(11.30 am)

MARK ETHERINGTON

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome back to those who were here earlier in the morning and welcome to our witness.

In this session, we are hearing from Mark Etherington. You were head of the Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team between April 2006 and January 2007. I think.

MARK ETHERINGTON: That's correct.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Etherington had served previously in Iraq as coordinator of Wasit province during the CPA time. Now, we do not intend to focus on this latter appointment in the time we have available this morning unless you want to add any general reflection about it at the end of the session.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Do you mean the former appointment?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: Another thing to bring both to the witness' and to the wider attention is that the government has declassified a paper which Mr Etherington wrote on his return to the UK in 2007 and we are publishing this on our website now.

We are also publishing the transcripts of two

hearings that we held in private with other junior witnesses who served in Iraq between 2004 and 2009. This evidence was taken in private because of the relatively junior status of some of those officials at the time that they served in Iraq. The majority of the content of their evidence was not covered by our protocols and so is made public now.

But for reasons of fairness, we will not be questioning Mr Etherington on these transcripts this morning.

Now, on each occasion we recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events and we check what we hear against the papers to which we have access, some of which are still coming in.

I remind each witness on each occasion that they will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate.

With those preliminaries, I'll turn to Sir Martin Gilbert to open the questions. Martin?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Could you tell us, when you took up your post, what did you understand to be the background of the founding of the PRT and what did you understand its objectives to be?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Perhaps I could just quickly say, insofar

as it is helpful to you, that I was also the head of the joint planning team for Afghanistan, for Helmand province in November to December 2005. I know you have been interested in lessons.

To go back to your question, Sir Martin, it wasn't actually clear at the time. I had been recruited in January of 2006 and I had gone over on a reconnaissance in February before taking up post in April 2006.

The TOR were -- the terms of reference -- the TOR were not issued to me until my arrival in May. Although, of course, I had some sense of what I was going to be doing. The background to this I think had been that there had been considerable American pressure for the British to establish a provincial reconstruction team and, as you have heard from other witnesses, this of course was effectively an import by Ambassador Khalilzad, the American Ambassador from Afghanistan, very much an American --

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr Etherington, sorry, could you slow down?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Of course, I beg your pardon.

So this had been an American import and my sense at the time was that it had been imposed on a rather reluctant British Government. I did not get the sense that this was something that they were necessarily keen

to do or would have done, had they been given the opportunity.

So that really coloured much of the creation of the PRT and its development because we had not necessarily done the homework required to create the PRT, nor, I would contend, had properly understood the implications of creating this unitary approach.

Now, the TOR -- the terms of reference given to me, the headline, I remember, was to improve the delivery of UK civil and military assistance to southern Iraq. Clearly, there were other bullets, but this was the key one.

I think these sprang largely from the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit's view of what I would be doing, for whom I worked at the time. That was this nascent unit inside DFID which has now become the Stabilisation Unit.

So I arrived with this sense of what I was to do. I hadn't properly appreciated, I think, the reluctance with which UK had embarked on this enterprise and this was very much the atmosphere I found when I got there, that departments had not, in the main, prepared themselves to lean forward into this new organisation but were rather prepared to admit it for, say, presentational rather than functional reasons.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is that both in theatre and in London?
MARK ETHERINGTON: I can't say that I got that sense -- well, there were a couple of occasions. In my prior meetings before taking up post in April, one did sense a certain lack of enthusiasm, let's say, for the venture, and it was made fairly clear that it was under American pressure and, had I been unconscious of that, I became quickly conscious of it during my reconnaissance in February, where actually -- I think his name was Ambassador Dan Speckhard, who had been a senior -- who was a senior American officer up in Baghdad, had come down in a sense to review our preparations. Fortunately, I was there and was able to show, presentationally, that we were committed to setting the thing up.
SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can you tell us something about how you were recruited and also about your own experience and perhaps training?
MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes, of course. Training. I'm a former army officer and I left the army in 1991. I was in the Parachute Regiment. I was then asked, under circumstances that were not clear to me but were nonetheless welcome, to take part in something called the European Community Monitor Mission, or ECMM as it was then, during the Yugoslav war, and I was seconded by the

Foreign Office to that organisation between 1992 to 1995, from memory. In other words, throughout the war.

Because of that, I was then used again in Kosovo, where I was based in the Vienna Secretariat of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE. I then went down to become the deputy head of our mission in Kosovo, up to Belgrade, a few -- it goes on for some time, I am afraid. So I think the point here is that our experience in these theatres was quite -- was fairly disparate. We had not gathered it as a government, I think.

A number of us belonged to databases all over the government. I was on, I think, an FCO database, and it was true of a number of people, and these databases were called upon in times of difficulty. My recruitment as a Governorate Coordinator - or province governor, I suppose - in Iraq in 2003/2004 was through the Foreign Office. I was then with the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, as I said, in Afghanistan and latterly in Helmand.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of training, was this essentially what you did as province governor?

MARK ETHERINGTON: The training was on the job. There was actually very, very little training given. I think, much later, the Foreign Office launched a sort of

hostile environment training course which was very useful, and there has been a considerable formalisation, I think, of training and experience since then but, as I'll argue later, I think we have some distance to go.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: To whom were you reporting from Basra and what was the sort of dialogue of the reporting?

MARK ETHERINGTON: The reporting lines were relatively complex, as these things are in a coalition. My line manager was Ambassador Ros Marsden, who was the Consul General there. I reported to her. I had a dotted line to the Cabinet Office and I had also a reporting line to what was called the National Co-ordination Team, the NCT, which was the American-led PRT co-ordination function in Baghdad.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: It was American-led?

MARK ETHERINGTON: American-led, yes. With, as I remember, a British lieutenant colonel attached to it.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What was the PRT's intended relationship with the existing British efforts in the south?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Well, they started off awkwardly -- and I should perhaps say how I found things in February when I went on my reconnaissance. I was, frankly, fairly shocked by what I found. I had been in Iraq for ten months before, in Wasit province to the north. I had

driven to Basra on numerous occasions as a province governor – I'll use that phrase because it is slightly more descriptive than "Governorate Coordinator".

I found a very changed city. Security, particularly, had deteriorated very substantially. To give you an example, I used to drive into the city from Wasit, which is some six hours north. That was now very difficult to do. On this occasion, I flew into Basra by helicopter. Rather tragically, that was one of the last of the daylight flights because a helicopter was shot down, I think, ten days later[1].

So the environment was a very different one, and I know it sounds rather prosaic, but people weren't waving anymore. One didn't get that sense of public support that I felt we had once enjoyed.

The relationship with departments, I think, was immediately coloured by the -- I think it is fair to say - - reluctance they had in taking part in the enterprise in the first place.

I think there were real concerns that American pressure would interfere with standing programmes, and I remember one member of DFID talking about the 'tsunami effect', the possible 'tsunami effect'. So we were placed in a curious position. The PRT was stood up as an HMG function, but the only -- the departments that could

[1] The witness subsequently clarified it was 6 May 2006.

alone make the PRT function were not attached to its creation.

So the very people who had set the PRT up were not really particularly enamoured of giving it scarce resources, time and money to build it up to its proper state.

So I think it is fair to say we floundered. So when I arrived in February, I detected much of this and was concerned about it and, just to recap on probably the most important point of that time, at that stage the military headquarters had moved to the airport, so we were not co-located. It was done, as I understand it -- and this happened before my time -- for perfectly reasonable reasons, which were to lower the military footprint. To make our military effort less significant.

The effect it had, of course, in command and authority terms was quite substantial, that the key leaders, if you like, were no longer co-located. So that was point one.

The second, I think, was this business of the six-month tour. Now, I know this has been mentioned often but, taken in aggregate, this had been hugely damaging, and it was not just the military problem, it was for all of us. If I can go in order a little bit,

in my nine months there, I worked for two heads of MND South East - the Multi-National Division - three Consul Generals, three heads of DFID office, two heads of US office and I think two heads of Danish office.

Now, this is in a nine-month period. I know we have talked about this before, but its effects are very, very substantial - it's not just a military problem, and I know it has been mentioned often in that sense.

I think the second thing was that the nature of the effort I saw was that it resembled to me a sort of archipelago, a scattered series of islands with no obvious links to one another on which people were working extremely hard, and I have to say - and to be very honest about this - extremely bravely in many cases.

So these are not individual comments, they are institutional and contextual comments. One did not get the sense that there was a binding strategy or, to drop it a level, plan for British engagement in the southeast and certainly not for allied engagement in the southeast. So these were my impressions. That was what I saw. I was surprised and, I have to say, slightly shocked, because this was three years post-manoeuvre war and I had hoped that we had moved on.

So I came away from that reconnaissance visit in pretty reflective mood and I wrote a report then, which

I have sent to you, which highlighted, I think, my major concerns and these were basically that for the PRT to work, it was an ideological formula, it was a single ideological doctrine. This is what we were all going to do. It was an ideological "roof" - and preferably a practical one, in the sense that you had everybody under one roof doing the same thing but of course, to have that, you needed a plan. You needed to know what it was we were doing and what it was others would do, and you had to have a very, very clear sense of how it interlocked.

By implication, of course, you also needed to have a steering group who could run the plan, "own the plan" in military parlance, and these things we didn't have. So I felt we lacked the strategy. I was concerned that the requisite homework had not been done prior to the PRT's existence. Clearly, to do our job, we had in a sense to supplant some activity or we risked duplication. That number-crunching hadn't been done.

There was another issue - and this has come up only tangentially and particularly with Andy Bearpark's evidence which I read the other day - and that is this business of what we would call Strategic Communications, the business of influencing the public in theatre to support your aims, to explain what it is you are trying

to do and what's going to happen.

This, to me, had been wholly neglected, inexplicably neglected. I just didn't get a sense we had had a serious stab at this. So I mentioned this in my report too.

I think there were also clear risks. One was already happening in a sense. It was the erosion of consent in Basra and it was a peculiarly Basra-centric problem. I remember the other provinces did not suffer from this so much, apart from perhaps Maysan.

So there was this sense that we were perhaps missing key bits, consent was eroding. I thought there was a risk also that we wouldn't resource the PRT, given the mood music I had heard and I did feel that a poorly-resourced PRT was probably worse than no PRT at all.

I want to explain that slightly curious comment: a PRT functions because you gather all of the moving parts together in a single template - and of course, the edges of that template flex - but what you are also gathering is half a dozen contractual schemes, half a dozen leave schemes, half a dozen different cultures, three or four different nationalities, different transport, different security schemes. So unless you have worked that through in advance, you are

left with actually an aggregation of weakness rather than strength, and these were the points I made at the time. I'm not sure how widely that document was distributed - nor what the uptake was - but that takes us through my early session.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: In terms of resources, can you tell us, when you arrived, what -- I mean both human and financial -- resources were at your disposal and what you were able to do to either enhance or expand those?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes. I arrived in April, as I had said. We were given a magnificent building and all credit to the Foreign Office for the work they had put into that. Not easy in a narrow compound to do this sort of thing.

The resources -- in a way we had a head start. What the PRT did in a sense was rebranding. We took existing effort and called it the PRT.

Now, there are advantages to that, of course. One was on the ground very quickly. You gathered, to my great satisfaction, a number of extremely experienced people. People who simply walked from one office to the other, if you like.

So it meant that, in presentational terms, we were up and running pretty quickly and I felt we had a very experienced team and one capable of discharging its responsibilities, which nonetheless remained fairly

opaque at the time.

We had three or four Danes, from memory, who had come across from the Danish office. There was an agricultural expert and some police experts. We inherited, though much, much later, DFID's governance and capacity building team which had been placed there in the consulate. So we gathered in those disparate elements -- if I can use that without being pejorative -- from existing effort.

Now, the downsides of this: I think I have described that you are also importing the danger of not starting and training a team ab initio, of course, and it means that you are inheriting all of these different cultures and working practices. So it is quite difficult to rebrand, if you like, substantively and set them on a new path.

Now, in terms of funding, as I remember, departments had given us, I think, a total of £350,000 start-up costs which were largely administrative. We later, much later in the year, gathered, I think, the rump of the governance and capacity building fund that DFID had had, which I think was £190,000. But these were relatively small amounts of money.

The big money, so to speak, wasn't available at the time. In prospect was "ESF" and, forgive me, I can't

remember -- economic stabilisation funds[2], I believe - were American. We were originally granted 15 million by the National Co-ordination Team in Baghdad. I immediately put in a bid saying that, because we were Basra, a large city, that I didn't think the money should be divided pro rata, I thought -- you know, divided between 15 PRTs in that manner -- I felt that it should be divided according to our[3] size, and we got, in the end, 40 million.

The point about this money, though, is it had a very, very long glide path, if you like. So it had been thought about in April/May but we didn't actually see any of it, I think, until autumn. So actually what we had, looking back on it, were some fairly immediate problems and they weren't easy to dispose of. We had people -- and so we could make a fist of it. They were good people. We had a building.

What we didn't have, as I said, was really an overarching strategy in which to plug. Rather, we were asked to create one by the National Co-ordination Team -- and, again, I have sent you some rather voluminous documents -- but that consisted of assessing where we were and planning where we wanted to go.

Our difficulty at this time was combining that with British efforts of the time. We didn't really have any

[2] The witness has subsequently clarified it is Economic Support Funds.

[3] Our refers to "Basra".

funding, not proper, solid funding. So this was -- these problems, I sense -- they were in a sense obscured in the sort of typical minutiae of the day, as we moved into our building and got staff behind us and got computers linked up, but once we were there, these rather more pressing problems became clearer and impeded us.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: My last questions concern the timeframe. For how long were you told that the PRT would exist and how far did that shape your thought about the work and, in particular, your relationship with your Iraqi interlocutors and how they regarded it?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think my memories are that my first contract was pretty short. I think it was a matter of months. But the NCT's vision for the PRT was two years and I remember that's the work plan we had to produce.

So I think there was this -- from the beginning, this at least implied divergence which became substantive divergence, and I think what happened is that this divergence, the boundary lines, became rather turbulent as time wore on, because I didn't get the sense at the time -- we can talk a little bit more about this later -- one didn't get the impression that the UK was committed to the long-term in Iraq. You did get the impression that the Americans were; and the two-year work

programme was at least evidence of that.

So my memories are of staffing being a recurrent difficulty. For a brief period of time, in fact for about two to three months, I think, there was governance work going on in Multi-National Division South East, which I'll abbreviate to MND South East, if I may. There was governance work, of course, going on in DFID and being led by DFID in the consulate building and we had just been set up to do a governance strand too.

There was infrastructure and economic work going on in MND South East, and infrastructure and economic work going on in DFID; the same with us. Rule of law was divided between MND South East and the Foreign Office, and was a co-ordination role we later took on.

The point I'm making here is that, where we were designed to simplify, we actually complicated, I suspect, and the lines of operation became very messy. It wasn't at all clear who had the lead for doing what and I was surprised by that at that juncture, that very, very difficult juncture post-war.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: The impact on this on your Iraqi interlocutors?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I have to say we didn't see an awful lot of the Iraqis at that time. I know it sounds an extraordinary thing to say. I remember it from my time

at the back end of -- sort of mid-2004 in Iraq, that I used to spend days, hours, weeks, on the road with Iraqis, nothing else. The security deterioration put paid to much of that.

In Basra at the time, it was very difficult to go and see Iraqis. It was done. It was always a deliberate enterprise and carefully thought through. We had interpreters who came in but, in the end, they stopped. An interpreter, I remember was shot, in the consulate -- a consulate interpreter was shot.

So interaction with Iraqis was very difficult. It took place in, as I say, rather deliberate chunks. In the early days, Iraqis would come in to the consulate. Later on I think they found it rather hazardous because, of course, they were seen coming in - and we would have sort of set-piece discussions on, perhaps, infrastructure or working groups on governance and this sort of thing, and the governance team particularly gathered Iraqis outside the country at intervals.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: We need to get on. Over to you, Roderic.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. We have now in evidence, and declassified, this report that you wrote in March 2007, so I don't think we need repeat anything that's in it. It is a very useful bit of evidence and you have picked

up a number of those points already. So what I would just like to do is check off, so that we are clear, just one or two questions that arise from it.

I mean, firstly, you have already referred to absence of leadership. Where was leadership coming from in the collective British effort in the southeast of Iraq at this time or where should it have been coming from?

MARK ETHERINGTON: It is curious that Britain itself was missing from Iraq. That was my sense. Instead -- I must explain that -- instead I saw departments and I saw departmental views --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you can't identify somebody who was the clear lead figure on the British effort -- in theatre for starters?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think, to answer your question directly - we had a Consul General who, of course, for the majority of my time was Rosalind Marsden and she was in charge of the consulate. If one took a helicopter ride to the division and walked into the Divisional Headquarters, the minute I entered the door, the general was in charge of the headquarters and, as an officer once said to me, "There can only ever be one general".

In DFID's office, clearly the authority rested with DFID to implement its programmes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You said earlier that you were reporting to the Consul General.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So, for civilian affairs, was it clear that the Consul General was our leader, our authority, our leader in southeast Iraq?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I don't think it was, no.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You didn't have a clear line of authority?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I don't think it was clear. It was rather consensual and very personality dependent. I think some of the generals whom I saw felt a lead role was appropriate. Other generals whom I saw felt perhaps that a role in support of the civil mission, so to speak, was more appropriate.

So I think one of the difficulties was that there was no clear sense of leadership. Indeed, we managed to establish -- and it is something we pushed very hard for -- the southern Iraq steering group - although we called it the Basra steering group when we first asked the Cabinet Office about it. The general and the Consul General co-chaired.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

MARK ETHERINGTON: So I think this business of leadership is important allied to the business of the plan. So there

wasn't a single plan, and I think one can get too hung up on this but there wasn't a single construct that set out our destinations clearly, and there wasn't a single owner of that construct whose job it was to deliver that plan.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We had already been there three years. I want to come back to the plan in a second.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just tracing leadership back to Whitehall, from your perspective of head of the PRT, who in Whitehall was leading the effort?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I personally felt that no one was and I'll say why: here we were, three years post-war. Now, in reading some of your transcripts, I read that Iraq was a "top strategic priority" for the Prime Minister, that there was a "strong drive" to deliver. I saw no evidence of that at all.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You say you had a dotted line to the Cabinet Office.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes, and I would like to explain that to you, just to complete that point. So here we are, three years post-manoeuvre war, in an environment where there is a strong drive to deliver the top strategic priority - and there is no plan and there is no obvious leader.

I think I found that surprising. I still do,

actually.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the Cabinet Office is the co-ordinating body within Whitehall. You had a dotted line to them. If you wanted guidance, instruction a decision from Whitehall, how did you go about getting it? Did you send a message to the Cabinet Office, to a particular official there, or did you go through the Consul General saying "Can you, as it were, get authority for this, that or the other?" How, in practical terms, did you do it?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I would like to go back one remove if I may and I learned a lot, of course, from my original time in Iraq and from all of the jobs I have described, probably at tedious length, before it. When I went to do the planning for Helmand with my team --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can we not go back too many removes?

MARK ETHERINGTON: No, I just want to say that the thing that made it work was this business of having Cabinet Office support. The thing that in a sense got departments to cooperate was that business of having a Cabinet Office mandate. I remembered that and I think the PCRU remembered it too, because, of course, I had worked for them at the time.

Now I'll come back to Iraq. We were terribly keen - because we thought the PRT was going to be a turbulent

old business - we were very keen to retain that dotted line to the Cabinet Office. So we could try to intercede where we could. So, to answer your question, we had talked to the Cabinet Office before we went and I think I spoke to Sophia Willits-King -- I think that's the name -- and it was to the Cabinet Office we turned in May[4] to try to resolve some of these issues, and I wrote a document - that I have sent to you - for a meeting on 22 May in London to deal with many of the issues outlined in the report.

So that's how we did it. Was I clear at the time to whom I was addressing these requests? No. And my memory of this is of an apparently -- a very -- a very large number of VIPs coming into Basra with aides and their pencils would smoke, you know, as one was saying, "There are just three things" or "There are just these four things". I don't remember much of that coming to anything.

So my impression -- and it is as strong now as it was at the time, I think -- was that we just lacked that locus in the centre of government in which to plug-in complex cross-governmental stabilisation enterprises like this one.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Turning now to the absence of a strategy, the absence of a plan, what did you do about this to

[4] 2006.

fill that gap and can you tell us about the Better Basra plan?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes. I said what my impressions were in my reconnaissance, and it wasn't much more than 20 days after my arrival in April that I felt that, you know, there were some substantive problems here that weren't easily going to be sorted out. These are listed in my lessons learned paper, and actually were initially listed in this Cabinet Office paper which you have.

I felt that what we should have done is to say, "Right, we are going to form this PRT, it is going to have responsibility, or at least co-ordination responsibility, for some fairly complex strands, governance, rule of law, economics, infrastructure", and we needed, therefore, to look at where we were doing those things and decide who is going to do them to make sure we are not tripping over each other.

As I said, that wasn't done, and for a couple of months, I think, this three-team system, duplicating not in one layer, but in two, persisted. So I think at this time I had sort of characterised myself as the Ancient Mariner. I ran from office to office saying "Surely we have to see --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did the Ancient Mariner manage to get a plan put together?

MARK ETHERINGTON: No one said "Unhand me, grey beard loon" - but I think they were thinking it - and I suspect that. We were doing our planning all the time. We were fulfilling what's called the requirement to plan for the National Co-ordination Team, and this was very sequenced and carefully laid out. There was training, an initial acquaintance with documentation which took us to an interim operating capability. We then had to do a baseline assessment of Basra across all lines of operation. We needed to grade them in colour terms. I needed to write a cover document. You have all of this and I am afraid they are rather long. So it is pretty substantive stuff, right or wrong.

The difficulty we had was that we couldn't lock it in easily with British effort because that British effort had not been defined and leadership was not defined. So we didn't even have, I suspect, an entity with which to interlock.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: The Prime Minister came out soon after you had arrived, May 2006. This process of trying to work towards a plan presumably was underway. As a result of that visit, were we then able to achieve some kind of united set of objectives and work towards them in a more coherent way?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think we achieved a measure of

coherence and I put it no more strongly than that. It took a while to work these things through.

Better Basra, I think, had three iterations, if my memory serves me right, some of them after my time, and Better Basra, ran, if I remember --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: When was the first iteration?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think Better Basra began 25 May 2006. That's when I think I first saw the paper.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You saw it, but had you helped to write it?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes, absolutely. We had, I think, quite a substantial influence on it --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So we had a plan from this point?

MARK ETHERINGTON: No, we didn't have a plan. What we had was the desire for one, and there is a huge difference and I suspect this is a long-running thing --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So (overtalking) objectives Better Basra, not an actual plan?

MARK ETHERINGTON: We had a set of aspirations and I think this, if you don't mind me saying so, cuts to the heart of the chase of much of what you have heard. We had lots of aspirations and we are told that it was a great priority. What we lacked were delivery systems, and I think this factor haunted us throughout our time there.

Now, my understanding is we didn't have a joint

plan, by which I mean a civil/military plan with the Division alongside us, until 2008. So the facts are that, since the manoeuvre war in 2003, for five years, Britain subsisted, of course, without a joint plan.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: A very strong theme in a document you wrote in March 2007, which again you have reiterated today, is the disease of departmentalitis, of different departments pursuing their own agendas, and yet, at the same time, you said it was an important objective of the British Government to succeed in this enterprise.

How should we have made sure that the different bits of British Government were joining up in theatre to achieve the success we wanted, these aspirations?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I have talked about the "archipelago" and I would like to reiterate that I met many able and very brave individuals. The difficulty was that we lacked the synergies that that activity should properly have produced. So we lacked a binding plan and, as I say, it wasn't until 2008, as I understand it, that the MND South East and the civil components had a joint plan.

We -- I think it took a considerable amount of time to get there. How could we have got there sooner? In my own view, there would have been -- there is no substitute for a clear locus in Whitehall for

responsibility, a door with "Iraq" on it. Cross-cutting Iraq, delivering the Iraq project, if you like.

In my view, that should have been matched by a clear locus in southeastern Iraq.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But once the PRT had been invented and you were in charge of it, hadn't, at that point -- even if it was not invented here, it was invented by Ambassador Khalilzad and imported, nevertheless, hadn't, at this point, a mechanism for delivery been set up with you in charge?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So were you able to drive that forward?

MARK ETHERINGTON: No, because the mechanism was not autonomous, of course. It depended on departmental input. So, for example, all of our staff, the pre-dominant numbers of UK staff, certainly the technical expertise had to come from DFID.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So, if you weren't getting the input you needed, what were you, as the boss, doing about it?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Making myself fairly unpopular, I should imagine. I was a demandeur for many months. It is on record. I tried very hard, and you have some of the documents that I wrote at the time about it. I sensed, and my experience led me to believe, that we simply hadn't done our homework.

I understand that others may differ from me, but I came at this with quite a few months in Iraq anyway, which doesn't necessarily, of course, mean that I know everything, but it does give me a sense of perhaps where we might have been. I felt that we had struggled from the outset to position ourselves properly, largely because I didn't think our partners were behind us:

DFID did not transfer their governance people into our team until July 31st and I arrived on April 24th. So for three months we maintained some of these duplicated structures. I think there was always a tension about the PRT itself - what was it for? Was it a British instrument to deliver short-term effect alongside MND South East or was it a long-term capacity building instrument, semi-autonomous because it had to be in a sense --

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What did you think it was there for?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I thought it was the latter; in other words, the two-year programme, and I'll tell you I thought it was that because of the National Co-ordination Team work programme - to which, of course, the UK had signed up - and I think, if I can speak a little more personally, I also felt we owed it to the Iraqis to be there for that period of time. I had seen at first hand, the damage, the dislocation, the

extraordinary suffering in Wasit and I really felt, having, of course, left early because of the November Agreement in 2003, having left early – on sovereignty - I felt that we owed it to them to put in this capacity-building, and make sure that they were as prepared as they could be.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Last question from me: you, as you said, have served in the army, you are an ex-army officer and a very important bit of the effort. The most important bit of the effort, numerically and in terms of resources, that we had in Iraq was, of course, our military command in MND South East.

How effective a relationship were you able to perform with our military commanders and were you able to leverage that to achieve the objectives of the PRT?

MARK ETHERINGTON: It varied, of course. I think General Cooper and I did not see much of one another. This was in the early stages. I think General Shirreff arrived in July or something of that order. I had seen enough by that period to buttonhole General Shirreff on his reconnaissance visit and, by pure coincidence, I knew him a little from past military life, and I said to him more or less what I said to you, "I sense that we just don't have a plan, we have just got – together - to create something" and I said I was very worried by the

lack of civil/military - it is not liaison, it is integration, absolute integration. We needed to be in lock step with one another.

We agreed, I think, on much. We had hatched a plan to move some of his headquarters back into Basra, which was to be called Chief of Staff (Forward), if I remember rightly, which would enable us to recreate that civil/military structure I felt that we had disposed of - although at the time, of course, not consciously and for good reasons - but now was really coming back to haunt us. So we agreed on that.

When General Shirreff arrived - and I remember clearly the briefing he gave us - his assessment was that, you know, we were stalled in Basra, that we were running to stand still -- I paraphrase him -- there were not simply ambushes taking place in Basra, but I remember him describing full conventional warfare in built-up areas. A patrol might go out and be ambushed in to Basra and then be ambushed on the way back again.

So these were serious times, and he and I both wanted -- I hardly equate my effort with his - - but I think we both wanted in our way to make sure that our bits functioned. So we had this plan. When he came back he gave this briefing and he outlined what became Operation Salamanca, which was a robust, and what the

military would call a kinetic, plan to take on the militias.

Now, for reasons that you will be familiar with, that didn't run with Prime Minister Maliki, and the plan was quickly rehatched as a sort of short-term capacity building plan. In its former guise, of course, it was everything we had hoped for. We were very substantially constrained by the security situation, and so any idea that the militia was to be taken on in this way was welcome to us. You have to have security for development.

I didn't see myself as a Lincolnshire bomber squadron commander sending people out to do governance meetings - this was dangerous stuff. I knew the Jaysh Al Mahdi well. They had attacked my compound in '04. We had had a couple of close shaves with them, so they are pretty effective.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. I think my colleagues will want to come back on security later, but over from me.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You have touched on most of the areas I was going to ask in some detail, but what I would like to hear, first of all, is if you can describe what are the main strands of your own work with the PRT?

MARK ETHERINGTON: We were given by the National

Co-ordination Team -- and, indeed, that template sufficed, I think, for pretty much everyone's effort -- a governance stream, a rule of law stream, an infrastructure stream and a economy stream and how one mixes those up and combines them is, of course, largely a matter for those doing it.

Of those, the governance stream was the most developed, and it was the most developed because DFID had done a great deal of valuable work on it before our arrival. So in this sense particularly, that stream was by no means complete, but it was at least a material process.

Economics and infrastructure, I think, had suffered. I didn't get the sense there was a large body of work -- sorry, economics had suffered. I didn't get the sense there was a large body of work there. In infrastructure terms, again DFID had done quite a lot.

The rule of law, again, had been done in a number of separate streams. As I remember it, the Foreign Office were responsible for prisons and police, MND South East was also responsible for some aspects of police training. The mentoring, I think, fell to our side. So over these months that Sir Roderic has asked about, we were gathering these streams together, trying to staff the PRT and, to answer your question directly - there is

a great deal of material in the documents I have sent you and the work programme was pretty complex - but, in summary, the business in governance was trying to get the Province Council to function in a way that could run the city and, at the time, even picking up the rubbish was a function we tried to look at.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When you got there, what were the gaps in the staffing capability that you had? Did you identify the gaps and how did you go about getting them?

MARK ETHERINGTON: In our capability, they were numerous. We settled on a figure, I think, of about 35, as all-up strength in the PRT, but in retrospect this was well below what we needed.

The reason is, of course, that 35 is not a static figure. I have said that we had different leave contracts. We had four of them. There were enormous frictions attached to daily operation, and let me give you an example.

I said that security arrangements had not been deconflicted. I couldn't ride on a convoy with my military deputy. His rules were different to mine. He clearly couldn't ride with me. Neither of us could ride with our American deputy and he couldn't ride with either of us.

So the picture I suppose I'm trying to give you is

an accretion of relatively small problems that, taken together: the lack of plan, the lack of leadership, the conflicting security requirements, the business of money, the business of staffing, departmental -- lack of departmental commitment to the plan, together built up to a very substantial problem, that dramatically impeded our work.

To answer your question directly, on each of these work strands, we assembled a working group that would then take a baseline of where we stood in these given sectors and then create -- and this was not just a British affair, this was with our allies -- with our Iraqi colleagues, too, whenever we could see them -- a work programme and that's what's detailed in that document.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But with the Stabilisation Unit, do you believe that the UK was developing the sort of necessary post-conflict expertise in such ventures or not?

MARK ETHERINGTON: At the time, that expertise was very much nascent. The Helmand planning activity that I had been part of was the first of its excursions and that was in November 2005. We are just talking now about April 2006. So really this was, in a sense, its second outing, I suppose, in these terms.

So we were very much about building up experience at the time. I don't think that experience was particularly present in government -- our government. I don't think it was present at the centre and I suspect that may be the reason for some of these difficulties for us.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You have mentioned earlier about the question of lack of resources --

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: -- but how did you spend the resources that you did have? What priority did you give to resources at your disposal?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Well, the start-up fund that we received, the £350,000 fund which was tri-departmental, was spent on administrative issues, it was spent on sort of photocopiers and rooms and all the administrative detail one would expect in moving into a headquarters.

The economic stabilisation – 'Economic Support Fund', I think, was that 'ESF' acronym -- was of course, spent on Iraq, or we attempted to spend it on Iraq. Of course, it was very difficult to operate at the time. We would offer it up to the council for agreed infrastructure projects and the aim then was to make sure that the Council handled that money, disbursed it properly, accounted for it properly and that the projects were

worthwhile, and we established a panel for that. The governance fund that we got from DFID, or the rump, was used to run governance conferences, which typically would talk through stages of a financial development strategy for the Province Council. There would be tutorials, if you like, on how to spend the money, how to disperse it, how to account for it, as I have said.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you had discretion locally in terms of how you could use the resources you had at your disposal?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Not entirely. Understandably, we were asked to go back to DFID on their money, and on the ESF funds we had to go back to Baghdad.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You mentioned that of course you are working with the coalition.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What's your experience of working with a coalition and what lessons would you draw from working with the coalition and were there challenges there?

MARK ETHERINGTON: There are always challenges in any coalition. I'm not sure that I could add to the body of lessons that others who have worked more recently in Afghanistan, for example, have provided.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But was there a shared understanding

among the coalition partners of what the PRT was there for?

MARK ETHERINGTON: No, I don't think that was the case. I think the American vision of PRTs was laid out pretty clearly. They saw it is a long-term capacity building venture centrally co-ordinated. I don't think that was a vision shared by us and we have described that.

A word on the Americans, I suppose, from what I saw, is that -- and I long ago worked for an American company and I feel I know them reasonably well -- they do come at the thing with an extraordinary sense of mission. We are talking about six-month tours now in 2006; my American colleague, in 2004, had done 17 months in Iraq. Admittedly, some of that was owing to an emergency, but he had routinely done a 13-month tour and had four months added to it.

Many of the American officers I met on my first time round were still there on my second. So there was a difference in Iraq terms -- and I don't know if this is the same in Afghanistan -- between our approaches, I suppose. Americans, as I say, have a very, very clear sense of mission and the need to get it right. Every time I saw them come across a problem in the PRT, they simply added the length of time to their tenure to get it right.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So how did you ensure cohesion within your team?

MARK ETHERINGTON: That bit wasn't too hard. The person who ran the NCT at the time was a colleague of mine from 2003/2004. We had been Governorate Co-ordinators together in south central region. So we knew one another. I had also taken the chance to see them in Washington before I went. So I felt we had quite a close relationship.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. Change of tack and on to the security end. Lawrence?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You have described how much things had deteriorated from the time you had last been to the time you arrived, and obviously we have heard a lot about the deterioration in the security situation. You have also indicated how few Iraqis you were able to see over this period and the reasons why.

Did you feel you had any understanding at this time of what was going on on the Basra street?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think it was very limited, if we are honest with one another. I remember those days particularly, I think, as sort of giving Powerpoint briefs to one another in air-conditioned rooms with no Iraqis present. We were conscious of it. We saw them as often as we could and it has to be said, of course,

that, in inviting an Iraqi to come to you, you are also placing him or her at some risk. So we were conscious of our responsibilities there too.

When we were out of the country -- and I remember we invited a group of them to Kuwait, they were also invited to Jordan, and we found that we were able to have really good, substantive discussions. But I think the casualty of the security situation was very much this local awareness.

Now, the military, of course, would feed us information from what they had gleaned on patrol, but I don't think we should kid ourselves that we had a particularly clear view of what was happening on the street, no.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was it possible to make any progress on the PRT's work, given the security situation?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I remember it as a very, very hard slog. I think governance made some progress. As I said, it was set up before we arrived and it was able to capitalise on that momentum. I think we made slow progress with infrastructure. Rule of law, I think, benefited from a sort of unitary view among us, even if we weren't able to make very much progress on it. I remember supporting the main courthouse and the judges in Basra.

We -- I don't think we made startling progress, no, and it was very frustrating of course, but this security situation is hard to describe, I think, to people who haven't experienced it. It had an enormous effect on development activity.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you have any confidence in what might be done to improve it? You mentioned Salamanca, before that turned into Sinbad, there were these pulses, operation.

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think when General Shirreff briefed on Salamanca, it was very welcome, and we talked about the Americans briefly. I remember the American head of office sitting at the table looking visibly relieved. Now, of course, the Americans had graded, if I remember this rightly -- I have tried to follow this up and find the origin -- had graded us as a "Red" city. There were ten "Red" cities in Iraq at the time and Basra was one of them in American parlance.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: "Red" doesn't sound good.

MARK ETHERINGTON: It wasn't good, no, so there were ten sort of crisis cities, if you like. Clearly there was a bit of Schadenfreude there too, because we had at least given the impression, however unwittingly, that Basra was going pretty well in the early days and that we had a feel for these things. So I think the feeling

was at the time that it needed to be tackled.

General Shirreff briefed on Salamanca and that seemed to be what was required, and I think everyone agreed it was required. I personally, at the time, had my doubts that it would succeed in the way it was outlined because it is very, very difficult to tackle an insurgency like this, and they clearly had a measure of public support - although I wouldn't exaggerate that.

The difficulty came in Prime Minister Maliki's reactions. So of course, Salamanca had to transmute very quickly into a capacity building operation, which it was never designed to be and, ironically, it supplanted the very capacity-building development it was first designed to enable, I suppose.

So, of course, we didn't get that security effect - and the security environment continued to deteriorate is my understanding.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: In November, the Foreign Secretary decided civilian staff should relocate to Kuwait.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Yes.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you in favour of that move?

MARK ETHERINGTON: That was a very controversial decision, and the military particularly were pretty angry about it. I have to take full responsibility for, I think, raising the issue. I don't know what led the Foreign

Secretary to take that decision then, but I had become very concerned about the safety of our staff and I did not feel that the constant mortaring, the risks of going outside, were in any way conducive to the development we sought.

I had also long suspected we should have been at the airport anyway. The only reason I didn't raise this more fully at the time was because the consulate was in the middle and I thought we had to be there. But there were many arguments to have had us with the military from the very beginning.

So the Foreign Secretary took that decision. I think the speed with which the operation was carried out is something I did not favour. We were moved in a matter of hours in some cases and I think a maximum of three days at most. It created an enormous amount of difficulty for us.

So I agreed with the sentiment. I thought something had to be done and I agreed that we should be moved if the situation went on that way. But I did not agree with the speed with which it was carried out and the date on which it was carried out.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Once there, could you remain effective? Was there much you could do?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I don't think we were that effective

before we left, frankly, if I'm honest. We were able to do something and I think we were able to keep an eye on the things we had begun, and we flew people into the airport, remembering at the time, of course, that hard cover was supposed to be the minimum requirement for our staff and there wasn't any at the airport. So I think the risks were quite clear.

I'm very conscious, as I say this, that the military were running far greater risks than us; they did not have the benefit of hard accommodation. But I felt that -- I felt I had a duty to my civilian staff. That was my view at the time. I'm happy to be condemned for it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that's all I have.

THE CHAIRMAN: You have given us a very candid set of responses to our questions, for which we are grateful. You said at one point that no PRT might have been better than a really ineffectual one. Looking back on the time of its existence, would no PRT have been better than the one we actually had and what it achieved, was able to do?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think there was a period of time between, I would say, April and October that was pretty difficult, for all the administrative reasons I have outlined - and almost, I have to say, comically difficult

on occasion, trying to gather these disparate convoys. We were helped considerably by the Foreign Office, who in the end, I think in August, some time later, declared that we should be treated as Foreign Office, all of us, and that was an important point because it was either Dane or American, or, you know --

THE CHAIRMAN: Is this August 2006?

MARK ETHERINGTON: August 2006, and at that time things became a lot more easy for us. So when we went into transit accommodation at the airport, of course, we were treated all as British members of the Foreign Office. So that helped us a lot.

But what I have to say is we had to break trail on these tremendously difficult administrative arrangements. But we did manage to do it slowly, not nearly as quickly as we should, and I think what we managed to do, dare I say it, is demonstrate a degree of utility by summer -- that we demonstrated, I think -- and this comes back to Sir Roderic's question on Better Basra.

Better Basra was a set of aspirations, and we were able, by simply being, to gather some of the strands of Better Basra, to make suggestions about how it should be run, to provide a repository in Basra Palace to run them.

So I say this because I think the PRT suffered enormous administrative difficulties. We gradually, and very painfully, began to sort those out. We began to demonstrate some utility, I think, to all parties in August/September, but regrettably the security environment was deteriorating at such a rate that it was very difficult to make the advances that we were now suited to carry out.

THE CHAIRMAN: You have referred already, as you do in your statements and reports, to the top level aspirations of the work of Basra for the southeast, but at the same time you tell us, I think, that the departmental expectations were pretty low, and semi-detached, even.

Was there disappointment? Did it come through, either from the highest levels of political leadership or indeed from departmental colleagues, who said, "Oh, what a shame"?

MARK ETHERINGTON: Sorry, a shame about what, Sir John?

THE CHAIRMAN: A shame that it didn't manage to work better?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think the irony is, I suspect, that, launched in fairly unfavourable circumstances, we were able to some extent to prove the concept, and of course we have one now in Afghanistan.

THE CHAIRMAN: I want to pursue that in a minute.

MARK ETHERINGTON: What that meant, I think, is that more

was expected of us at the end than at the beginning, and so I think, in demonstrating that utility, the departments did have some attachment to it after that, and saw it as a sensible vehicle to realise our aims.

The reason I say this is because I expect this came back to bite us to some extent, because up until that time we had, as I say, been predominantly pursuing a National Co-ordination Team vision of the world, with a UK government who were interested - but not very interested.

I think after that time, as the pressures mount - particularly as Sinbad began and MND South East began to worry about filling the squares of the city that they were surging into, and particularly leaving a legacy in the areas into which they were surging - then the focus on the PRT became much more acute. And this in a sense took these tensions that had always been embedded, I think, in the vision of the PRT -- was it long-term capacity-building, was it short-term effect -- and brought them right out into the open, and the effect of Sinbad internally, I think, was to make departmental relations quite tricky because there was a lot of expectation from the military, and of course in any war or conflict the voice of the MoD in London, I imagine, is listened to very carefully.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. That leads me to ask the question I was working around to -- and you have already begun to touch on it -- which is, taking the PRT concept, were the conditions in Iraq, in Basra, at that time, because of the security situation, as well as everything else, so difficult that one shouldn't draw too many lessons from the relative success or underachievement of MND South East in the PRT context, or, if you are unable to fulfil the requirements that you suggest are required -- unity of strategic objective, a supervisory structure that enables a plan to be formed -- is then the PRT as a concept the right kind of instrument to execute such a plan in those circumstances?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think the latter, Chairman, and I think that because I have seen it relatively often. I have seen it done in all ways. A plan in theatre needs to be owned by someone. It doesn't initially have to be an individual - though that would be a military model - but it can be a group of people.

I think the difficulty for us is that lessons learned under these circumstances are in a sense the more valuable because they are learned under circumstances where every defect is highlighted by the operational difficulty of what we are trying to achieve. It is all very well saying you can run a marathon and

then going once round the block, but if you actually have to do it and test the concept under the most difficult of circumstances, then I think the lessons are all the more valid. They may not be that obvious under other circumstances but under these and, I think, in Afghanistan, they are particularly valuable.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to press this just one stage further. You mentioned just now the possibility of military command for some structure like this. The American system, as we have been told in evidence and in other discussion, is deeply allergic to the notion of a mixed chain of command; it has got to be military or it is two things which don't necessarily connect. There is -- and again we have heard favourable evidence that the period in Baghdad of Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus did work although it was two streams. Would you like to comment on that phenomenon, and then finally could you relate that to Sinbad and how far the planning of Sinbad worked in with the civilian side at that time.

MARK ETHERINGTON: I'll try. I didn't know much about the Crocker/Petraeus relationship. I knew the Sanchez/Bremer relationship better, though I doubt in function and structure it was much different.

There had always been these two chains from the

beginning in Iraq and it did make life pretty difficult to me at the time. I remember in my province in 2003 not being allowed to receive intelligence about my province because I wasn't a military officer, and clearly that's absurd - but this is what happened to us.

So this dual structure persisted, of course, throughout our time in Iraq as a coalition. I think it was possible to make it work. General Shirreff had always said, when I asked him, that he felt he had sufficient latitude to flex, as required, between, let's say, British objectives and coalition objectives and did so for Sinbad.

So, clearly the ideal would be a mixed chain. Now, the Americans can do it because, of course, they have an enormous armed force, who can turn their hands pretty much to anything. We are not nearly so rich in resources, so I suspect we are forced to take more water with our wine than perhaps they are. I think in Basra, in other words, because the military were so constrained in resource terms and had been under-resourced from the beginning -- and they have my sympathies, it must have been very difficult to do what they did -- we had no choice but to look outwards and take the help where we could find it.

So my feeling was that we were so constrained at the

time, in terms of resources in Basra, and so overshadowed by the problem, which, of course, had grown still larger -- all the more reason for us to look very, very carefully at what we had and how best to make it work together.

Now, in Sinbad -- that was the last of, I suppose, the primarily military operations that we did -- from our side this sense of, "Oh, this is the last throw of the dice," was quite damaging. It wasn't the "last throw of the dice" for us, so far as we were concerned. So far as we are concerned, we thought we would be there for some time. The tensions, the operational tensions, at the time had created damage, I think, to a hard-won departmental unity, and I have to say -- and I was asked this earlier on -- it was here, I think, that NMD Southeast became somewhat disappointed with the PRT, I think, for not getting with the short-term programme. For us, we felt that the short-term programme wasn't going to accomplish anything and - I have to be frank with you - I say I remain of that view.

THE CHAIRMAN: You have given us not only your evidence this morning -- and thank you for that. It has been helpful to hear a perspective that we have heard from others from different perspectives. But we will try and take them all together. And thank you for that.

Is there any final set of reflections? Because you have given us both that valuable March 2007 report and a lot of other documentation, but is there anything else that you would like to get on the record today?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I think, if I could just look through my notes, I would like to make four points, if I may, at the end --

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, do.

MARK ETHERINGTON: -- that I would take away, or put forward.

The first is that from my point of view -- and I think there is plenty of empirical evidence for it -- stabilisation expertise is missing from the centre of our government. I don't think we have a sufficiently robust culture to learn cross-government lessons. I know it is nascent, but I think it really needs to be right at the forefront.

For that reason we lurch from theatre to theatre, I think, with no genuine sense of where we left off, and we do so having developed very fine practices in theatre, and this is great credit to the people who pull things together in theatre. They create ad hoc solutions that are often very good ones.

What worries me and concerns me is that these are not properly lodged when they come back because there is not this repository for it in the centre. I think some

disciplines -- and I think particularly of Strategic Communications, this business of influence, which we practise daily in political life -- are very under-resourced, and I really think this is a deficiency in Britain's armoury that needs to be corrected.

People will say we have made progress and that's absolutely true, we have moved on quite a lot from Iraq, but we have a deal further to go, and what worries me is that this progress isn't formalised anywhere, and I worry too that our -- the challenges are mutating quickly enough that they are outstripping our capability to deal with them and keep up with them, the challenges in theatre.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is that a reflection on Afghanistan now?

MARK ETHERINGTON: I haven't been to Afghanistan for a while now but that would be my private opinion, yes.

We need leadership in theatre, we need leadership in Whitehall. I think that's going to help. Those leaders need to have alongside them a repository of stabilisation expertise.

How would we do that? The obvious one is to move a stabilisation unit -- and I say "a" stabilisation unit because it is the function that matters -- upward and inward. It cannot do its job where it is, not buried in a department; it has to be out of the departmental

fray, it has got to be in the centre. I think we have got to be very careful that whatever we move satisfies the criteria we need of it. It has got to have the expertise at the centre.

Sorry, you were about to say something?

THE CHAIRMAN: I was going to ask really whether you want to add anything about its political direction and leadership.

MARK ETHERINGTON: It is not for me really to comment on things that I know little about. All I would say is that it has not received the attention it should have had. I think we have neglected it for some time. I think you need to look no further than this lack of repository, lack of centre, to many of the problems that have befallen us.

We shouldn't confuse symptoms with root causes. The root cause is, we don't have this body of expertise at the centre and we don't access it as we should. So if the Stabilisation Unit - or a Stabilisation Unit - function is moved into the centre, then it needs to be properly configured, of course, and it needs to have the right mix of expertise.

Now, many people would say, of course, "We have got a database of experts, of 1,000 experts." It is not enough to have them on the pantry shelf; they need to be

in the kitchen when some of these things are being cooked up.

Two more, if I may. I worry sometimes about some of the cultural tendencies I have seen in parts of the Civil Service. I worry that we are too – we, they -- I worry that there is a culture of speed, a culture of speed and spend over genuine product, of substantive product, of the look of things rather than their substance. I worry that they don't look outward enough sometimes and I think we need to look very carefully at how we interact with this expertise I have spoken about, to make best use of it.

The departmentalism issue we have spoken about: where departmental officials, I think, feel a departmental loyalty that tends to eclipse what I would think of as national objectives.

The civil/military interface. I saw that Andy Bearpark had also spoken about this. We have made progress here. This tremendously - occasionally - troubled interface between civil effort and military effort. There are many good reasons for that, but we need to take this very seriously. We need to get a much better sense of destination: what is it we want to achieve with our military colleagues; what are the waypoints for that effort over time; and where do we

want to end up?

I fully understand, I have to say, under some circumstances military impatience with their civilian counterparts. I do think there is a need for us to professionalise in stabilisation. That process has begun; I merely argue it should go much further.

I think, in conclusion -- I don't think I have understood the -- I don't think necessarily we should be on a 'war footing' for places like Iraq and Afghanistan. That is perhaps too dramatic a phrase for what we are facing, but I do think that those at the sharp end, so to speak, have every reasonable expectation that those behind them should be bending every sinew of their effort to make sure they are supported thoroughly, and I'm not convinced that that is where we are now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. We shall add all that into the mixing pot.

So thank you for your evidence and for your contribution.

I'll close the session there and with thanks to our witness, Mark Etherington.

We are going to resume hearings at 2 pm on Monday, when we shall be taking evidence from Carne Ross, who was first secretary to the UK Mission to the United Nations between 1998 and 2002, and with that

that's the end of this morning. Thank you.

MARK ETHERINGTON: Thank you very much.

(12.46 pm)

(The Inquiry adjourned until Monday, 12 July 2010 at 2.00 pm)