until well into 2006, and at the time the policy was that the new government had to be formed immediately the elections had been over: it had to be very, very quick. And I did get a degree of push back then, saying, "What are you doing, saying that this is not to be formed until late in 2006?"

I think the problem really was that there was a lot of pressure being put on Whitehall as a whole and Number 10, saying we have got to get this up and running very quickly. That's our job. That's our mission. Here was the JIC coming in and saying "That ain't going to happen", and there was a bit of concern that people would read the JIC paper and say, "Oh well, we needn't bother". Actually I think that exaggerates the impact of a JIC paper, but that was one point.

Also, consistently we produced these assessments, roughly every six months, of the quality of the Iraqi

security forces, how rapidly Iraqi-isation was progressing, how effectively, where we were pretty consistently saying "This is all going to take longer than you want it to".

We got fairly consistent push back on that from the MOD, and I would say also from people in theatre who were engaged in training up the Iraqis. Their criticisms were, first, that there was a certain element of "how can you in London sit and say this isn't going well? Actually it's going fine". Then there was a second element that said, "You're setting your standards too high. We are never going to produce NATO quality Iraqi forces, but they will be good enough".

I think the second point is possibly a valid criticism, although I actually think that our assessments were, if anything, a little over-optimistic. We tended to pull our own -- I questioned a couple of times in my end of year reviews whether we had pulled our punches by saying they are not going to be ready to operate unaided in six months' time or 12 months' time, whereas actually we might have said in five years' time. But actually, in the end, when the assessments came back, I think they were accurate.

It became particularly sensitive round about the time we were moving into the period of handing over to Provincial Iraqi Control, because there was a date on which, particularly down in MND South East, provinces were supposed to be handed over to Iraqi control, and here was the JIC saying we are really not confident that you are going to have Iraqi security forces in a fit state to take over PIC on the date that you are planning it to be. And

I would get a certain feeling at times that that date was going to be met, no matter what the JIC said.

So, to put it in the best way, I think: people read the JIC paper and said, "Okay, that's what the assessment is. We are just going to have to do better and make it happen".

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Can I also mention a procedural change that happened during my time as JIC Chairman? We have also mentioned that the intelligence base box was brought into assessments. There was another change, which is that policy implications were abolished in July 2005.

I was actually in a minority of one in wanting to retain them, but the rest of the JIC were very clear that, partly, I think, as a sort of Butler separation of assessment and policy work, we should get rid of these.

I thought they had been quite useful because for busy readers, who were reading the overall conclusions, they flagged -- they never said what policy should be, but they flagged some of the questions for policy makers. But the rest of the committee didn't agree with me and felt that that was too much going into policy. So it was done away with, and some Permanent Secretaries said, well, they often quite liked reading the policy indications. But the Committee as a whole didn't like them.

I think the chiefs of the agencies were uncomfortable with them, and some others from policy departments said you should leave that to us after you have done your assessment. So we got rid of those.

TIM DOWSE: I have to say, I was one of those who did want to get rid of them for two reasons. First of all,

frequently the policy departments who were supposed to be providing them said, "We haven't got time, we can't think of any, the Assessment Staff should produce the policy implications", and I thought that was not something the Assessment Staff should be doing. And secondly, I thought that sometimes the Committee seemed to spend more time discussing the policy implications than discussing the assessment. So that was my perspective.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: One final small procedural question from me. You say that the September paper was one you yourself decided to write. A lot of your papers were commissioned by the FCO, and then in the July paper it says it was commissioned by OD secretariat. Is there significance in that?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: No. I think the JIC very much -- it was quite unusual for -- maybe it was unique for the JIC Chairman to say, "We will do this piece because I think there's a need for it". Very much the rule was we operated according to our customers' needs. So when our customers felt that they needed a piece on a particular subject, they would come forward and ask for it because a big policy discussion might be coming up and they needed the assessment on which to base it.

TIM DOWSE: Most of our papers were jointly sponsored by FCO and MOD, although we did try to discuss the forward JIC work programme on Iraq at a senior officials group that was run out of the Cabinet Office.

When OD secretariat commissioned a paper, that generally

meant that there was an important policy decision coming up and they wanted to have a JIC assessment to ensure that the ministerial discussion was based on an objective description of the situation, not coloured from one or other department's policy views.

THE CHAIRMAN: When in your time, Sir William, the JIC Chairman at DOP(I) was facing challenge from ministries, was the assessments base box ever used as a weapon against the judgment or the assessment the JIC Chairman was bringing to the meeting?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I certainly remember being questioned about particular statements in assessments and having to show the minister, usually outside the meeting, what it was based upon.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. But you wouldn't face a challenge that said, "Well, you say this is actually patchy and thin, so how can you be so certain?", that sort of question?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Those judgments were agreed by the JIC as a whole. So if I was challenged I could always say, "Well, your man agreed to go along with that".

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

TIM DOWSE: We did have -- I recall one occasion, a very unusual one, which is why I recall it, again one of these assessments of the Iraqi security forces' progress, where [a US official] [redacted] said he thought this was rather an odd situation, that you had one branch of Government criticising the performance of

another branch of Government. Which actually I rather thought was the purpose of the JIC in some ways. I should rephrase that: not the purpose, but one of the values of the JIC.

At that time, I think one of his comments was how much do these people know. But that was pretty well the only occasion.

THE CHAIRMAN: [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted].

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we might take a break here for a few minutes. Let's come back in eight minutes' time or thereabouts, and then we can get on to the Iraqi politics of 2004.

(A short break)

THE CHAIRMAN: If we may restart, I'll turn to Baroness Prashar. I think you want to ask questions about Iraqi politics.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes. Moving on to the information on Iraqi politics in the period 2004/2005, what tasking did JIC receive in this period on the political situation in Iraq?

TIM DOWSE: Well, we were asked to produce papers on the political situation in the same way that we were asked to produce papers on the security situation.

In a way, of course, it's an artificial distinction. I was always very conscious -- I touched on this a couple

of times, I think, in my annual reviews – that an improvement in the security situation was a condition precedent for political progress. On the other hand, political progress would have an influence on improving the security situation. So it was quite difficult to distinguish them.

But in practice the demand from customers was much greater for papers on security than it was on politics, partly, I think, because intelligence added more, inevitably, when we were looking at force protection issues, including the protection of people in Baghdad. And when security was such a dominant issue and became steadily more so, right through 2005/2006 into 2007, I think it's inevitable in the end that the demand for both intelligence reporting and intelligence assessment was going to be greater on security than it was on politics.

I did a quick review before coming here, and I'm quite struck that after going and doing myself a little summary of each JIC paper we wrote in this period on anything to do with Iraq, I have six pages of summary on security issues and two on politics. That was the balance. It wasn't from choice, and we would touch on political issues in the security papers and vice versa, but I think it was really where the customer interest lay.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were not asked about the underlying political dynamics, how the policy had been received, the implications of military policy. You -- were not asked.

TIM DOWSE: Not on anything like that, no. Where we

were -- what we were being asked about was what is the state of play between the various Iraqi political factions. It tended often to be questions based around an event, such as the constitutional referendum, the January 2006 election -- sorry, the January 2005 election, the December 2005 election, how long will it take to form a new Government, who will come out on top? Quite difficult things to assess, actually; in some ways more difficult than the security situation because a lot of the time you are dealing not with essentially facts, like the numbers of attacks or locations of IED networks, but essentially a political scene that Iraqis themselves didn't understand very well.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: And although the numbers were considerably less than for security, by my count there were nine JIC assessments in 2004/2005 on particularly the election, election prospects, the constitution, as Tim has mentioned, but also on issues like outreach, which of course were bound up with the security but were very important political activities that could help security.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were responding just to what had been asked. You didn't ask these questions at your own initiative; you were just responding?

TIM DOWSE: The way it worked was when it was decided we should write a paper on Iraqi politics, we would then go to the sponsors, most normally the FCO, but sometimes the MOD as well, and say give us some focus for this paper. We are trying to produce something that is policy relevant. What

are the big issues that you would like us to give you a view on, a judgment on, that will help you take forward your own decision-making? So the exam questions, as we call them, would be drawn up in that sort of way.

We found from time to time that the policy departments needed a little prompting to produce the questions, and it was an iterative process. Clearly my Iraq team would have views themselves on what they thought would be useful because they were plugged into the policy discussions as well. So it would be a certain amount of give and take, but essentially we were given a set of exam questions for each paper.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did Number 10 ever have an exam question for you to pursue?

TIM DOWSE: Number 10 I don't think in this period ever sponsored a paper as such. The OD secretariat, on the other hand, would give us questions, and that was quite common. Actually, now and again, if the departmental sponsors didn't want to ask a question, the OD secretariat were quite useful in stepping in and giving the question that others might not want us to ask. So that happened.

Now and again, re-reading some of the papers, I see things that we put in that, as I recall, we essentially asked a question that perhaps hadn't been asked explicitly, but that we felt needed to be asked or answered.

[redacted]

[redacted]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [redacted]?

TIM DOWSE: [redacted] I think we perhaps were quite influenced by the Foreign Office views at this stage. By 16 February 2005 we were saying that his chances were slim. So I think, you know, eventually we, perhaps a bit late in the day, did recognise that there was a change.

[redacted]

[redacted]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Sir William, you said earlier that you visited Baghdad in October and then did a report. Did the experience actually affect your personal view of the situation?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: My job then was really to talk about the intelligence structures and the intelligence resources in Iraq. [redacted] But my job was really at that time to look at intelligence deficiencies and to see what we could do to improve the situation. .

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you were not there to make an assessment of the political situation as such?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: No, I was there actually at the same time as the Foreign Secretary and many senior political officials and they were doing that. I sat in on some of their meetings, but that was not my job.

TIM DOWSE: I don't think we ever felt that we were short of information on the political situation. Making sense of it was more difficult. I think one of the problems we had -- I mentioned that people would come and talk, both to our embassy, but they would also talk directly to SIS, consciously to SIS But almost everybody who was providing

information had an axe to grind, and one had to read every piece of reporting with a certain mental reservation -- what is this person trying to achieve, what is the advantage to them in what they are telling us -- which made it quite a challenge for assessment.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In your view, what value did you think JIC added to the assessment of the political situation in Iraq, if any?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I think -- well, I give one example. In the run-up to the elections at the beginning of 2005, we were highlighting for policy makers the very slim representation there was likely to be in the elections of the Sunni Arabs and the number of seats that they were going to gain. In fact, I think we said 15 per cent was our initial estimate. In fact it ended up at 5. So we overestimated it. But we were showing red flags as much as we could, and that developed. We got closer to the mark as the assessments progressively got closer to the election. But that was showing the degree of difficulty there would be politically after the election because of Sunni underrepresentation, as a result of which those on the political side did all they could to encourage Sunni political groups to take part. Ultimately that failed, in that particular election. It was more successful in the following election. But I think that was of some value.

THE CHAIRMAN: Failed for lack of effort on their part or failed for lack of success in their efforts?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Failed for lack of success in their

efforts, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: They did try?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Oh yes, they tried very hard.

THE CHAIRMAN: A question really from the outside of all this. What was the JIC doing, offering or being asked to offer political assessments, albeit in a pretty conflicted situation? What's the ambassador for? Isn't it the FCO and the ambassador?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I would say emphatically no. Maybe that's a provocative thing to say to the Chairman, but I do think that JIC assessments, it's most important that they are all source, that they are not just reports on the intelligence, but they are taking information from every source. Of course the ambassador gives his view, and we were not, you know, dealing with, "Who should I talk to tomorrow and what should I say to him?"

But I think actually we can help an ambassador, and most ambassadors, when we do do political pieces -- I'm not just thinking of Iraq -- actually rather welcome it. They often have some quite strong views on what is put into the piece, and we debate that with them. But I think -- I have certainly known, and indeed I as an ambassador have used it, to use a JIC piece to say that's the collective assessment back at home. So it can actually be of value.

TIM DOWSE: I think there is a degree -- in producing a JIC paper, there is a degree of triangulation that goes on. The ambassador, particularly, I would think, in circumstances like Iraq, where you have an embassy under

high pressure, producing, I think actually consistently, a high volume of very impressive diplomatic reporting. But they can be subject to, if you like, group think just in the same way that others can, and I felt from time to time over this period that the Foreign Office view, and to some degree the embassy view, [redacted] and I think in some respect the JIC papers did serve a purpose -- not just the JIC papers, but all the other material that we were producing from within the Assessment Staff.

Occasionally I think I consciously tried to remind the readers that actually the Shia were in the end going to be the people that were running Iraq and we did need to avoid alienating the Shia, by being seen as aligned with -- to be pro-Sunni.

I need to be careful because I'm getting close to policy recommendations there, but I think to get a bit of a balance into the picture that we presented was quite important.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm trying to find a sensitive way to put this, but the great body of the long experience, expertise, cultural knowledge and exposure of the Foreign Office Arabists is to Sunni cultures.

Can I turn to Martin Gilbert?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: If I could turn to the Iranian dimension. Looking at the assessments over the period of

2004, the degree of Iranian interference in Iraq, particularly in the south, was assessed as gradually increasing.

What I wanted to know was, looking back, do you think that in fact the Iranians were actually doing more, or that our knowledge of the depth of their complicity was growing?

TIM DOWSE: We spent a lot of time, from really the very beginning, trying to fathom what the Iranians were up to. [redacted] We still found it very difficult to work out what their objectives and what their motivations were. But in 2004 initially, I think, we were slow to catch on to what they were doing. [redacted] and I think we started this whole period with a reluctance to see an Iranian hand [redacted]

[redacted] But essentially that was where we came to conclude that we had underestimated the Iranian intentions in Iraq.

Even then [redacted] we always felt that the Iranians had at least a twin track

policy, and probably more than that, more than two tracks. [redacted] But in the end our conclusion, which we stuck to pretty well from late 2005, though the words changed, but right up to 2009, the conclusion was that the Iranians did not want to see Iraq fall apart, but they wanted to make life as difficult as possible for the Multinational Force, and particularly for the Americans. However, we always thought they would exercise some restraint because they didn't want to actually provoke an American attack on them.

So I think there were a number of countervailing pressures on the Iranians which led them to pursue multiple tracks in their policy, which made it very difficult to assess. [redacted] But in the end, I think, the conclusions that we came to seemed to play out fairly well.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were the Americans able to share their assessments? Did they have similar or different assessments to us?

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of the Iranian motivation --

you have touched on that in terms of, as it were, the different motivations -- the Prime Minister told us, Tony Blair told us, that in his view Iran was deliberately trying to destabilise Iraq for its own purposes, and he gave -- I think he said, they were worried about having a functioning Shia majority with a democracy on their doorstep. Is that an assessment you would make?

TIM DOWSE: We didn't have really that conclusion. I think the language we said was -- this was in November 2005 -- we said Iran wants actually a stable and unified Iraq, Shia-led, with strong Islamic identity, open to Iranian political and commercial influence, posing no military threat, free of significant western influence. I think that remained our assessment, that that was Iran's ultimate objective. I don't think we saw evidence that the Iranians regarded Shia-led Iraq as a rival for support in the Shia world.

I think it's something that we ourselves speculated on, as to whether Iran might find that Iraq formed a different pole of attraction within the Shia world, because of the holy sites obviously, and that the Najaf Marjayeh religious leadership might become a competing pole of attraction to their religious leadership in Qom. But that was a speculation on our part. I don't think we ever saw hard evidence to say that that was something that featured in Iranian concerns.

The Iranians did a lot of quite constructive things. They were building roads. They were putting a lot of money in. They were very concerned for the security of their

pilgrims going to Iraq. But at the same time, they absolutely did not want to have a western military presence there. So they were able to -- at the same time as doing some of these positive things, they saw no contradiction with supporting particularly the JAM, and then in later years what become the JAM special groups, to launch attacks on the MNF.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: But in terms of the integrity of Iraq, they weren't --

TIM DOWSE: We thought they were in favour of -- they didn't want to see Iraq fall apart.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: And they were conscious also that they had Kurdish minorities.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: One more question, Sir William, about your visit to Baghdad in October 2004. What assessment did you make on the spot with regard to the Iranian involvement? Is that something which impacted on your visit?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Well, I think I would agree -- we were looking at the picture overall, but I think I would agree with everything Tim has said.

I don't think we felt that the Iranians would feel threatened by a democratic Iraq in which the Shia were in the majority. Of course they wanted the Shia to be the strong element in the government, and in the run-up to the elections, of course, they had an interest in ensuring that those elections went ahead and produced their desired result.

I do think though that they, as Tim put it, had a twin track policy. They wanted to prick the Americans constantly, to ensure that they moved towards an exit and didn't have a permanent base, and at the same time, they didn't want to do it to the point where Iraq was destabilised or the Americans left too early and left chaos. They wanted to keep them steadily moving, but not precipitately withdrawing too early. They also obviously, as Tim said -- but that was probably further back in their mind -- didn't want to provoke an American attack on them.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So at the time something like the Iranian encouragement and help for IEDs didn't seem to present --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: It was later that autumn -- well, in the course of that autumn -- that we began to see more intelligence that they had actually -- the pinprick side of it, they had actually been providing more than we had earlier thought to some of those in Najaf in particular.

TIM DOWSE: And of course, with the IEDs, that became a much bigger issue as time went on, particularly when the rather sophisticated passive infrared / explosively formed projective IEDs, PIR/EFPs, began to turn up, [redacted]

So that picture developed, and we spent quite a lot of time in, I think it was 2006 particularly, answering

questions from Number 10, because the Prime Minister was particularly interested in what had we got [redacted]

We produced a series of not JIC papers, but notes from the Assessment Staff, spelling out what we knew as opposed to what we assessed.

In the end, I think it was concluded at a policy level that what we could actually reveal wasn't sufficient to make a difference and would have jeopardised the intelligence sources. So I think this wasn't taken forward, but we spent quite a lot of effort going into that.

THE CHAIRMAN: [redacted]?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

[redacted] I think our assessments were used also diplomatically to put pressure on the Iranians to withdraw the IRGC in the autumn of 2004, and they did withdraw temporarily a little bit. They came back after that a certain amount, but I think our view was that ultimately it was Khamenei who was driving policy, and probably broadly on the twin track, but with a bit of the harder edge to his views.

TIM DOWSE: Yes, I think that's absolutely right. It was more focused and more driven than perhaps we initially assessed. As I say, we spent really quite a lot of time getting analysts together, having seminars, trying to fathom out what in some way seemed to us, even seen through Iranian eyes, a pretty counterproductive policy, because you could look at it to say, well, the more they cause trouble, instability, and attacks on the MNF, the slower the MNF withdrawal will be, and surely they can't want to keep the Americans there? But then there was one school of thought that thought, well, perhaps they do want to keep the Americans bogged down in Iraq, rather than free them up to launch an attack on Iran.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: To what extent was Iran policy understood at one level as a function of American policy, given that at this period you are having the whole nuclear debate heating up, and there was the view that it was

helpful to have UK and US forces there as sort of hostages.

TIM DOWSE: Well, I think we understood very much that broader US/Iran or western/Iran relations, including the nuclear issue, were a factor in this calculation, and I think once we were up to 2007/2008, the assessments explicitly refer to Iran seeing instability in Iraq as something it's prepared to trade as a counter in the nuclear discussions, and that became a bigger issue as time went on.

Of course in the early stages, 2004/2005, we were still in a period when the E3 negotiations with Iran on nuclear issues were going ahead. Then it became the E3 plus 3. So we were still trying to find a co-operative approach with Iran to deal with the nuclear issue. It was only as we moved into 2006/2007/2008 that things became more confrontational.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was that sort of relationship understood by the CIA as well? Did they see things in the same way?

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

[redacted]

THE CHAIRMAN: Can we turn to the situation after Sir William's leaving the JIC Chairmanship, so we are into 2005. I hope, Sir William, you won't refrain from commenting.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What I would just like to understand, how did JIC's view of the Sunni and Shia insurgency in Baghdad and the surrounding areas develop over this period?

TIM DOWSE: Well, we are taking the end of 2005 forward. I think the thing that we saw was, first, if I can reel back slightly, we spent a lot of time trying to decide who is the biggest threat. Is it the jihadists, who became ultimately centred around Al Qaeda in Iraq, Al Zarqawi subsequently? Is it the Sunni nationalists? We were sure it wasn't the Ba'athists. But then there was also the question of the Shia insurgents, and the Shia insurgents, we could park them on one side. So as between the jihadists and the Sunni nationalists, which were the biggest threat?

Throughout 2004, and again 2005, we were pretty consistently saying that the Sunni nationalists were the long-term threat. They had the biggest support. The jihadists were a minority. Quite a lot of them were foreign fighters. They had the ability, through their suicide bombings, to have a disproportionate impact, but ultimately what we needed to address was the alienated Sunnis.

That had a direct feed into policy because there was a lot of policy attention given to how do we split the nationalists away from the jihadists, how do we drive a wedge between them such that we engage with the nationalists, isolate the jihadists. The jihadists, we took the view, could not be reconciled, certainly that was the JIC view. There would be a hard core of the nationalists who would not be reconciled, but the bulk of them, we said, if we can demonstrate that there is a place for them in the future Iraqi politics, then we may be able to draw them in.

That went through 2005. But as we moved into 2006, and particularly after the Golden Mosque bombing and the wave of sectarian violence that that started, we began to become certainly more pessimistic. It seemed to us that far from driving the nationalists apart from the jihadists, actually they were being driven together [redacted]

So it seemed to us that the trends were all in the wrong direction, and there was a period -- in addition to our JIC papers, I think you will have seen, we were putting out a weekly intelligence note which went particularly to

Number 10. It was something that the Prime Minister asked for, a weekly pack of material on Iraq, and we had an intelligence note in that. For a long time we would start that off with a summary of attack statistics, and I think early in 2006 we said we are going to stop giving you this weekly summary. Partly that was because every time it dipped in a week, people would become quite excited and say things are getting better, and actually that was not a good picture, not a straightforward picture.

So instead of giving a weekly summary of attack statistics, we started giving a broader brush, more strategic look, and the picture that we had was you did get occasional plateaus, but there would then always be another rise in the level of violence from a higher baseline, if you like. The underlying trend -- and we did put that into a JIC paper eventually, in quite a telling graph that showed that the underlying trend of violence was always up.

Then, as I say, after the Golden Mosque bombing, the violence became more explicitly sectarian. We had started making reference to risks of sectarian conflict, I think, much earlier. I think actually even before the end of 2004, the JIC started to refer to sectarian violence. But nevertheless the Shia were extraordinarily restrained, actually, through 2004 and 2005. But then after the Golden Mosque bombing, the JAM really was let off the leash and the violence became much more explicitly sectarian.

That was another problem actually that we had with the statistics. The statistics came from the MNF, and they tended to underestimate the degree of sectarian and

civilian casualties. So it was another reason why we decided to stop using them.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Why were the Shia restrained? Do you know any reason why they were restrained?

TIM DOWSE: Well, I think one reason was their religious leadership, Sistani in particular [redacted] consistently we saw him as a force for restraint

He was anti-sectarian. That didn't mean he was not pro-Shia. He had a very firm view that the Shia had the right to rule Iraq. But he was quite firm that he wanted a united Iraq, that he did see the Sunnis and the Kurds [redacted] as part of the future Iraq and he was very concerned himself with the risk of sectarianism. So that was a restraint.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [redacted]

[redacted] he didn't directly talk to any of the foreigners?

TIM DOWSE: No, our embassy tried to talk to him from time to time, and he was quite firm that he wouldn't. I think he might have seen Brahimi at one point.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, he did.

TIM DOWSE: But in general he had a high opinion of the UN, and was quite consistently in favour of -- he really wanted to UN to be fulfilling the role of the coalition. But he was consistently, I would say, a force for good, and we were very concerned that he might drop dead or that he might be assassinated. In fact we did a very specific assessment at one point [redacted] But that was one form of restraint.

But as 2006 wore on, the levels of sectarian violence particularly seemed to grow and grow. Of course in the middle of the year, we also had the Israel/Lebanon conflict, which in a way added some fuel to the flames, and Muqtada al-Sadr in particular capitalised on that. So that was a further concern, and we were becoming very pessimistic towards the end.

I think, as I said earlier, that rather played into the fact that when we got into 2007 and the US surge happened, at the same time as the Sunni awakening movement really began to pick up and make a difference, we were quite slow,

I think, to recognise that. Even when we did recognise it, we were still pretty cautious that it would have any lasting effect. There was a feeling that the US surge could only last for so long. It was only sustainable militarily for a limited period, and after the Americans had drawn down again, we thought that the insurgency might then pick up.

But actually there does seem to have been -- I say that with some caution because things could yet go the wrong way, but it does seem to have been something of a tipping point at that time, and the Sunni engagement really paid off.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you say you were slow to recognise that?

TIM DOWSE: I think in 2007 we were quite slow. Indeed, my annual review for 2007/2008 that I wrote was something that we had quite a debate on within the JIC, when we looked back on the performance of that year: why had we been slow to pick it up?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What were your conclusions?

TIM DOWSE: Partly that -- well, perhaps it's better that your organisation that is charged with giving you warning is inclined to the cautious rather than the panglossian, but secondly, that -- and it's something we had seen before actually -- we sometimes failed to factor ourselves, or ourselves and our allies, into the assessment. Actually the things that were really making the difference were things that we ourselves or more particularly the Americans

were doing, and we'd really focused on the enemy, rather than making a genuine net assessment.

I'm perhaps being too hard on the JIC: a lot of other people [redacted] were pretty sceptical that the surge was going to work. But with other factors as well, it did seem to play out.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How far did the JAM ceasefire impact on the --

TIM DOWSE: That was obviously a factor as well. We tended to look at the JAM ceasefire very much through a prism of what's going to be the impact on British forces in Basra, because by the beginning of 2007, obviously, we were very focused and the policy makers were very focused on the ability of the British forces first to move out of the centre of Basra to the airport, and then what was going to happen after that. On that we were giving quite a number of warnings, really, that we were concerned that once they saw we were going, that wasn't going to mean that the Shia insurgents were going to stop attacking us. On the contrary, they were quite likely to step up their attacks in order to claim credit for driving us out, and that happened to a certain extent.

Even when we moved to the airport, we thought that we would come under quite heavy pressure. That, I think, happened rather less. We were perhaps a bit too pessimistic at that point. But the ceasefire certainly helped.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did the departure of the UK troops

from Basra City affect the quantity, the quality and the reliability of the information that you were getting?

TIM DOWSE: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It did?

TIM DOWSE: Yes. Generally Provincial Iraqi Control began to seriously affect the quality and quantity of the intelligence we were getting within MND South East. It was a point that we drew attention to in one of our assessments, that our ability -- I think it was described as our ability to influence the situation -- would decrease as we steadily handed over province after province in the south east. But it was true also on the intelligence picture. [redacted]

So yes, our situational awareness, if you like, did diminish. It was more of a problem for the troops on the ground, I think, than for us. We were, after all, trying

to look at the strategic picture.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you have any observations -- I know it was after your time, but anything you want --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I don't think I do, no.

THE CHAIRMAN: Lawrence.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just a couple. With the pessimism that you described, what happened to the challenge function there? Were there people saying we are being too pessimistic, or was the challenge to challenge against being too optimistic?

TIM DOWSE: Well, it's a good question. Were there people saying we were being too pessimistic? Up to a point, but I think they were -- if you like, from the policy side. I think it was less saying you are being too pessimistic, and just saying, well, we see what you say, you may well be right, we have just got to make sure it doesn't happen; not actually questioning the basis for our assessments.

Of course, from the point of view of the evidence base, it was quite difficult to challenge our assessments until we got into 2007, the summer of 2007, when we began to get the drop off, quite a steep drop off, of attack levels. Until then the evidence seemed to support our assessment.

In looking at what was going on in MND South East, nobody really challenged us on what life was going to be like after withdrawal from the centre of Basra. One of the particular things, I think, where we might have pulled our punches, and it was never really tested, there was a policy statement, if you like, that even once we had left the

centre of Basra, we had the ability to re-engage. I think certainly my view, and that of the intelligence community, was that we didn't think that was true in any meaningful sense. The idea that we could have gone back into Basra and reoccupied in the event of a crisis, we thought was extremely optimistic, to say the least.

We never actually were in a position where we wrote that in an assessment. I recall going to a couple of meetings where I asked the MOD representatives how confident they were of the assertion of re-engagement and was told -- I think the phrase was "We recognise we are carrying a risk". Actually it was never really tested.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally -- it follows on from that -- to what extent did you feel that the assessments coming out of MND South East reflected what's been described as a can-do attitude on the military side, and were you providing a challenge to the institutional optimism that the military may sometimes claim to have?

TIM DOWSE: Well, I did feel that a little bit. I don't think it ever really manifested itself particularly at the JIC. It was more a matter that from time to time at an interdepartmental meeting one would make a point at which there was a certain degree of spine stiffening or intake of breath around the room. But, of course, the military do have a can-do attitude. They never want to say "this is impossible". But I think also we were at a stage, by the time we were into 2007, when we were on a very different railroad to withdrawal, and there was a reluctance to accept that anything would derail that

timetable.

In fact, actually, we wrote an assessment in about March 2007, on risks to withdrawal, where we said -- no, sorry, I think it was 2008 actually, early 2008 -- where we said actually there will be residual violence, but it won't derail the UK withdrawal plans, and that proved correct.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you feel before 2005/2006 that MND South East were on top of the risks that they were facing?

TIM DOWSE: I don't think we really -- we didn't really assess that so much. We were spending more of our time looking at the national picture.

What we did say, and I think it was a true statement, but the MOD was always very keen that we put it in, when we looked at again these big picture assessments of the insurgency or of the state of Iraqi security forces, they were always very keen that we included a paragraph, and probably a key judgment, saying, "But, of course, things are better down in MND South East".

Of course they were. The threat was less. A lot of the time when we were looking at the development of the Iraqi security forces, we were saying they are improving, but they aren't improving fast enough to keep pace with the growth of the insurgency, and I think that was true up until round about the middle of 2007, and at that point the balance shifted.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. I think we will come to the end. I have just got three rather general questions, and then

I'll ask if either of you want to offer final reflections.

The first of mine is basically about the US/UK intelligence relationship, and how far we were mainly in step throughout the period 2003 to 2009 in our assessments, or were there moments when one or other intelligence community quite strongly influenced the other? Is it possible to generalise about that?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

THE CHAIRMAN: [redacted]?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

[redacted]

It's perhaps worth saying the sort of interaction we had with the Americans. [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

[redacted]

THE CHAIRMAN: I was going to ask, so perhaps this is a good moment to pick it up, what you've just observed about picking up from a huge flow of tactical intelligence, particularly from the military, or indeed intelligence on the ground, and how you could gather that up for the purpose of strategic assessment level assessment. [redacted].

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there a general lesson there? [redacted]

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: [redacted]

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

TIM DOWSE: It's a lot, and I think some of those lessons are being applied to Afghanistan. We have to work at it.

[redacted]

THE CHAIRMAN: One last question from me, before inviting any final reflections of your own.

Going right back to the pre-invasion period, is there a natural and proper role for the JIC and the agencies that supply intelligence for its assessments in the Phase IV planning, a look ahead? We have had evidence from one senior witness from the intelligence community who said Iraq is not actually a natural target for intelligence collection. He was talking about Phase IV in effect, the likely state of Iraq at the time of invasion and predicted state after it.

What about the JIC and the Assessment Staff? Is it a natural area of interest and responsibility?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I think it could have been. For example, some of the things that happened in Iraq were rather unexpected, like the complete dissolution of the Iraqi army by Bremer. So we weren't asked to look at that. Had we been, it might have been quite useful, but we didn't know what the policy was going to be.

But I think looking ahead, which we tried to do after the war, to what was going to happen, how would our popularity rather quickly decrease -- and we did say that -- yes, I think it's a proper thing to ask the JIC to do.

TIM DOWSE: I agree. I'm aware of the quotation you have mentioned, and I was slightly puzzled by it at the time because it seemed to me that if one is going to war with a country that is one on which we don't have a huge amount of open source insights, if that's not an intelligence target, then what is? Certainly the JIC, I think, would have been failing in its responsibilities if it had failed to try and offer papers, and of course it did. I was re-reading in particular the paper that was written before the invasion on what would happen in the south, and actually the JIC made some quite telling points there.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: It also did one on what would happen in the north. So we did one on both of those.

TIM DOWSE: Of course, in a way, what we didn't write about was what was going to happen in the middle, and that was where a lot of the problems arose. But, of course, that was going to be an American area of responsibility.

I think the JIC should -- it is a natural thing, and it was quite right. The fact is that for the period that we are talking about, 2004 to 2009, until the very last year Iraq was the single largest item on the JIC agenda every year, and I think that was absolutely correct. Now, Afghanistan came to rival that from 2006 onwards, and that became a considerable strain on the Assessment Staff resources, and I think more widely. By, I think, this year, Afghanistan is certainly greatly outstripping Iraq, but this is what the Government is doing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Can I invite any final reflections? Perhaps

they might include, if you are minded, any sense of view of the impact on the running threat to the UK in global terms by reason of our involvement in Iraq.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: That was actually the only area I was thinking perhaps it might be worth saying something, because a question that did frequently come up was: is Iraq exacerbating the global campaign against terrorism? We did about six reports in the year I was in the JIC, but there was one specifically in May 2005 on what is the effect of Iraq on international terrorism. It might be worth just covering some of the points that were in it because most of them were negative, but not all of them.

There were some quite interesting nuances. I mean, the overall conclusion was that Iraq had exacerbated the threat from international terrorism and would continue to have an impact in the long term, but then there were about six or seven views beneath that.

The first was that it had confirmed the belief of many Muslims that Islam was under attack, and that Al Qaeda propaganda was sustained by coalition actions in Iraq and by some of our words. We didn't go into details on what that was, because it was pretty obvious. Abu Ghraib talked of, 'crusades' and all that sort of thing.

Our second conclusion was that it had attracted new recruits and had strengthened the resolve of existing extremists, and that particularly in the UK there was a clear consensus, here where a wide range of networks were re-energised and refocused, that the Iraq jihad was legitimate and should be supported. Indeed, we judged that

Iraq was likely to be an important motivating factor for some time in the radicalisation of British Muslims.

We also judged that nations contributing to the coalition would be priority targets, thinking in particular of the Madrid bombings, but also of an attempt to attack the Italian Embassy in Beirut in 2004.

Another conclusion was that -- this was a nuanced one -- we were seeing an increase in co-operation between terrorist networks: [redacted]. More exchanges of personnel, finance, equipment, much of it flowing to Iraq. [redacted]

Another view we took was that the merger of AQ and Zarqawi had strengthened the AQ brand name of the time, but we didn't think that would divert attention of those who might be planning attacks on western targets outside Iraq.

We also didn't -- although, as I mentioned, there was much more co-operation between the networks, we didn't know how much AQ would use them in fact, have the trust to use them, or didn't trust them.

Another conclusion was that Iraq was providing a new training ground, an obvious conclusion, for terrorists to gain expertise, and we did see evidence of jihadists leaving Iraq and using that expertise against targets elsewhere in the Gulf. Again, it was a nuanced conclusion because, as with past wars, we didn't expect the majority of those who left Iraq to engage in further extremist activity. That may be a counter-intuitive conclusion, but

it had been the conclusion from earlier wars. There were certainly some who did, but it wasn't everybody.

Then there were two final more encouraging points.

[redacted]

The last conclusion was that -- again, potentially, an encouraging one -- we judged that an Iraqi Government that included strong Sunni representation and spoke out clearly against the jihadists would actually have a very positive effect throughout the Muslim world, and indeed the ejection of foreign jihadists by them, if that happened, would be a very powerful message, much more than anything we could do.

That was in 2005, and the picture moved on after that.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was the date of that?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: That was May 2005. It leaked eventually in the Sunday Telegraph.

TIM DOWSE: Although --

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: I do remember, I sent it only to the members of CSI because it was such a sensitive report. It leaked nonetheless.

TIM DOWSE: It became even more apocalyptic in a way after William left, because in December 2005 we were saying, and

I think it was true at the time, that Iraq had become a key motivator for Islamist extremists around the world.

I think, looking back now, that may have been quite temporary. I think you are going to be seeing Eliza Manningham-Buller, so I would be interested in what her view is.

Both on that, and also on the impact of what the Americans used to call bleed-out, which is people leaving Iraq, hardened terrorists, to go and attack elsewhere, I think it's been less than we had imagined that was going to happen. The Saudis might disagree, but I think it has been rather less.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think that was an aspiration?

TIM DOWSE: By?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Of Al Qaeda?

TIM DOWSE: I think it might have been.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: There was talk, wasn't there, of --

TIM DOWSE: [redacted]

It could have gone worse. But actually, in the end, we saw very little direction of attacks, certainly into Europe, from Iraq, [redacted]

So I think perhaps it has been a little less than we thought, and now that there has been the rejection by the majority of Sunnis in Iraq of Al Qaeda, because Al Qaeda essentially overplayed their hand internally, at that point I think we now have to wait to see, does that have a broader impact elsewhere? And that also may be less than we had anticipated.

THE CHAIRMAN: A broader benign impact?

TIM DOWSE: A broader benign impact, yes. But I think it's too early to say. It may also be less than we anticipated, but we will see.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Any other reflections?

TIM DOWSE: Only one, and I think it's something that other people have said, having read quite a lot of the transcripts.

I felt at the time, and I still do feel, that we, the British Government, went into Iraq from entirely honourable and defensible motives. But having got there, I think we did fall down on organising ourselves in London to deal with this, in particular in resourcing co-ordination at the centre. There were really very few people at the centre

trying to pull all the strands of a multi-agency, multi-department operation -- what in Afghanistan we call the comprehensive approach. It was held together by very few people working extremely hard at the centre, and that was just about tolerable until we got to Afghanistan in 2006. When we had the middle of 2006 certainly, when things were very tough in Iraq, when things were very hot in Afghanistan, hotter than we had anticipated by quite some way, and then we had the Israel/Lebanon war as well, the mechanisms for Government co-ordination, I think, were stretched extremely thin.

The Assessment Staff was part of that, and we also felt stretched extremely thin, but we did come through. But I think it is a lesson. If you are going to do this, then you have got to do it properly.

THE CHAIRMAN: One proposition that has been put to us, and I wonder whether either of you would support it, as one address to that problem would be the appointment of a fairly senior minister of state, not a Cabinet Minister, but with nothing else to do, giving full-time political attention to the bringing together of all the different pieces --

TIM DOWSE: I think that could be part of it, but I think you have to support that figure with a degree of bureaucracy. There's always a tendency -- I think this is something Andrew Turnbull said -- for the Civil Service to try and make do with what they have got, and it's almost an admission of failure to say "I need more". Of course it's particularly going to be unpopular in the next few

years, when we are all going to be trying to do more with less.

I think in a way the Prime Minister saw himself as that person -- as himself the senior minister who was controlling, but he found that it was quite difficult to have anything on the other end of the lever.

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: My only observation would be Ministers of State tend to get squashed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Unless they are the true reflection of the Prime Minister?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes. If they have the absolute support of the Prime Minister and working right alongside him. But if they are not, they generally don't count for anything, and more important is for the structures to be available to give good support to the Prime Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: More important than a focus for ministerial political direction?

SIR WILLIAM EHRMAN: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you both very much indeed. That was a valuable session. Very much obliged.

Just to remind the transcript has got to be looked at here. Sorry about that. But at your convenience.

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

(The hearing adjourned)