

Friday, 3 September 2010

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD**

**THE CHAIR:** We will take the opening remarks as having been read into the record, so can we start with your time in Brussels. Just a few questions about that. Reading the note you wrote in November 2002, you said:

"Many here see Iraq as proof that on key foreign policy issues, the US matters more to us than Europe ..."

Can you help us to form a proper picture of how opinions within the European members were on Iraq? Were public governmental positions within the EU identical with what you might have been hearing in private?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I will do my best. I think I said this in my public session back in December. It's very important to remember that the EU didn't break into two parts over Iraq, it was actually more complicated than that. The majority of countries which had a clear position were probably the countries in favour of military action like the UK. At that stage it was the UK, Italy, Spain, most of the central European countries, Denmark, the Netherlands; that's quite a block. The block clearly against was France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg and Belgium. Then there was a bigger block -- the largest single block was probably the block of countries that was uncomfortable and unwilling to commit either way. So it left the EU rather paralysed as an institution and most countries in the middle sort of uncomfortably torn. That was the position I think certainly by the beginning of 2003, although maybe it hadn't sort of gelled in precisely in that way at the time I was writing my letter.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to ask you, was there within the countries that had taken up a firm position for or against, or indeed a floating position, were there different strains of opinion or was there

a fairly solid public and political opinion behind those decisions, say of France and Germany on the one side or Poland or whoever on the other.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think once you got into the debates over 1441 in New York, the public debate which was gathering in the autumn of 2002, and then into 2003, I think the public positions were pretty clear among the protagonists, among the main countries, certainly. But it was funny in Brussels. Brussels wasn't the cauldron -- it was almost a subject that was avoided because it was known to be a subject on which no useful conclusion could be drawn. So you found people like Solana and Patten and the others in these organised monthly meetings of foreign ministers and it did get on to the agenda, but it wasn't as though it was a major item of discussion. What was a major item of discussion I would say during that whole period was the subject of European enlargement and that was the focus of the Danish presidency which took us through to the end of 2002 and the follow-up to that was in the Greek presidency which was in charge when the war happened.

**THE CHAIR:** I think that almost leads me to the other question I had on this which was how far the Iraq issue spilled over into your other dealings on the EU agenda, or was it actually separated out because it was so divisive potentially?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** As I say, people were aware of it, people talked about it. One of our efforts, really, and you see this from some of the things that I and others from the UK Representation were writing, we wanted to make use of the cards that we had. We didn't want it to be done in a way which kept our partners in the dark, we wanted to bring information to the institutions as much as we could and advised London to be more on the front foot in order to slightly dispel the natural sense that

many in Brussels had that it was just a deal between us and the Americans, which it wasn't, not least because a large number of other Europeans were actively in favour.

So I don't think at that stage that it affected everything. It was in the air. It meant the atmospherics were difficult, but I wouldn't say it was a decisive factor at that stage. But it affected things.

**THE CHAIR:** Right. One thing just to get clear is that John Holmes said in his public evidence that France and Germany had actually misjudged opinion across the EU on the Iraq issue and they just read it wrong. Is there anything to be said in private about that? We've heard differing opinions from French officials, for example, about their private view, but their assessment of EU opinion -- the EU not as a block but as a source of influence on the Iraq decision. Did France and Germany misread?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I mean they might have done. I think they probably felt there would be a bigger majority on their side and there wasn't. A lot of the countries -- like Sweden -- were clearly uneasy, but were not prepared to go into the anti camp.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. There was outrage, wasn't there, when the "big eight", is it, or nine, in favour of Iraq circulated their opinion? There was apparently French surprise as well as anger that this had happened?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** At the time when the -- you mean that article, are you thinking about?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, I mean which supports John's view that there was a misreading.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I think there probably was some misreading, just as there probably was some misreading on our

side of the depth of French and German opposition.

**THE CHAIR:** Last point on this, from me anyway, this is how far Chirac's personal ambitions and position drove the French position and the French understanding of the whole situation.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think that was a factor. There's another document. Most ambassadors, as you know, do annual reviews, and I think there is probably less of that these days than there was then, and even then it was dying out, but in my one for the end of 2002 what I did say was that it was already evident that if the UK had an ambition to be a leading player and the leading voice in European debates, this was going to be one of the factors -- by no means the only one, because there were enough other complications, but this was going to be one of the factors that would make that more difficult. That was already obvious by the end of 2002 because this old issue, the issue of whether Britain's centre of gravity was in Europe or somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic ocean, was a perennial of European debate and this reawakened it, just frankly as in our 1998 presidency the issue of the inspectors and the military action which was taken at that stage -- which was ultimately defused quite successfully -- but at that stage exactly the same issues arose of whether our heart was primarily with the Americans or with our European partners. So the Iraq/EU theme was a fairly familiar one to people by the time we got to 2002/2003.

**THE CHAIR:** We are coming to the point when you moved from Brussels into No. 10 and my last question on this --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Sorry, shall I answer about Chirac?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think Chirac is a factor, mainly because long before this, if you were looking for the two people who

would regard themselves as the potential leaders of European debate it would be Blair and Chirac. Their relationship had begun promisingly in 1997/1998, but it had become more fraught even before you got on to this period in the aftermath of 9/11 because of their differences in personality, because I think the rivalry that Chirac felt --

**THE CHAIR:** I mean he felt seniority.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** He felt seniority and he didn't like being challenged. During the big negotiations on money in the late 1990s, he didn't like the pressure France was being put under on the budget and on agriculture, so their relationship was more difficult. The relationship with Schröder too I think started off extremely well between Blair and Schröder, but also there were undercurrents of competition in that relationship as well. I think that, you know, the extent to which Chirac and Schröder consciously decided during and in the aftermath of the Iraq war to form a discrete block in counter-opposition to Britain, America and the liberal Anglo-Saxon leaning world, they didn't have to do that, even though they had decided to oppose the Iraq war. My hunch is, and I can't prove this but my hunch is that under different leadership France might not have reacted in such an adamant way, particularly in the aftermath of the war.

**THE CHAIR:** So you wouldn't analyse it either in terms of exclusively perceived groups of national interest on the one hand, nor exclusively in terms of personalities on the other? It was really an intermingling?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think so, yes, I think so.

**THE CHAIR:** Just finishing off on this, the relationships afterwards, over 2005/6 and 7, which you are seeing from No. 10, of course.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Some temporary damage is caused but then is slowly repaired over the years 2004/5/6. Was there an impact on our wider interests as the UK out of that?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, we did our best to sort of tilt -- you know really from the autumn of 2003 when I was starting we tried our best to repair at least some of the damage with the French and Germans. That was the genesis of an initiative which was quite controversial at the time, a trilateral initiative with the French and Germans, which began in my first month in September of 2003. That launched another defence initiative which found its way into the constitutional treaty and the attempt there was to rebuild some of the confidence in the trilateral relationship. Ditto, I mean, we were working from the summer of 2003 together, actually rather successfully on Iran, and that was going on the whole time that I was in No. 10 and is still going on today.

So I think Europe emerged from this in a more fragmented way and stayed lacking in confidence and the UK role in it was not a defensive one or a minority one, but it was a more complicated set of relationships undoubtedly than before. But I was going to say, you know, for the most part these things sort of repaired themselves and I certainly wouldn't have said it was a big factor by the time we got into our Presidency, in that sort of period.

**THE CHAIR:** Presidency was the last point I was going to ask. We had one very senior and very involved French official who said that he thought that our presidency was actually weakened by reason of the US/Iraq history, but that was a French official talking. Was he right? Can you say that sort of thing?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** It's not an untypical thing for a French

official to say, but it's quite difficult to prove one way or the other. I mean I wasn't much involved, and I wasn't directly involved because this was while I was at No. 10, but actually our Presidency, on the agenda that we had set, was a big success for the Prime Minister and for the rest of the government. It's not obvious to me that at that stage, the main issue being the future financing of the EU, that this actually got in the way at all.

You have to remember also that the Chirac/Schröder factor was continuing to play a role, not actually through to the end of our presidency because of course Merkel was elected by then, but it continued to play a role and was affected also by European issues let alone Iraq and global issues, because there had been another falling out -- I think it must have been in 2004 -- over the new Commission presidency where Tony Blair had been one of those opposing Verhofstadt as the European Commission President and that had been very bitter with both Chirac and with Schröder. In the end, I think, his relationship with Schröder, partly because I think they were from the same political family, became more -- there was more personal animosity involved in that than actually in his relationship with Chirac.

**THE CHAIR:** Interesting comment, yes.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** And that was obvious to those of us around him as we watched his meetings with his opposite numbers.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we need to bring you into No. 10 now. I will ask Martin to pick it up. Martin?

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** If I could turn to No. 10. You arrived just at the point when there were serious riots in Basra, no food and electricity, and a deteriorating situation. Julian Miller wrote on 28 August:

"We cannot attribute particular attacks to specific groups."

Did you have confidence that the intelligence community had a grasp on what was going on in Iraq?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I'm not sure about at that stage, I mean that was my first week, literally my first couple of days. I started about a week after the bombing of the UN and in that week of that attack, which must have been around this time, on the mosque in Najaf. So this was really early in my time, I don't think I could possibly have formed a judgment of that kind.

But I think if you look through the JIC assessments of that period, they made clear early on that they were limited in what they knew of the insurgency but, by and large, as you re-read those things now, I think they present overall a fairly coherent picture of what was emerging. They knew that there was a lot they didn't know, but they presented it in a consistently sombre and for the most part accurate picture in terms of looking at trends and broad developments. But I don't think we had a handle on the content, the sort of roots of the insurgency, at that stage and it's certainly true to say in terms of the way that the coalition was responding -- and I think Jeremy Greenstock said this in his public session to you some months ago, we at no stage regained control over security after those early months. So I think the intelligence picture was a fair one in general terms, but it didn't actually help us to get a handle on what to do.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** In terms of the wider challenges created by Iraq and the demands on our policy, did you feel that the government machinery was geared up to tackle them?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, no, I mean when I arrived there wasn't very much government machinery. We were in transition, essentially. Some of the people who had been involved very much in the conflict had moved on. If you think about it, I was replacing David Manning; Rob Fry had taken over from



General Pigott; John Sawers was taking over in the Foreign Office, having had that temporary stint in Baghdad. So in terms of the senior officials handling this in Whitehall there was a bit of a changing of the guard.

My sense was that although there had been a number of meetings held in June and July to assess the situation, that the structures hadn't really evolved since what had been put in place during the war itself. So among the many things we had to try to do as the situation deteriorated was try to put in place some Whitehall structures which would be more coherent than what we all found coming back from our summer break.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Were there particular areas where you felt there was a lack of capacity, a lack of machinery?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** There was a lack of structure and clarity and what we tried to do was put things on a more conventional and transparent and inter-departmental basis. So we tried to use the ministerial level meetings in a supportive way, with the Cabinet Office supporting them in the conventional way; we tried to draw the Prime Minister in as much as possible, because he wanted to be drawn in as much as possible; and although we had a number of stabs at this and we didn't have any single structure, over the course of those few months from, say, the end of August through to the end of the year we established in the end a very clear rhythm of official level meetings with [the] Strategy Group which I chaired and a senior officials group which was chaired by my deputy first, Desmond Bowen and then Margaret Aldred, which dealt with the full range of issues, on a sort of rhythm which was understood by and accepted by the rest of Whitehall - just about, because it was sometimes quite demanding, but it was what we thought the situation required. But there wasn't a clear understanding on the funding. Jeremy Greenstock

still hadn't taken up his job when I arrived at the end of August and Hilary Synnott had only just arrived and things were arguably a little bit slow in gearing themselves up in the aftermath of the conflict. We had to put that all into place, I guess, at the end of the September period which is what those meetings at the beginning of September, which we talked about in the public session, what they were all about. They were partly the shock which ministers felt, and the Prime Minister certainly felt, at the deterioration in the situation over the European summer holiday, but it was also a sense that, partly because of that, we needed to gear ourselves up for what was going to be a lengthy and very, very difficult struggle and that's what we were doing. We had to do a lot of things at once.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** We have a note from the Prime Minister to you where he says quite early, well on 29 August, "this isn't really working at present, I will have to reflect on how we progress". Can you tell us something about his process of reflection?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think he had come back from his own leave, I think he was at that stage at Chequers, and I think this was a reaction to the deterioration in the security situation. First of all, the UN -- but then in that week, the week these things were written, it was that particular attack in Najaf, which I think killed 100 people: it was probably the first of the really, really large sectarian attacks, probably I think in retrospect undertaken by Al Qaeda against one of the Shi'a sites, and I think it was a jolting piece of information for him. I think, from my reading of what he said, it was partly that he wanted to be personally involved in talking this through with his ministerial colleagues, with the CDS, with everybody else, and that's what we did. He and I had a conversation about it just

afterwards, I commissioned a bit of work, and then I think on 2 September, a couple of days after this, we held a big ministerial meeting which was the beginning of the autumn campaign. We set out the beginning of the autumn campaign with a sort of programme set out in a private secretary letter afterwards which really, in one way or the other, defines what we were trying to do throughout the period I was at No. 10.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I come in on this on one particular aspect. This is MoD, the private secretary letter to Matthew Rycroft at No. 10 of 4 September really addressing the deterioration of the security situation and military response to it. But, summing up, it is said:

"It is the worryingly slow pace of infrastructure development which is undermining consent and opposing the strategic risk".

Reading it now with a lot of hindsight, that looks quite a narrow perspective I think.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Were you having to pull together in a very complex situation different departmental groupings?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, we were and I think in terms of analysis of the motivation, as it were, of the different strands of the insurgency, you know, we would have relied on what the assessment staff and the JIC product would be saying, which of course defined it much more broadly than that. I think this was a factor, and maybe we will come back to this later, but of course there are a number of different optics, avenues, here, and maybe this particularly reflected a perspective from Basra during the course of the summer where it was undoubtedly the case that the disturbances there during August owed a lot to the collapse in utilities and the problems over electricity and all of rest of

it, and this was a big MoD thing at the time which I was trying to respond to and which Hilary Synnott was gearing up on, which was to try to get a British emergency programme going there focused on services, but not just that, which is precisely to plug this gap in popular perceptions of what the occupation was about.

But our emerging understanding of the other aspects of the insurgency and the Sunni aspects of it would suggest a much broader range of motivation including, of course, the sectarian one.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, thank you.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Perhaps I can turn, quite naturally from that, to the question of force levels. We had reduced our force levels and the United States had decided not to commit all the forces that it originally had. Given our responsibilities as joint occupying power, did you have confidence that those on the ground had the resources to tackle the problems and, also with the resources, the will to do it?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think there were at least two issues there. The first issue is to some extent an issue which was at least partly resolved during the summer where a decision was taken not to put additional British forces into Baghdad. So, you know, there's an issue about the overall British contribution to the coalition effort and that sort of answered that. Sort of because, of course, the issue did come back in various forms later on. But that wasn't really a big issue by the time we got to the autumn.

The second issue is, did we have enough for Basra? I think the immediate answer to that was, no, we didn't, which is why in the early days of September the government decided to send two additional battle groups to Basra, admittedly temporarily, but

particularly to deal with this point about the infrastructure and the development programme because part of it, I recall, was to send engineers in order to help the DfID-run programme. So I think there was a recognition that we had under-invested in the support for the civilian effort and needed to do that in order to regain control and consent in Basra.

Thereafter, of course, there was a debate about our force levels but I think, you know, if you are talking about the way people felt at the beginning of September 2003, we were aware that one element of it was we had to increase our forces at least temporarily in Basra and that was a decision made without any difficulty.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** And of course another element, as you have inferred, was the dwarfing of what we could produce with what the Americans could produce and we have the figure of 16 billion as Bremer's recollection as the request at that time from Congress. What difference did this tremendous disparity, inevitable disparity, in contributions make with regard to our influence on the United States when dealing with policy issues?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think that's one of the big issues and no doubt you will be debating this yourselves. Let me step back a minute. As I said in the public hearing, for the Prime Minister and I think for the government as a whole we always realised that the heart of this was what was going on in Baghdad and we had to have an Iraq policy and not a Basra policy. The MoD inevitably were involved in Baghdad as well, but they had their forces, their reports were very much focused on Basra, and their perspective might, might -- certainly on the military side -- have been a slightly different one. But the government as a whole realised that our reputation was bound up in what happened overall in Iraq, and what happened overall in Iraq

depended on what happened in the centre, what happened in Baghdad and to the north and to the west of Baghdad.

Now the question was whether we needed a bigger effort in those central areas of activity. We just talked about whether we should contribute militarily beyond our headquarters contribution in Baghdad and decided against that in the summer. We could have decided to have a much, much bigger role, say, in the CPA. We could have decided to have a much bigger role in the aid programme. I have to say, as far as the CPA is concerned, we did actually have about 10 per cent of the total which was a larger proportion than our military contribution or our aid contribution. I went there in the autumn of 2003 and there were quite a few really quite senior British officials and others who were there. You could have tried to do that.

On the aid side, particularly in retrospect, I would have to say it's not clear to me that we had an aid model, a delivery model, judging by what we were able to achieve in the south, that was any better than the American one. So it wasn't as though if we had put more money into the centre that we would have inevitably come up with a better hit rate of delivering aid than the faltering American effort which we unfortunately saw. I'm not sure that, you know, we ever debated those choices as starkly as I've just presented them, they certainly weren't discussed as far as I know before the war, but in the end we concentrated -- and it wasn't exclusively, but we concentrated our aid effort on Basra. It was hand to mouth because in a way it was surprising it was not until September of 2003 that we got the money together for the effort which Hilary Synnott was putting together.

I think one of the difficulties of us being in charge in Basra was that it wasn't really until the Maliki period that the central government in Baghdad really took a responsibility for Basra and the CPA certainly -- there was a CPA and there was

a CPA south and the CPA south just got on with Basra, so I don't think we got Bremer's attention as much as we would have liked or should have done for Basra. That was part of the history of that period. So my sense is we should have done probably a better job of getting the money down there, but I'm not actually convinced that it would have made sense when there were huge amounts of American money available for us to have been trying to push our own money towards the CPA.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** You had an interesting discussion with Dr Rice in September about the rather different perceptions of how things were going and the level of concerns. The note says: "We agreed that the level of overall concern in London was maybe a notch or two higher than in Washington."

What I was interested in was, did this reflect differences in intelligence assessment?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, yes, absolutely. I think that throughout this period, and maybe this goes for quite a big chunk of the first sort of phase of activity after the war, there were really two major concerns on the part of the Prime Minister and other ministers in London. The first was that, by and large, the American political assessment of what was going on in Iraq was more positive than our own. In conversations with Bush and in conversations with other people -- and this wasn't uniform on the American side because of course you had Colin Powell and others who were depressed and worried about what was going on - but by and large the impression was not that things were going well, but they didn't have the same sense of foreboding and concern which was evident in London from the summer of 2003; number one.

Number two, the slowness, ineffectiveness, of the American CPA effort was something they woke up to only very slowly and,

certainly from the centre, had very little control of. There's a record, I think, of a Blair/Bush conversation later in the autumn where Bush [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. So I think those two things were the things that worried us. There was a gap in analysis -- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Our feeling was that things were deteriorating and that we weren't catching up and we were being overmatched by the pace and the scale of negative developments, combined with this [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. To add the third element, obviously the fact that at that stage the American doctrine for dealing with the insurgency was essentially unformed and, to the extent it was formed, it was, [REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** In terms of the formation of some sort of coherent strategy and our perception, in one of his letters to the President, again at the beginning of September, the Prime Minister talks about the best solution being the Iraqis and developing Iraqi capacity. What was our appreciation at that time of the capacity of the Iraqis and the resources required and the timeframe that would be needed?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, again, there was no website, there was no authoritative book by one of you or by anybody else which anyone could turn to to give you a snapshot of any part, frankly, of the Iraqi system, or any part of the Iraqi government, including their armed forces. We were trying to measure what they had left after the inevitable effect of a war, number one;



number two, clearly a deliberate intent by the departing Saddamists to deplete what was left behind; and thirdly the deBa'athification. So we were trying to work out what was left and what we had to play with. As the British government, one of our constant refrains during this period was to try to get back -- even after the deBa'athification to try to get back into the armed forces and the police qualified people who were not personally tainted by the Saddam period. So that was one element.

Then I think it was only really during this period that we started to see a coherent plan developing for Iraqisation for training and developing the Iraqi security forces, which the Americans got going in the autumn but which really didn't get going in its full form until Petraeus took full command of his training mission in the summer of 2004. But I would have to say, you know, in those early times I don't think we had a full picture of what we were dealing with, what was going to be needed, ie that you needed very highly developed forces to deal with the scale of terrorism which this country was going to face over the years ahead or quite how long it was going to take. I don't think anyone -- certainly ministers but I would say actually our military and security advisers - I don't think had a perfect picture of that. How could we? I mean, how could we have known that?

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** On a rather more over-arching question, we see from our record the large number of discussions of the communications between the President and the Prime Minister and you, for example, attended these video conferences like the one on 5 September. Could you tell us something in general terms, because it does seem tremendously important to the evolution of policy, how you would characterise the dynamic between the two

men as these issues arose?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. Well, I mean I think the first thing to say was that in terms of the intensity of contact and the willingness to - I think Bush used the phrase "co-strategise", I think this was unprecedented that a British Prime Minister and US President spoke as frequently as this, usually at that stage by video conference which created a personal connection and rapport in the conversations, and you know, very regularly for about 45 minutes or an hour. So these are long conversations.

I think what Tony Blair was doing was he was backing his basic belief that you would get more out of the relationship with Bush by continuing to be seen as a supportive ally and friend. His tone throughout this is supportive and understanding. But using that foundation in order to get across some really quite difficult points [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] these things were being run out of the Department of Defense in the United States

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] One of Blair's, I think very deliberate, intentions was to draw the President into the policy more. He couldn't understand why the White House wasn't gripping this emerging tragedy more solidly, really right from the start. So by asking Bush a whole series of questions

[REDACTED] which Condi or I or other bits of the machine had to follow up, we were trying to draw the White House in to a structured discussion, dialogue, on those issues

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

Now Blair had a particular thing about communications and that side of things, which he kept coming back to, and there were huge areas of the CPA that we did worry about and the interface with the military and so on but that was really what he was trying to do.

I would add a third thing, which is that, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I think Prime Minister Blair's way of looking at this was, Iraq is part of a broader Middle East

policy and the broader Middle East policy sits within a set of global policies on all of which you need to be active [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Was it effective?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Over time, yes. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I mean, for example, outreach, Sunni outreach, a refrain of the Brits from almost day one -- and no doubt we will come back to it. We tried our hand at it ourselves, but it became a central part of the American doctrine with Khalilzad and particularly with Petraeus' and Graeme Lamb's efforts. Bush himself, as things got worse and worse but particularly from 2005/2006 onwards, took personal command and got more involved and dealt with this personally with his commanders in Iraq.

**THE CHAIR:** And you would argue this, in part at least, stems from the influence that Tony Blair was exerting?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think it was the direction that we wanted, it's what we encouraged. I think, in the end, probably it was the raw politics of it in the United States which forced him to do this and the realisation that he couldn't just leave it to Rumsfeld. I think he was getting more involved even before [reference to Secretary Rumsfeld's departure]. [REDACTED]

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

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** My last question relates to something you alluded to and which is very much woven into these President/Prime Minister discussions and that's what the Prime Minister called his "obsession with the media". My question really is, did media efforts ever meet his expectation? Is there a lesson to be learned from the media story?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think there was a double thing. First of all, the thing I was talking about there was principally the way in which the media was structured in Iraq itself and I have forgotten the details about this now, but gradually there was more of a sort of moderate Iraqi media developed, with Iraqia and so on. But early on I think Al Jazeera just had the field and I think that's what frustrated him and there was a vacuum as far as the government side or the non-Jihaddist private side of the media was concerned and that's what frustrated him and the fact that, again, no-one seemed to be in charge and it seemed so difficult. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So there was this imperviousness early on to political direction

But I think there was a broader point in that he was frustrated and I guess his frustration did continue in that he accepted -- certainly from the time I was working for him, he accepted that there was always going to be a huge public debate over the decision to go to war and that would continue and it would continue to affect all of this. But what he wanted to get across was that that should not stop people supporting the new

Iraq and being on the right side of the battles that we were then facing. That was a message he wanted to get across not only in Iraq but here as well and I suppose there was some success in that. But that was ultimately a frustration too.

**THE CHAIR:** I'm starting to fret about time.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Okay, I will try and speed up.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to ask just a couple of questions about the descent into violence in 2003/2004. I've got a golden quotation from King Faisal from about 1932 describing the people of Iraq saying:

"There isn't a people of Iraq. They are hugely divided with a conflictual history ..."

You said yourself in November 2003 when you came back from a visit, "There is no clear picture of ...", in this case, "the enemy". First of all, is this confusion actually simply an accurate reflection of the state of things as opposed to a failure to understand, drawing on intelligence or other sourcing? Could we have gotten a clearer, better, more useful understanding of the dynamics of what was happening with the descent into violence or was it actually confusion multiplied by itself that was incapable of being understood or indeed, to that extent, managed?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I would be very surprised, even if we had analysed the basic situation better, done our preparations more effectively -- we all know there were deficiencies there -- I really think it would have been difficult to have been confident about our analysis of what was unfolding there. I think a number of people have said to you, rightly, that the key thing in these situations is to maintain an alertness and flexibility in the way you yourself approach things and the

policy responses that you have. But, you know, I'm sure that maybe in a more structured way ahead of the conflict we might have written out the elements of uncertainty that we would be faced with, but I don't think we could reasonably have been expected to come up with an absolutely precise picture of what we were going to face.

**THE CHAIR:** We are in that situation now in 2003 as it goes into 2004 and, taking your point about the lead is really a rapid and well-focused response to events, rather than trying to predict in advance and then managing a strategy and laying it down; did the Americans take the same view? We have David Manning saying that [REDACTED] said that, from where he was sitting, they had stated:

"We were not just dealing with a bunch of terrorists, but with ... a living, breathing, thinking enemy ..."

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

**THE CHAIR:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

**THE CHAIR:** But was part of that a failure to comprehend what was going on and respond to it?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I think I would say that was certainly an element of it. I'm just pausing because I'm not sure I know precisely what Bremer thought and what other people at the top of the CPA thought about the insurgency. I mean, we kept going back over this, and the JIC kept, you know, sort of going over the traces and I think ours was a considered analysis -- certainly a 2004 analysis would be that if you looked at what was hitting us on the Sunni side it was about a quarter to a third Al Qaeda/Zarkawi and the rest was the shifting set of Sunni rejectionist groups, the Saddamists and a whole load of others.

**THE CHAIR:** I mean it's quite important later, and I don't use this as a sort of particular question to pursue, but later on, you know, and looking at Tony Blair's memoirs, the external intrusion of Al Qaeda and foreign terrorist elements is seen as critical to the maintenance, or the intensification, of the insurgency and that was actually rather the American view at the time, but it wasn't particularly argued at that time in 2003/2004?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** No, and we discussed this in Whitehall. I think you are right to say that the intelligence community regarded the main threat, in terms of numbers, as coming from the home grown Sunni insurgents of different kinds.

I think where the Prime Minister had a point which needs to be assessed is, during that period, if there hadn't been a Zarkawi figure -- a person able through his brand, through the boldness of his actions and the success of his actions, his ability to mount the most complicated and spectacular attacks -- would the rest have produced the scale and the intensity of action without that? I thought that was a legitimate point which we, on



occasion, did ask our intelligence colleagues about. I don't think that Prime Minister Blair felt that if Zarkawi was killed -- and eventually he was -- that the insurgency would go away, but was that an important factor, having him around, having those links back to the single Al Qaeda narrative and the, as we now know, complicated relationship with Al Qaeda core, but was that an important factor? Yes, to me it was. I would hesitate to go so far as Tony Blair in saying that it was the critical factor. I think that, to me, goes a little bit too far.

**THE CHAIR:** If I could just ask a couple of questions, then, on the response in the 2003/04 period, which if it centred on a single word or concept it's "Iraqiisation". I think the first question I've got is about capacity in Iraq and the realism of the coalition strategy of Iraqiisation. I've got this quote from General Abizaid in November 2003 talking about accelerating Iraqiisation, accelerating from 26 to 36 battalions in the Iraqi army. Was the Iraqiisation project and its timetable realistic in terms of what could actually be done in terms of capacity and timing? I think we've got a particular concern to ask you about, which is policing as opposed to military reconstruction. I think somebody was telling us that you can make an infantryman a soldier in a matter of weeks and months, but you can't make a policeman except in a number of years. So could you give us your sense of how far the Iraqiisation policy timescale was realistic?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Just before I answer, I mean I would like to go on to talk about the other aspects of Iraqiisation because in a way the concept starts with politics and our thrust for diluting the occupation. Faced with these things, what was our main conclusion? Our main conclusion was we need to transfer power quickly. But I would like to come on to that, because I

think that's a key point to do with particularly the mid-2004 period, and what we were doing with the UN and with the Americans on that as well.

But on Iraqiisation, I don't regard myself as an expert in this area. I think that we probably did have an unrealistic view about the police, not least because the advice we were getting was about the length of time it took to train somebody. Of course, you apply your common sense and you know that what is going to emerge is a rudimentary policeman at the end of it, but I'm not sure we had all completely internalised the difficulties of police with that level of training operating in an environment of intimidation and corruption without the experience and structures to deal with that.

On the training of the Iraqi army, we realised there was sort of an industrial element to this, just getting through this production of soldiers. But I think -- maybe not in this period, maybe not in late 2003 or early 2004, but certainly during the course of 2004 -- we realised that needed to be allied to leadership training, mentoring of the Iraqi forces and the right equipment. All those issues came up really the whole time, particularly once we got into the Allawi period and so on, and in Allawi you had someone who knew about this stuff and was ambitious for the capability of the forces which he had taken over.

So I think what happened in the end, as you know, was that we became more and more realistic about the police. We didn't stop training them but realised just how difficult it was to deal with that -- and we have come up against exactly the same problem of course in Afghanistan -- and we probably put more of the effort, certainly in Basra and elsewhere, into the army as the national institution most likely to stabilise the situation and cool things down.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to close and move on to force levels in a minute, but just closing off on this, two points really.

[SIS10]<sup>1</sup> gives a report in April 2004 and says to you:

"New Iraqi Forces in no position to contribute to security after 30 June ..."

That's to do with transition, isn't it? Was that understood or accepted as an accurate judgment by the British side of where the Iraqi forces in Iraqisation had got to, or certainly would have got to by June?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think, again, it's a question of what you mean by "no position" or what you mean by "substantive". I think we were gloomy about this, and there was a series of studies done by the JIC on the capacity of the capability of the Iraqi forces. I don't know if we had one, probably not by this stage. But they painted a consistently negative picture of the capability of the Iraqis in both the army and police areas. So I don't think ministers were under any illusions about the ability of the Iraqis to do this themselves.

Whether they, by that stage, had made no progress since the autumn of 2003, I question that. If you come into the Allawi period, he is talking about building up his strike capability and this elite corps and all the rest of it, and I think our judgment was there were some parts of the Iraqi armed services that, even in that period, even in the 2004 period, were able to perform. But equally there was so much evidence, whenever there was a bit of aggro, of the leadership not being up to it, of the rank and file melting away, that we were aware of that and we saw reports of it. So I think people had a sort of realistic assessment.

I'm not sure that we wouldn't have also said, well, what's the answer to that? The answer was to continue, but maybe to

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<sup>1</sup> This SIS officer is referred to as SIS10 throughout the Inquiry's papers.

concentrate just as much on the part of it which gave support. I think the Americans were probably better at this than we were in understanding the need for mentoring, which involved in some cases a higher degree of risk, and we were very slow in Basra to go in for proper mentoring and MiTTing sort of model of doing things.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, I need to move on. Just to sum up, though, it isn't a case, as you put it to us in London, that aspiration was outrunning an accurate sense of realism? The realism was there, but what you could do about it was the question and, as you say, it's not just numbers and industrial training activity but it's also support and, if you like, doctrine.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, and I would say, you know, this is not -- I think this is gradual, over time. I wouldn't want to claim too much wisdom on this. Certainly when I arrived, but more generally in the autumn of 2003 we were learning and we were putting in place metrics and ways of dealing with this, but as 2004 and 2005 went on, I think we were aware that we were dealing with something which was pretty fragile.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, thanks. Lawrence, over to you.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I would like to ask you first a couple of questions about Fallujah in April 2004 and then some particular questions about force levels. Now we have had quite a bit of evidence and discussion about the importance of what happened and about concern about the movement against Fallujah. A very particular question: in November 2003 you reported back from Iraq:

"Sanchez is planning an operation in Fallujah ... this could turn ugly [REDACTED]."

In fact during the operation you said:

"Last week has seen the most serious challenge to the coalition since the main conflict, since 12 April 2004: [REDACTED], disproportionate US military tactics; what they did in Fallujah looked on Iraqi TV screens [REDACTED]."

[REDACTED]

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED].

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** [REDACTED]

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED].

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** [REDACTED]

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED].

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** [REDACTED]

What assurances was the Prime Minister seeking from the President at this time? Was there concern that the President didn't have a relationship with the commander so that he could influence what was actually going on on the ground, coming back to the comments you made earlier?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think the concern, by the time we get to -- we are talking about April 2004 and I think the concern was that we had almost stumbled into it, you know, that although there had been a lot of talk for a lot of time about how you deal with Fallujah, as I say, we talked about -- I was there at the end of 2003, and it arose again after the American contractors

were killed -- when was that? The end of March in 2004.

But I think one of our worries was that the decision to go ahead in the way that they did was done very much in theatre without very much thought or consideration and particularly compounding whatever problems would arise from that method of handling Fallujah with the risks they took on the Shi'a side as well. So that was our worry and I think it comes out in everything that everyone wrote at that stage: that I wrote, but what was coming from David Manning in Washington and elsewhere, you know, was this worry of for the first time having to handle an insurgency on two fronts. Remembering that our central analysis in all of this all the way through had been that -- and this will be tested -- the ultimate strategic threat to us in Iraq was Shi'a disaffection, not the Sunni insurgency. So I think the worry was that you had the Shi'a areas rising up in addition to all the problems we had in the central area of Baghdad and Anbar and elsewhere, that was what worried us a very great deal. It wasn't just because our own people were under the kosh in the south east, but that was part of it as well.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** The Prime Minister sought assurances that he would be consulted on American tactics. What sort of response he was getting and do you think we were able -- did you get any assurances?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think this was an episode which reflected creditably on the British machine and on the Prime Minister actually. I think it reflected creditably on John McColl in Baghdad, who, in his extremely authoritative way, was able to exercise some restraint over his opposite numbers in the American military: not to stop the operation, but in the way that they handled it. I think the way that the issue was handled politically -- led by the Prime Minister but others were

involved -- did give the Americans pause. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and I think that the record shows, and certainly my recollection is, that whereas when we went to Washington on 16 April we were extremely worried about an imminent further assault on Fallujah and that was a possibility, you know, over a period of time thereafter, nevertheless at each stage when Bush was consulted -- partly, I think, because Blair had interposed himself and required, as it were, the Americans to jump that extra hurdle before taking any further action -- at each stage Bush seems to have opted for a more moderate approach.

So I think a lot of damage had already been done, and compounded with Abu Ghraib it was an awful period, but it could have been worse. I think that was a success for our policy of saying, you know, "handle this in a slow and quiet way, handle Muqtada differently, see whether you can conciliate and use the tribes, use this general they put in to Fallujah". It was all in the end not very substantial and you couldn't rely on any of it, but it did actually avoid another conflagration.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I mean that, to some extent, is retrospective. At the time -- and you mentioned Abu Ghraib as well in this period and the problems with Muqtada al Sadr and Fallujah -- this was quite a cocktail that was coming together.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, yes.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Was there a sense that we might have to come to a point where we might need to distance ourselves from American policy or was that just never considered?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I mean I think it was pretty obvious that we were worried about what was going on in Fallujah. I can't

remember what the press was saying at the time, but we certainly weren't publicly applauding it and we were making clear that it was a very serious situation.

I know you want to make progress, but it is important to remember the other things we were doing at that stage. So on the one hand we were saying, "Get the military and political tactics right over Fallujah, but more broadly make sure that you keep your UN Brahimi-led operation on the road", the two things being connected, "and, number three, let us make sure that we give enough emphasis to what is coming down the pike, which is a transfer of sovereignty which needs to be backed by a UN resolution and which needs to be real". That was another Blair point, a British point, that was, I think, put effectively and it's right to pause on the moments where this did go right. It wasn't inevitable that the Americans would decide on a definition of sovereignty at that stage which was as full as the one that we wanted. It wasn't to be taken for granted that we would get, in the exchange of letters involved with the MNF, the sort of understanding that we eventually did. This was a creditable effort for British diplomacy with London, New York, Washington and elsewhere. That was also part of the British/Blair message at this point: to keep this political track going and to get across the message about what the nature of our occupation was. It was only going to be an occupation formally for another few months and, in any event, we were going to be working with the new Iraqi government and so on. I think those political messages were very important to the Prime Minister.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to interject on a point of fact, you sent Condi Rice, on 15 April 2004, a personal note from the Prime Minister?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, the night before. We sent that from



New York actually.

**THE CHAIR:** Did the Prime Minister draft it or did you?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Normally those things were written by the Prime Minister himself. I mean they would usually -- but not on this occasion -- they would normally emerge, as you have probably heard from others, from weekends in Chequers and so on. But this one I think is one he probably wrote the draft of in the plane going to New York, where we met Kofi Annan before going down to Washington. Then a number of hands would have been involved in making the odd change, to which he was usually resistant, but by and large that would be his way.

**THE CHAIR:** Interesting, simply because so many of the points you have just been making to us are embedded in this note, so thank you.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I think we probably need a break but just a couple of questions on troop levels. We've discussed the additional troops that were sent to the south east in September and reduced again to 8,600 by May 2004.

The first question: how were these issues of troop levels being discussed? I mean how active, in terms of the policy debates in which you were involved, was the pressure to either get the numbers down or get the numbers up?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, are we talking about particularly the period in 2004?

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Yes.

[**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I mean there was a period, as you know from the records -- and we discussed that even briefly at the public session -- there was a period in 2004 where we had quite a serious discussion about the lay down particularly in the south east and that arose, I guess, particularly from the episode

we were just talking about. So in the aftermath of Fallujah, the American military -- and I do stress military -- came to our military with a number of ideas, one of which was to do with the ARRC going to Iraq. There were two other ideas: one that we should take over the whole central area, the Najaf headquarters as well, and use the ARRC for that, and then there was talk also of an additional new brigade or whatever. So there were a series of interlocking reinforcements which were discussed over a series of meetings in May and June 2004. In the end, these proposals were put by the Defence Secretary to the wider group in London, in the end we didn't do it and didn't go ahead, for Iraqi reasons -- and I would like just to pause a little bit later on the Afghan issue.]

**THE CHAIR:** Well, it is relevant.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I will save my reasons until the end, but for Iraqi reasons. There were two things, I think, it seemed to the PM. One was that his accent at that stage was on the transfer of responsibility to the Iraqis, he thought it was a difficult message to get across to be reinforcing. Secondly, running through the Chiefs' thinking - seemed to be something to do with doing it because the Americans had asked us and wanted to do it without it being very clear what we would get in return, or whether there was a sort of military rationale for taking on this additional role. Re-reading the papers, I think a sort of benign version would be that, worrying about the situation spinning out of control in the aftermath of the Fallujah episode, including in the south, maybe our senior commanders felt that we would do a better job, that we would be able to settle things down in Najaf and so on by having the competent headquarters like the ARRC there or whatever.

But I think, as time went on, as we got into June and the

situation on the ground stabilised, that was maybe less of a factor and it didn't seem to us -- to me, to No. 10, and I think to the other ministers involved, to the Prime Minister and the other ministers involved -- there didn't seem to be a really compelling military rationale for doing that sufficient to counter the political risk and the military risk. So it sort of melted away and almost immediately we decided in any event that we would make the decision to send the ARRC to Afghanistan.

I just want to say a word on this, if I may, chairman, because I know you talked to General Dannatt and General Jackson and others and I do think it's important to try and bear in mind a sequence. It was a messy sequence, but by and large the decisions on Afghanistan and the big increase in our forces in Afghanistan were decisions which were being made in 2005 with a Cabinet decision in 2006. There was an early discussion in 2004 in DOP about Afghanistan, which looked in a very general sense at whether we might send the ARRC and whether we might get involved more as NATO conducted this gradual expansion of its activities in Afghanistan, first into the west and then into the south of the country. But there was no sense in the summer of 2004 that we were sort of making a decision to make Afghanistan our main military effort. There's no record that I have seen which suggests that. We decided we would send the ARRC. The ARRC, as you know, is a pretty self-contained piece of kit. It's not a huge number of British forces as it happens, it doesn't need to be, but it was certainly not a decision at that stage.

Now that came about much more in 2005 when John Reid started to plan, with the rest of Whitehall, the Helmand operation. But I would say even at that stage there wasn't perceived to be a conflict between our Iraq and Afghanistan force levels. It was really, I would say from my recollection, much later on in

the 2006/2007 period, and particularly that very good MoD paper on balancing which was I think early 2007, where the relationship between the two theatres came into effect. But that was because of the degree of reinforcement which we had been required to undertake in Afghanistan. If you look at the actual numbers during the period we are talking about, in 2003 we had 300 troops in Afghanistan; in 2004, 500 at the beginning of the year and 900 by the end of the year; in 2005, 1,000. It's only when you get into 2006 that you get into 5,400 by the summer when you've got the ARRC and the Helmand operation going in.

So the assumption through this period was that we were declining in Iraq -- and we did decline fairly gently if you look at the numbers: from 9,500 in 2003, 8,600 in 2004 down to 8,500 in 2005. But our ambition was to continue to reduce and until we got into Helmand and saw the need to increase our operation to the extent we did, there wasn't really a conflict and there was an explicit review undertaken of that by the MoD in late 2005/early 2006 before the government made its decision, where it said explicitly that we were able to manage both operations together and even if there was some delay in our projected draw down in Iraq we would still, with some difficulty, be able to deliver what we proposed in Afghanistan. I'm saying that only because I just got a sense from that earlier session of yours that you were anticipating a debate from 2004 which I think was rather later.

**THE CHAIR:** This is an important point. I would just like to be sure we've got it right, what you are saying. In 2004, the decision not after all to send the ARRC to Iraq was really purely on the merits of the Iraq situation, not because of a prior, preemptive decision that it was going to be needed for Afghanistan two years later?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** That was my recollection.

**THE CHAIR:** Why it was taken on Iraq grounds at the time, as were other decisions not to reincrease our forces -- this was partly about post-Fallujah concerns and essentially on the Prime Minister's judgment about the competing military, political and other arguments at that time, is that correct?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** That's my recollection of it.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, fine.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** While this debate was going on where there was a possibility that we might take over the six provinces and expand our operations in the south, I do remember saying to Condi that, if we were to do that, then we would expect a different role in decision-making. I don't think I got a response from her, but we would have needed something like that in order for the thing to be remotely viable.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Just to finish off on that, how important were costs? Just a simple costs question, on this.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** On the military side I don't recall that being a big item of discussion. It certainly came up much more when we were talking about the Afghanistan operation and it was an issue the whole time on the civilian side, on the development and the Foreign Office side of the operation, but I don't recall the costs on the reserve, the costs of our forces, all of those sorts of things. I don't remember those being a big issue.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** And, just slightly differently to how the chairman put it, with the post-Fallujah concerns as you've described them, is this that we are now looking ahead and thinking: there is going to be a transfer of power, what April

has shown is the limits of what we can do with heavy military force and therefore the post-Fallujah concern is to some extent accepting that our security role must diminish over the future, that we have had a stark example of the limits of what we can do?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I think a lot of those feelings had been there, I would say they were there in the autumn, you know, there were concerns among our military, as you know, about American tactics and a belief that the tactics which our troops were using in Basra were at that stage superior and preferable. So this debate was going on really from the moment we were in the aftermath of the initial conflict, but it was brought into very, very sharp relief by the events in Fallujah.

But I think there's another issue, you know -- and I keep coming back to it and I don't apologise for it -- which is that it reinforced the British belief in the primacy of politics. It said, "How are we going to handle this when we've got to go back to the fundamentals of the political settlement?" We've got to, in this awfully difficult period, keep the show on the road politically; make sure that a decent Iraqi Prime Minister emerges; keep Brahimi involved; make sure that the transfer is seen in Iraq and internationally as a change, it shouldn't just be a cosmetic change on 1 July but a real one; and make sure that the legal and military arrangements reflect that. There was a big debate, which I hope you've seen something of in the files, in the United States over the different aspects of the Security Council resolution where, by and large, I think we did pretty well in getting those issues resolved to our, and Iraqi, satisfaction.

So whether that was enough to stem what was by then a rising insurgency, you know, we must debate, but that was the remedy. The remedy was to come back to politics to try to get those

points across publicly and change the face of the occupation.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** And the final point, the dilemma that left us with possibly was that you couldn't really assert the primacy of politics until you had sorted out the security situation.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** This comes back to the issue of where we should have been involved. If our job, the UK's job, was essentially to keep the south quiet and to avoid Shi'a disaffection rising as a national issue, by and large we achieved that. There were very uncomfortable levels of violence against British troops in Basra in 2006/2007 but you couldn't say for one moment that they were a strategic threat to the coalition. So if that was our job, then in a rough and ready way that was achieved.

The question, you know, at the back of your question is, given that the ultimate action politically and militarily was in the centre of the country, could we afford to be absent from that except through the advice and presence of our senior commander and so on? That decision was taken early on and it's easy to see why it was taken. This is one of the issues where I think we are drawing a lesson, you know, this is one of the things that you need to have thought about deeply before: as a junior coalition partner, what are you there for, and approach it politically, economically and militarily. What we ended up with is something I suppose you can defend and explain, but it wasn't a plan, it wasn't planned this way, it was something that we stumbled into.

On force levels, our aim was to decline and to draw down and ultimately to withdraw. That was also part of our political messaging to the insurgency. Increasingly you see this in the papers for 2005/2006 and the Prime Minister later on was one of those who believed it was important politically to set out that

perspective, to set out the horizon without looking as though we were cutting and running. Nevertheless, he had this idea of a timetable with conditions or, you know, the different names for it over the period, but setting out that horizon, which involved the UK draw down as well as American draw down, he thought was an important factor in dealing with both sides, both the Shi'a and the Sunni resistance.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I think I would like to continue but I think we had probably better stop.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we should, yes. This is a very interesting set of questions, so we will come back to it at the end more generally. But let's take a break now for five minutes or so.

**(A short break)**

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** I want to move on to look at the CPA and we as a joint occupying power and our influence with the CPA and the US. I mean technically, because of the (inaudible), the CPA was accountable to London, but was that the reality?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, we certainly had people in it. I mean it was quite a complicated set of relationships in the end. Jeremy Greenstock deliberately decided he wasn't going to be Bremer's deputy, so he would be a British representative, and my recollection is that for the most part Jeremy concentrated on the strategic issues, the political issues, you know, the broad military and political elements. So I suppose our most senior person involved day-by-day in the CPA was Andy Bearpark.

So this was in many ways an extraordinary type of operation and one that I suspect would not be repeated but, no, I don't think that they behaved as an organisation which was accountable to London, they didn't behave in that way. They behaved as if they were accountable to the Pentagon.



**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** From your perspective, did Jeremy and Andy Bearpark make any in-roads?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, some in-roads, yes. I think Andy Bearpark was in it and was part of the senior management and I recall from my own contacts with him, that that wasn't without its frustrations. I think he has given testimony. I think he had an impact.

I think we had -- and we discussed this before -- a continuing problem getting funding quickly down to Basra and there was, you know, always that tension. On the one hand we quite liked having our own sphere of operation, having Hilary Synnott running the show down there, but we needed American money because our own money, which was not easy to get agreed, but our own money, whatever it was, 30 million I think in that early phase, needed to be supplemented by their and by Japanese cash and so on, which dwarfed our own.

So I would say one of the leitmotifs that ran through this whole history was getting the attention of Baghdad for Basra, whether it's the CPA, Allawi, Ja'afari or Maliki. So, as I said earlier, it was only when we got into the Maliki period that for a variety of reasons you got the full attention of the authorities in Baghdad. I don't think we had it in the CPA period.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** On 24 September I think David Manning reported to you that Armitage was saying [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].  
Did the lack of influence over the CPA reflect London's lack of influence over Washington or [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think there were two things at play here.

The first was the structure of decision making on the American side, that Bremer was responsible to the DoD. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The second was Bremer's personality, [REDACTED]. Jeremy Greenstock I think went through different phases with Bremer: some collaborative phases but also some very difficult phases. His personality was controlling and he wasn't someone who liked to have a multiplicity of views and he felt challenged by Jeremy, I think. I think that was a problem in itself. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] rather than someone who gave a lot of priority to managing the coalition and managing partners.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Can I ask a couple of general questions. Reading from the papers, time and again we see that issues are referred up to be resolved between the Prime Minister and President Bush. I think you explained earlier the kind of

relationship they had, an amicable relationship. But what did this do to the UK's wider diplomatic strategy with the USA, because if this was pushed up to the top what was happening underneath?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I understand very much the point you are making, but, you know, the problem we had at the time was that we agreed with the state department -- Jack Straw had an excellent relationship with Colin Powell, they shared many points of view on this, but the State Department had effectively been cut out of the action in Washington

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So that channel wasn't going to be a particularly operative one as far as Iraq was concerned.

[REDACTED]

We might have been able to do more on the MoD to Pentagon channel. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Elsewhere, could we have used a channel to the vice-president, had we had one? John Prescott didn't have a channel to the then vice-president,

but had it existed would it have made any difference? I don't think so.

So I think, you know, Prime Minister Blair's instinct as a politician was to do more not less -- and you can debate that, but that was his instinct -- and as I say there was method in that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** So would you say that these long video conferences that took place were used to drive policy or what was the role of the video conferences?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, as I say, the Bush phrase for it was "co-strategise" and Blair would always try, at least with some of the things they would discuss, to have a hook at the end to say, "Well, can Condi follow that up with Nigel, or could we ask so-and-so to do that?". He was conscious of that, that there was a need for it to have some follow through.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Before I move on to the CPA we have been told that Blair liked to avoid rows with Bush. Would you like to comment on that?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think that that is worth dissecting a bit. He wanted to and was prepared to discuss with Bush these very difficult issues. His way of doing it, as I've said before, was not to start by saying, "I disagree fundamentally with X", but to start by reminding Bush of the areas that they shared, the common ground that they shared, and to work from that. If you look at his notes to Bush, you can see what his is doing.

**THE CHAIR:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED].

**THE CHAIR:** [REDACTED]?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Can we move on to your visit in November 2003 to Iraq. What were your impressions before and after the visit? What were your impressions before you went and

was it confirmed with what you saw on the ground?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, by and large it was a confirmation. Some of it is superficial but for someone going for the first time -- I mean I had seen a war zone in the Balkans but it was nothing like this. To see the scale of the American military effort and the way in which Baghdad had been transformed and the way the green zone had been transformed into a camp, you know, just the sort of physical aspects were extraordinary.

I think I commented on just the -- well, my abiding worry, and it comes through in several of my reports on my visits to Iraq, was just this uncertainty over the degree of connection between what was going on in that green zone, whether it was run by Bremer or run by the Iraqi Prime Minister, and what was going on outside. That sense all the way through this period that even when people were trying to pull levers, they weren't connected to anything because the system wasn't there and there was too much violent opposition to what was happening. Certainly, you know, I wrote about it and I don't know where it is now, but I mean --

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** I think what you said was "continued CPA civilian weakness" and you also talked about the Brits felt they were not doing worthwhile jobs and they were being marginalised?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. Maybe it was later than I'm thinking of. I mean certainly the CPA was reporting back. I had had a meeting with the Brits in the CPA, and there was a number of them, just to get their impressions.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Was anything done when you got back about the continued CPA weaknesses?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, we were trying the whole time to improve it and certainly in terms of the working conditions of our people, that was something we were working on consistently.

You know, I think that the record during that period is that some of our people did do a very good job and others felt continually frustrated. The people who were working on the Iraqi MoD structures and capacity building, a lot of that seems to have come to fruition. There were some working on the economic side with the currency and so on and that was a project that was crowned with success. So it wasn't all failure. But I think it was a very difficult thing and you just felt how ramshackle the thing was, I mean in every way: in policy terms and in physical terms.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Can I move on to another issue which is the UK concerns about access to economic opportunities in Iraq.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Because Andy Bearpark told us in public that:

"It was never, ever said to me officially -- and it was certainly never, ever put in writing, but ... it was perfectly obvious that I couldn't be put in charge of oil because I really wasn't American".

That was the point. Now would you like to comment on that?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, yes. I mean certainly that was a worry for us during this CPA period, that we should get a fair crack of the whip when it came to awarding contracts. The Prime Minister wrote to the president about it and I was in touch with Condi, spoke to Condi, and that was I suppose in early 2004 and so that was an issue. I think in the end actually there was a big round of contracts which were being decided on and we didn't do too badly, so whether it was the lobbying that helped or whether it was the sheer brilliance of the business, I don't know, but that was a worry.

On the oil side, my recollection is that we did have an adviser, a British adviser, in the Iraqi oil industry. This is probably post the CPA, and there were lots of to-ings and fro-ings on that and that was debated in the senior officials committee chaired either by Desmond or Margaret a bit later on. So we had some influence there.

In terms of long term impact, I don't know the details but my impression is that BP and many other British companies are now involved in Iraq and they have a historical role there. But just to put it in perspective, it wasn't a big issue. I mean it was an issue which raised its head early in 2004 because there were ministers going out to Washington and there was a concern UKTI were expressing about a fair crack of the whip, but it was a tiny fraction of what we were doing on Iraq.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** It didn't look very large?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Not for me. It may have looked like that for others, but it didn't for me. I wasn't aware of that, I wasn't aware that he had this carved out until he said that to you.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Okay, can I then move on to the CPA plans for the transition, because on 15 November the interim governing council unveiled its timetable for the transfer by June 2004. Were you at No. 10 consulted on this decision and the timing?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I can't remember that day but, yes, in the sense of were we involved and were we aware of the debates that were going on in Baghdad, between the IGC and the Americans and the newcomers, yes, we were, we were very much involved and we consulted the Prime Minister on a regular basis on the advice of the Foreign Office and elsewhere. So I think we were aware of those debates. We had the Bremer plan and then we had this



revised version of the plan, so I think -- whether we knew it was coming out on that day I just can't remember, but I think we felt well up to speed with the nature of that discussion, yes.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Because in his book, "Bad days in Basra", Hilary Synnott said that he had no inkling that the entire basis of the CPA's operation was about to change. What was your understanding of how this decision came about?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think we did know it was going to change. I know he said a similar thing to you, that he felt the CPA shouldn't be wound up, but it was impossible for it to happen any other way. You couldn't have a CPA and end the occupation. So I was puzzled by that. But obviously, you know, he should have been better informed by his own colleagues in the CPA on the one hand and by the British system on the other about at least the general trend of debate in the IGC involving Jeremy Greenstock. It was unfortunate he was caught unawares.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** What was the planning sort of underlying this transition? Because if you look at the issue of the civilian capacity of the CPA and the military interface and the question of the responsibility of security remaining with the CPA, and there were issues on the cusp about police and law and order, I mean was there an understanding of what the impact might be of the division?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think there was a feeling that we would need to move and we had enough time to think about it and we would use the intervening months between November and June to oversee the structure. So essentially we would have two embassies and they would perform not only the traditional functions but they would be the home, as it were, for a lot of the capacity building and advice that was hitherto provided by

the CPA. So to some degree it was a revolving door: those who were going to carry on, who were within the CPA helping the ministry of the interior or the ministry of public works or whatever, would from that point on work from the American Embassy or the British Embassy and perform the same function with the agreement of the newly installed interim government. So the functions would be handled differently once the occupation had formally ceased and that was what we spent those X months doing.

I can see it's more difficult in Basra, which is maybe why Hilary felt the way he did, because you were having to deal with a set of local institutions which were far from being fully formed or functionable, although at that stage in 2004 at least we did have relationships with them, you know, and there was more of a mood of cooperation than sadly at the end of the period.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** But as the Iraqi interim government was being formed, Brahimi was in charge of the process. Did the UK government have a good grasp of who all the likely Iraqi political frontrunners would be?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think so. I mean I think it swung around a lot, you know, with different names mentioned at different stages, but, yes, I think we were in touch through all sorts of ways.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** And what role did No. 10 play in the formation of the interim government?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Just frankly keeping in touch. I mean an element of keeping the show on the road through really difficult times, I mean for example with the Fallujah stuff going on in the background. We were very involved, arguably in the lead, on the UNSCR. That was run from No. 10 because, again, we judged that it would be better to get our views of the content of the UNSCR

agreed with a NSC-led operation on the American side than if we had just done it with the state department, because they would have run into more difficulties with the Pentagon. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

But we were very much involved in that and saw the UNSCR as very, very important, as the sort of foundation stone for what was going to happen thereafter. I think we had pretty good -- I really do feel we had pretty good visibility of what was going on, you know, not to say that there weren't surprises along the way. Allawi wasn't mentioned all the way through that period, but he was someone who was certainly extremely well known to us and from the moment we heard that he was going to be the Prime Minister, he was pretty much welcome to us.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Just a few questions now on, after the invasion, the search for WMDs and essentially, I suppose, the intelligence relationships with the political system. But first off, there's a prioritisation issue for us, but also for the coalition generally, about use of the intelligence resources as between the search, on the one hand, and the active operation of intelligence in the real world over the period 2003/04/05. So far as the UK is concerned, and not least No. 10, the issue of WMDs was a high political point, I take it, throughout that period; more here than in the United States, in Washington perhaps?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, maybe. I mean it's mainly because our political situations were different. There was much more political opposition in the UK to our role in Iraq than at that stage in the American public opinion. So to that extent, yes,

and I guess also because we, the Blair government, had placed so much emphasis on the issue of WMD in their justification for going to war, whereas the American reasoning had always been broader. So, yes, I think that's right, but I think there was a lot of interest on both sides in what was going on.

**THE CHAIR:** The ISG itself is essentially a US-led operation --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, with some Brits, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** -- but the political significance of its findings and how they are expressed is actually of more significance for us than for the US and there is an asymmetry in there --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I suppose so. I mean, I think to a degree, rather than in black and white, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Now because of the political significance for us about finding, or not finding, traces of WMDs you've got both C, I take it, and [SIS4]<sup>2</sup> being very important players in this and bringing the Prime Minister up to speed, and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Can you just say a little bit about how salient all that was, that set of relationships?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** It is a bit dim and distant for me now, I have to say. I don't think that it was -- maybe you will be able to correct me, but my impression was that during this period it was mostly John Scarlett and the Assessments Staff who advised the Prime Minister on the evolving thinking of the ISG and who was in the lead in Whitehall, rather than SIS, in talking to Kay and Duelfer about their reports and so on. That's what I remember and I think it's borne out by what I've seen of the record. There will no doubt have been some contact with SIS on it, but it's not what I recall. It's mainly coming from the

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<sup>2</sup> This SIS officer is referred to as SIS4 throughout the Inquiry's documentation.

Assessments Staff and John talking to the intelligence side of the CIA and to the individuals directly. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

**THE CHAIR:** I suppose one key thing where SIS and C has a role is the progress with SIS intelligence sources?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, that was more 2004, that was particularly in parallel with the Butler inquiry and -- but that was pretty much a mechanical --

**THE CHAIR:** It was mechanical rather than the case of C coming in with bloodstained hands saying, "I'm terribly sorry, we've lost another bit".

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, absolutely, and I think it came to us -- I think there were letters over from SIS saying, "We have to withdraw this", and so on, as part of their review. Whether the review was being prompted by the Butler inquiry or whether it was part of their overall review in the light of Kay and so on, I just don't remember.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. I suppose there is an outstanding question still a bit about the timing of some of this intelligence created after the Butler report rather than before. From No. 10, did you have a sense that the information about withdrawal, even if it did have little significance, was being given to you in a timely way rather than being held back?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** No definitely. I felt that that was almost a formality by that stage. The emerging picture from the autumn of 2003 onwards, with the succession of reports and interim reports and so on to the Prime Minister, it was handling the politics of that and adjusting to a world in which there were no WMD but where he was nevertheless keen to try to get a public

understanding of what they had found -- of the elements in the reports of intent and preparation and so on -- which he felt required some public recognition even though the cupboard was bare as far as WMD themselves were concerned. That's I think how I would describe his sort of political reasoning during that period.

**THE CHAIR:** Because it is essentially, in light of the facts as we now know them, a very nuanced case that has to be made, was John Scarlett in his dealings with Charles Duelfer asking, in effect, for Duelfer's interim report, and then the final one, "Can't you find some of the nuggets that we've already got, can't you bring those to the fore?"; was that in essence John Scarlett acting on his sense of the need to produce the nuanced account rather than the "there's nothing there, so it was all wrong" --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think he was trying, at the request of ministers, to ensure that the full picture emerged and that there was a reasonable balance there. So, I mean, knowing the way that the media were reporting this, it tended to say that there was nothing and to take the headline and to ignore the rest, and John was trying, at the request of ministers, to try to get that balance.

**THE CHAIR:** We have had private evidence from one source that this whole business of looking at how we related to Duelfer and how Duelfer addressed his task and then his final report, that this was done in a very dispassionate way. The quote we have, for example:

"The people who were party to the advice on both sides of the Atlantic on a decision to go to war felt passionately about it, but during these processes the ISG behaved in an honourable and dispassionate way."

Was that your own sense of it?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** That was my sense of it. I mean the Prime Minister certainly met Duelfer -- I mean I can't remember if he met both of them, he met one of them I know, I can't remember which one it was, but these were calm and objective occasions. I wasn't around at the beginning, you know, in the run-up to the war. I know everyone was adjusting to what they were hearing and I know also around Whitehall people held different views about what might eventually show up. There were definitely people within our intelligence community who continued to believe in the autumn of 2003 that something would emerge, whether in a matter of weeks or years or whatever it was. Others didn't. I think the advice I was giving the Prime Minister, as a newcomer in the autumn of 2003, was basically saying that the only safe assumption is that there will be no finds and that seems to be the trend of the ISG's thinking and that's the basis on which you should operate.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, okay, thank you. Let's not spend more time with that. Let's move on to the Allawi government period. Lawrence?

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** You mentioned a moment ago that Allawi's name had not been particularly in the frame and then all of a sudden it was and we were quite pleased with that. To what extent was Allawi seen as "our man"?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, you know, he was seen as someone that we knew. I didn't know, when I first heard his name, the extent of his connections with the US and the UK but I found out about those over a period of time. But he was known to me from his contacts with Jeremy and so on, you know, as someone who had that interesting bridging position, or potential bridging position in Iraqi politics, as someone who had a tough view of security, expertise in security and intelligence, credibility with the Sunni community but was nevertheless Shi'a and, you know, in

office and in the elections since, he has offered this elusive prospect of a sort of broadly based secular-based coalition; very appealing inevitably.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Rather like the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He did actually win the last elections I recall. He may not be prime minister, but ...! I mean looking at it now, his come back in the last election was interesting, wasn't it, given that he had not done well in the 2006 election?

So, I think that he offered promise. He was somebody who -- well, take the simple things: he spoke good English, he was well connected in London and Washington, he understood our systems and he had an approach to life which was refreshing. So basically people were positive about it. I suppose there was maybe at the same time a concern that he would be seen as too identified with the occupiers, with us. You wouldn't have had that with Shahrستاني who was a name also mentioned at that stage, but some of the other people who have been mentioned would maybe have had the same problem

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Given that, was the expectation that he wasn't just going to run the interim government but that he would have a really good chance of becoming an elected leader as well?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I think there was a feeling that he had a good chance [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So, yes, there was a lot of interest in him and a possibility that he would have done better in the elections.



But we also knew, and I just want to say it again here, you know, we also knew what a difficult period this was going to be. I think when I visited in the September of 2004, before Allawi came to London, I picked up this phrase from Casey about a "window of vulnerability" and that was absolutely right. I mean the fact is that the interim phase, and you could argue the transitional phase too, were inherently unstable and vulnerable periods.

Just as a broader comment, if there's one observation I would make about the political process; on the one hand I think it is to our credit that we kept it going with the Americans, kept the show on the road, the Brits were always arguing not to delay things, to stick to it, to strengthen the UNSCR, to strengthen the electoral direction[?]; all of those were right and correct policy. But I think there was a fundamental problem with the length of time from the conflict itself to the election of a definitive government in 2006. It's just much too long to have a series of transitional periods. So if there's a lesson that I would derive from that, again it would have to be -- there was no easy model for this or wholly acceptable model, but I would have transferred power arguably in a more rough and ready way earlier in the process. Our block was always Sistani. So Sistani for the most part was one of the heroes of the period in keeping a lid on things, but on this issue created a fundamentally unstable political process. I think it's one of the biggest problems that we were dealing with: we, in the end, had no way round it and we were stuck with this very, very long period which every textbook would tell you is incredibly difficult to achieve. So applying the principle of pace to political transitions just seems to me to be very important and we were unable to do it on this one.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** There is a capacity issue here as well,

if you want to move quickly to a transition. The people to whom you have transited have to be able to cope and there is a paper from Anthony Phillipson of 27th August 2004 which you were copied in to, in which it is said:

"There is a real concern about the capacity of the central government to make and execute the necessary decision. Too much rests on the shoulders of one man. We need to identify who needs to do what to build up the capacity of the IIG to govern."

On the same day the policy unit is writing:

"Timescales for Iraqiisation can be compressed ... but only with increased resources and a risk to quality."

So that's the other side of the coin.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Again, starting from where we started, which was starting with a government which was deba'athified and in which there was a deliberate element of destruction by the departing Saddamists. So in any future model you would try to avoid that scale of deba'athification and try to find a way of retaining people's loyalty more than we were able to and control the initial security situation and dominate the security scene in a way which we didn't in those first few months. But I agree with that and indeed I was in Iraq myself a week or so afterwards and made many similar comments in my report back to the Prime Minister. I think that was our central analysis at that stage coming back in the reports from Edward Chaplin and from his contacts with Allawi as well.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So I think setting your expectation levels realistically in terms of the structure of government is one of those things and we tried

very hard with the Adam Smith Institute and all those things and I'm sure they were realistic, but it was never going to be Whitehall, [REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Just to sum up the Allawi period, were we too dependent upon one man and put all our eggs in that particular basket? Was it ever realistic that he would be able to take Iraq very far forward?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, we weren't only dealing with him, I mean we were talking to the others as well -- to the Kurdish leadership, you know, to the Shi'a leaders and so on -- so we didn't only deal with him, but you had to deal with the Prime Minister. The tradition in that part of the world anyway is to repose some hope in the leader, the strong leader, who could get things done. But, as I say, we were conscious all the way through of what a short period this was and that the dominant activity during that phase was really preparing for the elections and keeping that going and giving Allawi some sense of confidence on the security side that, going back to my analogy before, that if he wanted to pull a lever there was something at the end of it. One of the real refrains in all his contacts with Blair and with Bush, you know, was that he wanted more, he wanted more military capacity so that he could be seen to be running his own affairs.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Which brings us on to the security situation. In September 2004, you wrote:

" ... our information remains poor ... the security situation has been so bad that both the US forces and the international diplomatic presence has been more hunkered down. I do not think we can say with confidence that we know what is going on in the Sunni areas. And I doubt that Allawi has a completely solid picture himself."

Which is a pretty grim statement.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. Actually, that was the phrase I was recalling in answer to the point before about the green zone. I was remembering this comment.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Yes. So how could we have gotten better information?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I don't think we could. I mean I think that we were very hunkered down by this point. Certainly in my first visit to Iraq in November of 2003 I had been able, admittedly with some protection, to drive around in Baghdad itself beyond the green zone. There was no chance of that by this stage, by the time we get to the autumn of 2004. You will have had this, I'm sure, from other witnesses as well. So I'm not sure we could. I think that our ambassador tried to get on an American plane when he could and see other parts of the country. There was access to the north, we had our office in Erbil and Edward was able to get up there quite a bit.

But I think that our UK understanding of what was going on in parts of Iraq other than Baghdad and our four provinces was actually probably pretty slim. You know, even winding forward a bit, in 2006/2007 I remember we were trying to get a better picture of what was going on in Najaf from DfID and others and they sent back a sort of picture of what was going on that I just didn't find at all satisfactory and, again, it was because we had no real sources of our own. Security was so bad you had to do it with the Americans under heavy military escort.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So how does this affect our ability to deliver? I mean, you can have a strategy in these circumstances, but implementing it must seem pretty hopeless at times, if you can't actually pull any levers. Was that a growing feeling?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** It would confirm the strategy of focusing on capacity building in ministries where we could get to. I don't think we did think about it, but if anyone had come up with the idea that we should start running power projects in Al-Anbar or something like that, I mean clearly this was not a world in which you could do that. So focusing on where we were able to get access made sense, but also recognising that the political organisation of the Iraqi state was fundamentally weak and that the connections between central government and what was going on outside were often tenuous. Again, it was a mixed picture because some of those things would be achieved in ways which would not happen in our society -- they would be done through religious affiliations, through tribal affiliations and so on -- but it was difficult to sort of match that to any political strategy that we would come up with.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** In November 2004 there was yet another assault on Fallujah and before that we sent Black Watch to Babil south of Baghdad. Can you just take us through that decision-making, given that we had been reluctant to send forces before?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. Well, I think I would make one comment to preface. I think all the decisions made on military forces, whether they were positive decisions or negative decisions, all arose from recommendations by the chiefs through the Defence Secretary throughout this period. Indeed, that is exactly the same for Afghanistan, just to make that clear, because sometimes you read in the media that the Prime Minister decided X and told the Chiefs to come in. It never happened that way around in my time on either subject. The plan on Afghanistan to agree to the aggressive NATO expansion in Helmand was bottom up: it came from the Chiefs to the Defence Secretary to the Prime

Minister not the other way around, just to be clear about that.

In this situation I think that it was maybe something of a leftover from the decision not to expand our role in the summer. I think that both the MoD and the Prime Minister were relying very heavily on the advice of John McColl, who very strongly advised on this occasion that there was a very strong alliance reason for acceding to the American request on this occasion and that there was a military reason, because the Americans were stretched, that they needed the forces that they had in Babil for the Fallujah operation and that we had in the Black Watch battle-ready troops familiar with the terrain who could take this on quickly. So that went ahead and it was agreed by the Prime Minister. It was the only expansion of our role beyond Basra throughout that period. That was the background to it.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Was part of the understanding that you would have more influence over tactics?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I don't think so. I don't think so --

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** There was just a gap to be filled?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** -- I don't remember that coming up so much. Maybe in a very broad sense that you can't be in a coalition like this unless you are prepared, from time to time when there's an urgent need, to respond if you are able to respond. I think that was the sort of point which John McColl might well have made, but I don't think there was anything specific about this operation.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** How engaged more generally were we in the discussions for tactics strategy for Fallujah?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** My sense was that was mainly in Baghdad. We were aware that there was planning for the operation that had gone on for a long time; we were aware that Allawi was involved;

we were aware -- I can't remember who the general was at that stage, had Casey arrived by that point? I'm not sure. But we were aware that those things were going on. I don't remember there being detailed discussion in London, there might have been discussion with the Chiefs but I don't remember it coming to No. 10, to the Prime Minister's office.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** During all of this there was the Margaret Hassan kidnapping and Ken Bigley as well. I would just be interested generally in your thoughts on what could be done and what you were trying to do from No. 10 about these very difficult issues. There was a video released, broadcast on Al Jazeera, in which Margaret Hassan appeared and one of the demands was not to send soldiers to Baghdad, for us to do that. What effect does this sort of video have? I mean is it something that you take note of but can't really have any influence on policy or did it feed into policy debate in any shape or form?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I don't think it fed into a policy debate. A huge amount of time is always spent on hostage situations and throughout both these episodes the Prime Minister was kept informed on an incredibly regular basis and was definitely emotionally affected by it and by the media pressure which he and other ministers came under as a result of the videos and the appeals. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So it was very, very difficult to handle.

Most of the direct handling was done by the Foreign Office, that was their role, but the Prime Minister was certainly made aware and involved [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But

I don't think it made us step back and say, "Should we go ahead with the whole operation", if indeed it was -- I can't remember whether it was under way at that point or whether it was still in prospect.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** It was in prospect.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think that was one of the problems with the Babil operation: it would have been much better if it had just happened rather than being advertised in advance. It would have been much better for our troops, who unfortunately in those early days did suffer a number of fatal casualties.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I mean was that issue that was discussed about --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** It was an issue which was constantly discussed, which was the difficulty that the Ministry of Defence has in maintaining secrecy of any information. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But it is an issue.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So if they had just moved their --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, my recollection is that was a feeling that we had at the time, but I don't know whether I'm reflecting backwards and it is a retrospective judgment. But I think we felt at the time that it was damaging that it was known and that people would be waiting for them when they arrived. I mean, there was always going to be an element of that, but it would have been better to have effected this as quickly as possible.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Then, just finally, in December 2004 the Prime Minister wrote to you:

"We need to sit down with the US in the New Year and work out a proper strategy based on a hard-headed reality check. The



paper I have seen for 2005 is inadequate."

So what did he think could be achieved, why did he think it could be delivered, why did he think the paper was inadequate?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I don't remember the paper, but it wouldn't have been the first paper to have been found to be inadequate. But his consistent worry during this period was: was Whitehall applying, was our government applying, a sufficient level of effort to this problem? Were we doing everything that we could with the Americans to get things moving? He continually looked for, was trying to look for, the missing pieces in the strategy. Were there game changers? Were there drivers which would help us on to more profitable and successful terrain? That, I think, is what I would do if I was Prime Minister as well, I think that was a reasonable thing to do. You know, he was involved in this day by day, week by week, and of course he had other things to do as Prime Minister but he kept his focus on Iraq. As I say, I think we were all adjusting, even at the end of 2004, to what was the correct and realistic basis, but you had to, as things got worse, you adjusted your expectations and your hopes and goals. I think he was doing that as well.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So did the strategy change? I mean was there a big rethink at this time or was he just sort of grasping for something different to do?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think the key point was to come which was the election. December 2004<sup>3</sup> was the election, that was a huge event, there was a huge amount of doubt as to whether it would happen, how it would happen, what the turnout would be, how much intimidation there would be, and whenever we had one of those moments, it turned out to be a success -- and not because of us solely, but it did turn out to be a success. So we would have

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<sup>3</sup> The election was actually in January 2005

had to, with a new government and so on, do this anyway.

But I think that, certainly from 2005 onwards, if there was a change of emphasis it was to put more emphasis on the glide path to transition and to put more emphasis in the Prime Minister's mind and in our own activities into outreach, to both sides increasingly -- obviously to the Sunnis, which had been a refrain right from the start, but increasingly the need, although very difficult to achieve, to try to do the same with the outliers on the Shi'a side as well.

So I would say if there was a change, it was a change of emphasis of that kind; a knowledge that Ja'afari, both once he was in place, which obviously took some time, but once he was in place would be less able to accept direct help than Allawi had been, so we had to operate even more at arm's length than before; and I think, you know, growing degrees of realism about how capacity building could be achieved and so on.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** That leads naturally on to the next question.

**THE CHAIR:** It does and Martin would like to ask about Sunni outreach. Over to you, Martin.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** I would like to start with the early 2003/04 story and we see from our documents the extent to which this issue had been highlighted from the autumn of 2003 and that the Prime Minister raised it twice with the president in October. General Abizaid told you in November 2003 that the coalition had failed to reach out to the Sunnis and needed to find some way of inclusion. Can you explain to us what the inhibitors had been to this and to what extent American policy had been a driver in inhibiting the outreach?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think there were a complicated set

of reasons, some political and some practical. First of all, it was a good thing that Bremer put David Richmond, who was then Jeremy's deputy, squarely in charge of outreach. I think he recognised there was a British interest in this, maybe a potential British expertise, but anyway David was there with the responsibility. So it was recognised as an issue from the start.

I think there were a couple of difficulties at that stage. Although Abizaid might have recognised it, I think there were mixed feelings on the American side about doing this. You have this debate the whole time -- we have it now in dealing with the Taliban -- there were mixed views on the propriety and efficacy of dealing with the people some of whom were directly responsible for blowing you up. Then an imperfect understanding, particularly poor at this stage, of the composition of the insurgency and the relationship between the Al Qaeda elements on the one hand and the different strands of the Sunni insurgency itself. I don't think we ever got a perfect picture of that, but it certainly was far from being well formed in the autumn of 2003.

Then I think there's a number of practical issues. If you are going to do outreach, you've got to have people to outreach to. How do you do it? Now I think it may have been possible at that time, and I think David may even have done a bit of this -- you know, in conditions where security is less fraught, you can do things like town hall meetings and going out and saying, "I'm David Richmond, can I have a chat?" I don't think that was ever possible in the autumn of 2003, but certainly as time went on and security became more and more difficult you needed to be able to identify people and start it that way. I'm not sure that we ever at that stage had the information to do that except in the broad sense that he could talk to one of the people who represents the

Sunni community. But my sense was that, whether it was because we didn't give a completely full effort to it in Baghdad, or whether it was because the Americans weren't backing it up by giving him the access that he needed or whatever, it was a rather superficial effort in those early months.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** There is an important paper from the Prime Minister to the president in April 2004 where he sets out as his summary of what should be done:

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

Again, looking through what we were asking earlier about the influence of the Prime Minister on the president and the White House, what came of this set of suggestions?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think that this started to happen in the sense that this was channelled really through our contacts with successive Iraqi governments. This is really what we were talking to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] That was going on. It wasn't accompanied by any public or political effort. I think, from the Prime Minister's perspective, you need both. You need a Prime Minister who looked as though he was drawing the communities in in a public way as well as having private and perhaps secret conversations with people who were actually closer to the insurgency itself. But Allawi was doing some of that, so I suppose our effort was done through that.

At some point, and I can't remember when it was, the American

military themselves got involved in this and this is particularly in the later period, and particularly towards the end of the Casey period, when Rob Fry was doing some of this, and then obviously during the Petraeus period where Graeme Lamb was heavily involved in this side of things. That was a little bit later. By then it was a much more fully formed and much more extensive operation paralleling what Ambassador Khalilzad was doing himself. So again I would say this is something which we gave a lot of emphasis to early on. It was on the advice of the FCO initially. The FCO themselves were involved through some of these initial operations through [REDACTED] and Dominic Asquith and so on. The Americans, I think, agreed in principle, but it was a slow business. I don't think Bremer himself was too committed, which is maybe why he parcelled it out to David rather than taking ownership himself, but eventually it became an American policy. As I've said so much of the time with this, this was something that, if it had been done a bit earlier, we might have avoided some of the depths of the difficulties.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Thank you. I shall come back to 2005 and 2006 later.

**THE CHAIR:** Let's talk a little bit also about Shi'a outreach in the 2003-05 period with Lawrence and then I think we will take another break.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** You've mentioned already the special role of Sistani and the complications produced by al Sadr. How well do you think we understood their roles within the Shi'a community and generally what was going on within the Shi'a community?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think with Sistani we didn't have good, or really good, direct or even indirect connections. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So you knew what was going on, but didn't have any means of influencing it yourself?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** No, I don't think we had means, and again we continually tried to test that. There was at one stage a message -- I'm jumping, probably, periods, but there were different stages and we tried messages from the Prime Minister and indirect messages. There were some people who definitely had access to him: I think the Europeans, the UN had access to him. So we were always using these to try and get messages through, probably in a diluted form.

**THE CHAIR:** Could I just jump in on this to ask about the level of awareness and understanding of Sistani's own position as the leading Ayatollah in Najaf and his own personal religious history and where he stands theologically in terms of an unwillingness to engage directly in the political process, but nonetheless exerting an influence on it in the community he leads in a religious sense. Was all of this part of the understanding?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think in that broad sense, yes. I think that those contours would certainly have been understood by the Prime Minister in that sense. I don't think he or I would have known a lot of detail about Sistani, but those basic facts about his positioning were understood.

I don't think we got Sistani wrong. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Finally, we seem to have struggled to get the measure of al Sadr. Why was that? And also our understanding of his relationship with the Iranians?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, both things I think we can be forgiven, because I think his compatriots struggled and others in the region struggled and which al Sadr are we talking about? I think you could argue that al Sadr in 2003 certainly had a following, but you might have been able to do something about him in 2003. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].<sup>4</sup> But as time went on it was impossible to do that, so you had to develop a more subtle strategy for dealing with him, which is what the Prime Minister was advocating in the spring of 2004.

So I don't think we understood him completely. I think a lot of Iraqis talked about him, he was a relatively young man, he wasn't a fully formed personality that they understood either, and you know, it was always -- apart from understanding the depths of alienation and frustration within the community to which he was appealing, and we did understand that, it wasn't always possible to know exactly what he was about or exactly what he was trying

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<sup>4</sup> Sir Nigel suggested that there may have been merit in detaining Muqtada al Sadr.

to achieve. He was one of those people who often avoided doing things and delayed making decisions and seemed to have some problems himself in defining a strategy, no doubt because he was under some pressure within his own movement and within his own community. I think we can be forgiven for not getting it absolutely right.

With the Iranians, again I'm not up to date on this, but I think our initial feeling certainly was that although he might have had some support from them financially, that his whole political positioning was as an Iraqi nationalist and that he wasn't a natural Iranophile in that sense. Now events have maybe pushed him a little bit closer to the Iranians, but I just don't know what the current assessment is. But I wouldn't have thought he would be the closest of the Iraqis to the Iranians. There would be many others ahead of him.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Let's take another five minute break.

**(A short break)**

**THE CHAIR:** Let's start where we left off, with the Ja'afari government.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Right, he emerged in 2005. What insights did we have into his emergence and how did he emerge?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think it was a little bit later, the election, and then it was April or thereabouts, I don't know, I can't remember exactly when it came about. I think the key thing was that it emerged in the Iraqi system that it would be easier to find someone from a political party which was not one of the main parties; that we would build consensus around a minority figure and I think we were reasonably well taken into



the discussions. My recollection is that we were. We didn't know a lot about him, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Despite the fact that he had these British antecedents, I don't think we knew a lot about him. He had been in the IGC, I think. I think he had. So there had been some contact, but I don't think we had a good appreciation of him.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** I mean he was doing -- at the time they were also doing the drafting of the Iraqi constitution. I mean what were the Prime Minister's aspirations for the constitution and were they achieved? What did he expect?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Good question. Well I suppose that he hoped it would -- well, I mean first of all, above all, that it should get agreed and the referendum should go ahead and it should have a very broad base of support in the population; that we should keep to the timetable, we should keep the show going, we shouldn't get derailed by the violence which of course continued, intensified -- I can't remember whether there was a particular spike before the referendum, but it certainly wouldn't be surprising if there had been. I don't know so much about the content of the constitution because I think, broadly, we were happy with the draft, the proto-constitution agreed in the spring of 2003<sup>5</sup>, which was quite a progressive document and I certainly can't remember during that period, certainly from a No. 10 perspective, devoting a lot of time to the content of the constitution or to the discussions. I don't think we were spending a lot of time, and it was their own process and frankly if we had spent days worrying about it I'm not sure it would have

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<sup>5</sup> Correction: it was the spring of 2004.

been time well spent.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]

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

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]

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

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED].

THE CHAIR: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

THE CHAIR: [REDACTED]?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

THE CHAIR: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]?

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

THE CHAIR: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

**THE CHAIR:** So we enter a further decline in security. Lawrence?

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** A cheerful question. You wrote in July 2005 to the Prime Minister a question:

"Are we headed for strategic failure?"

Then you decided you didn't think we were. But the fact that the question was raised seemed significant. How much of a concern was it at this time that actually the whole thing might end really in tears?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, we were all very concerned that the situation continued to get worse and there was a great deal of debate in the media and within government about whether this was irreversible and whether we were headed for a strategic failure. I was trying to address that honestly in this note and gave my own opinion, which was not to be optimistic but nevertheless to say that by the standards that I would apply to that term that I didn't think we had met it yet. Not to say it couldn't get worse -- and it did get worse, of course, in 2006. The degree of sectarian violence was, I think I am right to say, at this stage less than it was after the bombing of the Samara mosque in 2006. So things were to get worse.

I think the two critical factors which made me think we weren't at that point of strategic failure were -- and I come back to this point about the primacy of politics -- that the political process had not yet been derailed and we had managed to keep it going and there appeared to be a discernible intent of the Iraqi people to keep that going by continuing to support it in increasing numbers; number one.

Number two, you have to make a judgment about scale and about how much of the country was engulfed in violence and so on and my belief was that we hadn't yet reached the point where the country

was ungovernable. In the centre there were terrible things going on, but large parts of the country reminded quiet, et cetera, et cetera. So it was opening that debate, which the Prime Minister was aware of, but giving my own analysis of it and at the same time I was going on a bit about the ... that was before we got to the Red Team, wasn't it? That was later.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Yes. What about the impact of British casualties at this point, because I think they were starting to creep up more? How much of a factor was it? Obviously there was concern about the ability to sustain significant political support at home to these efforts in the longer term?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** We had just had the election here in which Iraq had been quite a significant factor and the unpopularity of our presence in Iraq was very clear. But I think also we were at that stage where if we got through the next [Iraqi] election, the election in January of 2006, we knew that that, and the election of the government thereafter, was the end of this process to which we were committed. That was what we had to see through. That's why I think if you -- if I'm not mistaken, what we started introducing for the PM and discussing amongst ourselves increasingly during this period is the concept of the sort of standards and methodology that we are going to use for our draw down and for our ultimate departure. So this concept of sufficiency, which I advanced in notes to the Prime Minister and which was discussed in Whitehall -- and it was my own term but we certainly talked about it quite a bit -- was to get across to him that it was not going to be --

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Exemplary?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. I didn't use that term, but we were going to have to do it and there were a set of judgments we were

going to have to make. There were things we would like to see to make our exit more publicly manageable and defensible, but it's going to be a difficult process. So we were starting to think about that. I suppose what you are saying is, you are starting to think about that transition more, understandably, as we were reaching the end of the political process which we had had to nurse as the former occupying power.

But certainly I would say, as a rule of thumb, both in relation to Iraq and Afghanistan, the single biggest determinant of public opinion always was the level of British casualties and that was undoubtedly for both areas of war.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** But you felt that as long as there was a political process there was hope that you could have something that could be described as strategic success?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, in broad terms, and that the process of capacity building, though it might be fitful and not lead to where you would like to go, nevertheless was continuing.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** One slightly different question. Were you considering really radical options like emergency pull outs and so on, or did you feel that you would have enough notice of a chronic deterioration to leave that decision until later?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Just reading through the papers again, I don't recall any detailed papers, contingency planning papers of that kind, but there were clearly at least brief discussions of "what we would do if" and there are these occasional references to being able to work up those options if we need to leave more quickly. We were conscious of it. I'm not sure we ever worked it up in a full way and I'm not sure whether the chiefs looked at such a plan. I'm sure they had one. I would be surprised if they didn't.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Lastly, the Iranians. What sort of evidence were you getting about Iranian involvement and what did you try to do about it?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think any analysis of Iraq will show that there's a huge amount of Iranian involvement even before you get to the history of this period, so the cultural interplay between the two and so on. But I really think from early on, from 2004, the malign Iranian role in the south was becoming obvious. I think it was 2004 when we first started noticing the weapons that were being used against our forces, which clearly had that Hisbollah brand and clearly were Iranian. I think there was sort of pretty regular intelligence pointing to financial and practical support for some of the militias in the south east as well as obviously the Shi'a militias in Baghdad from Iran. That was the picture that was coming from the JIC and going to ministers. So I think we didn't dispute that, that was known.

What we tried to do was to warn the Iranians off. In August 2004, we actually asked our ambassador in Tehran to pass a message -- even in the Prime Minister's name I think actually -- to warn the Iranians to avoid a situation in which, as it were, they overplayed their hand, because we were worried about the situation in the south east in August 2004 and we felt that the Iranians were fanning it rather than trying to tamp it down. So we did send a message there. [REDACTED]

I think maybe we should have done more of that. During the whole of this period until the spring of 2007, when they took 15 sailors hostage, we didn't really have any sort of functioning dialogue on these issues with the Iranians. We had some contact through Jack Straw and the Foreign Minister. I don't think that



ever really got on to these issues. We didn't have what we have with most other governments, which is a contact with in this case the National Security Adviser and we had to develop that in a hurry in the aftermath of the hostage-taking. But I think maybe we should have tried harder to talk to them about it, not that it would have been very easy to construct at that phase, with Iranian attitudes hardening [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] this period; not that it would have been very easy, as it were, to develop a modus operandi with them over Iraq.

I think they were trying to have it both ways. I think they were pleased that we were on the back foot and destabilised and that America was bogged down. They were actively and unhelpfully involved, particularly through the Revolutionary Guards and that part of the complex Iranian system, but I don't think they would have seen it in their interests to destabilise things to the point where Iraq went up in flames. I don't think so. But we felt, I think, in the summer of 2004, that there was a risk of things getting out of control simply through miscalculation - that they put enough in that the tinderbox could go up. That was the risk, I felt, with the Iranians. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**THE CHAIR:** Can we turn now to something that's very close to you personally, the Sunni outreach into 2005.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Martin?

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Yes. The Sunnis had largely boycotted the January election and then the focus became ensuring their

participation in the next election. Can you tell us at what point you became involved in Sunni outreach and why you were asked to take a lead on this?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think I was involved in a general sense from the start because it was one of the key strands of our policy and we discussed it a lot in the Iraq Strategy Group and so on. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. So it was a British process which had gone on for some time.

But I think, the feeling was, in the autumn of 2005 -- with the referendum coming, with the elections coming up, with the government formation coming up thereafter -- that we needed to step up the effort. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** How were your Sunni interlocutors chosen?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** They were chosen by [REDACTED]. I don't know if any of them had been seen by Dominic earlier, but they were a mix of people, and in fact in the two meetings I had they weren't exactly the same. Some of them were the same and some of them were different. There was one group who refused to have anything to do with it and we hoped to see them on the second occasion but they declined. I think General Fry might have seen them at some point separately.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Were the Sunnis themselves consistent in what they wanted from the coalition? What points did they put to you?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, to some extent, yes. The big difference was the Ba'athists. The Ba'athists were rejectionists and were on a line all of their own. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** How effective were these discussions?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think we had an impact on the people we spoke to. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** My last question concerns the American dimension. You wrote in April 2006:

"We are widely seen as having played a major role in getting Sunni Outreach going."

What had been the American attitude towards it during your negotiations? Did our success buy us some further influence with the Americans?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I don't think it so much brought us further influence; I think this was one of the areas where the Americans consistently thought that the UK -- because of history,

because it was one of our political and diplomatic talents, this was an area where I think they regarded it as something where we had a voice and needed to be allowed to get on with it and were worth listening to anyway. I would say this, the political process generally, the external and international aspects of handling Iraq, whether it was the UN, the regional groupings, working with the neighbours, the Saudis and others; I think these were all areas where there was a British expertise and experience which the Americans paid attention to.

It may be worth pausing on this. I don't think we were doing things to buy ourselves influence. It didn't feel like that at the time. I think we wanted to get them on side, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So I think that this outreach effort in this phase of activity, I think for the Prime Minister and for other ministers in the UK, the outreach was trying to get something moving with the Shi'a, to see whether we could make a new start with Syria -- we didn't actually do anything directly with Iran during that period, although we would have been happy to, but we took the Foreign Office's advice at that stage that it was better to leave the Iran channel to them and to the nuclear negotiation that they were involved in with the other members of the EU.

**THE CHAIR:** I just want to ask almost a single question, I think, about the Maliki government and about Maliki himself, because

after the 2005 elections he emerged and you visited him.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** It's really the assessment that we made of Maliki and how accurate it turned out to be. You give a very balanced account in that minute of 27 April, "business-like, decisive, getting used to the role, on the other hand [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Did that picture, as it were, stand up throughout his time or the rest of the time you were concerned with him?

The other point really to make is, the Prime Minister goes and visits in May 2006 and he has got his own view on Maliki as a human being, but he describes him to Bush as "brisk, determined and intelligent", which is your own judgment, but without the qualifiers. Is that to ensure that Bush keeps up the positive sense that it's worth doing business with this guy?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I don't know the answer to the last one. I think Bush had no option but to have a relationship and to engage and I think -- I can't remember when he visited but he visited some time around the same time himself. I don't think he would have done it that way. As it happened, you know, I arrived just as he was being appointed, so I saw him -- I probably was one of the first international visitors to see him, so it was really an early snapshot. I mean re-reading it, I think it holds up pretty well. If you look at the last few years, certainly looking back from, say, June of 2007 when I stopped at No. 10, this would have been pretty much the picture.

I think the complication, which only emerged once the Prime Minister had seen him in May was his very ambivalent attitude towards the British role in Basra. I thought it was an

achievement in April that really more or less the first thing I said to him was, "How are we going to work together in Basra?" and he responded positively to that. That was a very important moment for the UK to see an Iraqi prime minister who really did have a feel for and a sense for Basra. But we weren't able, until we had seen him in action, to bottom that out and quite what it meant and it came with, as we know, a lot of complications and a lot of baggage, including some of the people that he assigned to work with us there. So it was obvious from the moment the Prime Minister saw him in May, that he wanted to scale back the British role and didn't really see the need for that British presence.

**THE CHAIR:** Was this partly or indeed mainly looking ahead to the Charge of the Knights, because the Shi'a politics in Basra, in parliament as well as the city, was of crucial importance to him as it had not been to his predecessors?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. I think that's it and you've heard from Jock Stirrup and a lot of other people about this. There were many bitter aspects of this pill when it came in 2008, but I think it was the right -- ultimately the better view of what happened, you know, was that, uncomfortable as it was for us, this was in the end what the Prime Minister had been arguing for all the way through, which was that at last the politicians in Baghdad were reasserting their key national interests in their second city. That was bizarrely what hadn't happened very much before. It was already obvious with him. Da'wa weren't very big in Basra, but clearly he saw it as a Shi'a issue and saw the British role there as a complicating factor and that he would, [REDACTED], want to handle it himself, handle it in his way, [REDACTED] and I think gradually we understood that



that was the way of dealing with it.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you agree with a bit of analysis that says he actually delivered our policy in the sense of resolving the Shi'a differences in Basra which were being played out by violent means mainly against the British military, but in fact he then took political control and resolved the political issues for the Shi'a factor?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, but he also did what he refused to allow us to do which was to use a lot of force and in denying us the ability to do that in the autumn of 2006, he was denying what was in the end one plank of his policy which was, as you say, it was a double-whammy in the spring of 2008, certainly it was the Charge of the Knights and it was political settlement on the other side. I think we were right from the start that we needed a bit of both, that we couldn't have just done it by political reconciliation, but he tied one arm behind our backs when he denied that coercive element to Operation Salamanca.

**THE CHAIR:** My fault, I think we've got slightly out of chronology now, but no matter, it's all Maliki. But can I turn to Lawrence about the surge?

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Yes, so over 2006, you are getting a variety of messages back about the development of US policy

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and then in

early December, Nick Banner relays to you a conversation he had with Meghan O'Sullivan in which he said:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Now, I think still outside people were assuming that the Baker Hamilton review was the main game, so did that come as a surprise to you or had you picked up beforehand that there was a different sort of review going on of US policies?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Just before we get on to that, our policy throughout this period -- again, just to get the shifts -- was continuing, but I think where we were at that stage was continuing outreach to everybody, but the two elements were this phrase the Prime Minister had of a timetable we can use, so trying to find a way through this conundrum of how you signal your intention to leave in the right way. So this doctrine of sufficiency and the conditions for our own departure and looking for the draw down, combined with international outreach as well, so pulling in Iran, Syria and so on. So that was what we were on.

As it was originally put to us, the White House conceived of Baker Hamilton as a way of tilting, pivoting, themselves in a way which would command a national consensus and that was agreed before the then disastrous mid-term elections in November 2006. So I think we initially felt they were going to be broadly comfortable with the Baker Hamilton prescription. We didn't know exactly what it was going to be, but we thought it wouldn't be far away from where we were and the elements we had in terms of our policy. The Prime Minister spoke to Baker Hamilton as you know, and David Manning I think kept in touch with the team.

I think it was pretty late in the day when we realised -- and I'm trying to remember the date of the Prime Minister's own visit to Washington. It must have been maybe just after this, because the Prime Minister visited Washington on the same day as the

Baker Hamilton report came out, so I think it must have been 6 December or thereabouts. It was around that time. So I think probably, you know, as we were preparing for that visit, and certainly during the visit itself, it was obvious to us that there had been a change of approach within the White House. We always knew that it wasn't just Baker Hamilton: there was an internal White House administration review going on to which Baker Hamilton was a contribution. So we knew there were internal ruminations as well.

What we hadn't anticipated and became partly clear through this sort of information and very much when we came to Washington and talked to the president and his team, I think it was around the 6th or 7th of the month, we realised that they were on a different page and that the president was increasingly looking to accept the views of General Keane and the others who had been putting forward a fundamentally different proposition during the course of the autumn. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The view in the UK was very sceptical. The view of the chiefs was sceptical that it could work. We were pretty luke warm in our reactions to it and we were surprised that the administration departed as much as it did from Baker Hamilton.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Prime Minister, you know, could see some of this, but it was very telling when he -- I can't remember whether he wrote to Bush or whether he commented to him, but I remember reading the record of it recently, and he said:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I think that might have been a message to Bush in early 2007, just before or just after he made his announcement.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Reading Tony Blair's memoir --

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Which I haven't done yet, so you are ahead of me.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** You have a treat in store! There is a note of regret that we didn't have a surge as well, that exactly this point that you have made about an air of defeatism clearly seems to be bothering him.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, he was bothered in that period. I think all of us felt that Maliki's decision to refuse to allow us to take any action against the militia was really weakening and difficult and throughout this period, late 2006/early 2007, before the Prime Minister made his statement to Parliament at the end of February, we were toying with, you know, what is the real situation on the ground in Basra? We have had to forego any

offensive military operations. Is it the case, as our commander on the ground is telling us and as the chiefs are telling us, that the situation is actually improving and that operation Sinbad is actually having a positive effect? There was some scepticism, I have to say, in other parts of Whitehall that that was the case: certainly within the FCO, certainly within SIS, certainly within the office of No. 10, we weren't sure that that was a balanced picture of what was going on. Part of the Prime Minister's regret, I think, was that we weren't allowed to do our operation. If we had been allowed to do our operation it might have been a bit different, but I think he felt that the conditions that he described in his statement were there, but that we were much less confident of our ground, confident that there would be an improvement, than we would have liked to have been the case in making that announcement, which is why he deliberately decided he wouldn't make the announcement until he had heard a proper assessment from the MoD of how operation Sinbad was going. He was trying to coax more performance out of the operation before making that commitment to further draw down.

He may well personally have felt that, but as I say, the very strong feeling the rest of us had was that we had to draw down and there was never going to be a perfect moment to do it and there would be no support in the UK to do anything else.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Martin, over to you.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** I want to focus on Basra but before I do really to take up this question of defeatism.

On 19 January 2007, Simon McDonald wrote to the foreign secretary and it was copied to you. He wrote:

"Iraq will take a long time to put itself together ... we may not be able to prevent it falling apart. Meaningful

reconciliation will take a generation ... [et cetera]."

You wrote:

"These judgments look too defeatist ... But we should discuss."

So I have two short questions: first of all, why did you think they were defeatist and, more importantly, did or didn't a consensus emerge as a result of the discussions?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I haven't really read this, I'm afraid.

**(Pause)**

Well, I disagree with bits of it, I mean certainly, but that was my view. There's never black and white judgments, but the tone of it was that we've literally hit the buffers and there's nothing more we can do. I thought there was something more worth trying, but I didn't disagree fundamentally with it. I mean, I had been the advocate for a long time of taking a realistic approach with this and finding the best way out that we could, so I wasn't fundamentally out of sympathy with that approach.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** "We should discuss"; did that lead to a discussion?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I'm sure we discussed it in the Iraq Strategy Group, I'm sure you will find records of that in the Iraq Strategy Group. But I think the "we should discuss" is really to my own team, but I'm sure we would have discussed the basic strategy because these were the things that were under discussion at that time. This was the phase when DOP and indeed the full Cabinet, in this period of late January, was looking at the whole issue of transition in Basra. So that's right.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Well, to focus on Basra and the various SIS reports through 2006 about the deteriorating situation and the problems of intimidation and the tremendous deterioration in the

security situation; how concerned was No. 10 at these reports? What impact did they have?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Very, because we were getting those reports from SIS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and it made us concerned that we were hearing a more positive picture from the MoD. So we were trying, as you would do in the central government, to reconcile differing information and to work out the right way of approaching it. I suppose, the Prime Minister's view would have been that we should continue to make an effort to improve things.

Can I just pause for one second because this just raises something I would like to say about what happened in Basra. I couldn't put my finger on it and say that there was a moment when this happened, but at some point during this period, a combination of our own people and the army in Basra sort of lost their strategic awareness of what was going on in Basra politically. All the way through this period and going back to the Hilary Synnott period, there is a debate about the extent to which our military forces are involved early on in the provision of aid, the extent to which they were supporting the CPA and then the Consulate General in its political activities and to have protection of the people involved in the politics. Somehow or other we had a very small Foreign Office operation there -- some good people there, but it was pretty small. You never had a Hilary Synnott figure there after he left. There were relatively junior figures some of whom had no expertise in that part of the world and some of whom did. But it was a pretty small operation, you know, compared with an operation of 8,000 or 7,000 soldiers. Between them, they sort of lost the plot as far as what was going on in Basra was concerned. Early on, there

were good relationships, and I'm not saying it was easy, because there was a lot of antagonism between us as well, but we sort of lost our connection with what was going on.

I think, in retrospect we should have had a bigger effort to make sure that we were connected, the military should have been more involved in enabling the diplomats to do that, maybe had a bigger political operation themselves in the way the American military have someone like Petraeus, who functions politically in his role with tribal chiefs and political leaders just as much as he does as a strictly military commander. We don't seem to have done that in quite the same way in Basra. So we lost our awareness of what was going on and I think that's one thing worth thinking about. That worried us all the way through and I think that there was a lot of fatigue in Whitehall about Iraq and about Basra and it was very difficult to get the system geared up to continuing to take action on those sorts of issues.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** That actually answers several of my questions. Perhaps I could just draw attention to one document in this connection which is a letter you wrote to the Prime Minister in January 2007 reflecting General Shirreff's frustrations with the civilian effort and the Prime Minister minuted on the paper to you:

"Put Shirreff in charge. The army gets things done."

How much did this reflect his frustration?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I think it reflects his frustration. I felt that the Shirreff prescription, which was basically to have a military proconsul or whatever, might have worked but it was much too late by the end of 2006 to think about that. If we had done it that way in 2003 it might have been a way to go, to fuse the military and civilian efforts. In some ways that was exactly what Hilary Synnott was asking for, to bring the two



operations together. I just felt it was out of time by that year and of course what he was saying was resented by DfID and by -- I think it was the Prime Minister being frustrated that it had been as difficult as it had been to bring the different lines of the campaign together effectively in Basra.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Did the possibility of increasing troop numbers in Basra play a part in the discussions at this time?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** No. There was no possibility of increasing numbers as far as I can recall and the issue was, what would be a reasonable trajectory. On that, we maintained over this period the direction of travel, but at every stage, as you know, going right the way through to when we eventually withdrew in 2009, it all took longer than people anticipated. I guess that's another very obvious lesson from all of this, is that everything takes longer. But that's certainly true of the military transition.

Talking about tactical awareness, in this case, our withdrawal from Basra -- from the centre of Basra and then from Basra Palace -- obviously reduced our awareness, our understanding, of what was going on in the city which you could say in turn led to the circumstances around Charge of the Knights where effectively it was Maliki taking over the responsibility from us which in turn prolonged our presence, because we weren't able to draw down in 2008 in the way that we had originally anticipated. So "everything takes longer" is a principle of nation building.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I remember Lady Thatcher saying the same thing to me about the Falklands.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, you have the records and Margaret can come in and correct me, but I don't think there was any thought given to reinforcing at that point, no.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** To turn to the other side of the coin, my final question really is the political dimension. One of our witnesses has told us that because politically, in domestic political terms, it was an unpopular war the government wanted to get out of it, to reduce and leave. We have been told that in early 2007 you told the military that the Prime Minister wanted them out by Christmas. Is this so?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** No, absolutely not. I mean I don't remember that conversation at all. It was certainly true -- well, Simon has said it in his note -- it was certainly true that by that stage really two things: first of all, our main military effort as we go into 2007 is Afghanistan not Iraq. In Iraq we are about to draw down to 5,000 or 4,500; in Afghanistan we are going up to 7,000 or thereabouts, 7,500. I've got the numbers somewhere. But around that time was the point where the two lines crossed, at some point in the first part of 2007. So our main military effort was already Afghanistan by that point.

Secondly, it certainly wouldn't have been the Prime Minister's view that we should get out of Iraq by 2007, but there was a general sense within the government at that stage -- and particularly knowing there was going to be a change of Prime Minister -- that there would be an acceleration of the consideration of draw down. I don't think it was ever realistic to imagine we would be out by the end of 2007, but certainly that was what was being looked at. As you see from Simon's own note, that was what he was recommending.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Thank you.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** And he, as you know, subsequently became the Prime Minister's adviser.

**THE CHAIR:** Baroness Prashar would like to ask about the Basra

deal.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Indeed, two brief questions. When did you become aware of the negotiations with [REDACTED]? Did you have confidence that you would succeed? What advice did you give to the Prime Minister?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I'm not sure that I was aware of them when I was at No. 10 and I'm not sure that they were going on when I was at No. 10. I left No. 10 in --

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** This was in June and you left at the end of June.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** In which case maybe they had just started.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** This was in the middle of June, the 15th, but you weren't aware of it?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I must have been aware of it, but I'm afraid I just don't remember. I'm sure we would have been aware that they were started, but I wasn't particularly --

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** I mean the fact that you were going to negotiate with militia, there was no authority sought at No. 10?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I honestly don't remember that.

**THE CHAIR:** Jack Straw was asked.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I'm sure he would have been. I'm not sure whether we would have been asked in that way of getting authority. I mean I was aware that discussions were beginning and of course afterwards that they were going on, although I had no particular visibility of them once I was preparing for Washington and going to Washington.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We are coming close to the end and the moment for

your reflections, but just a very quick one about the regional dimension, not least because you had your own part to play in that period, I think.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Just a general question about how far from 2005 onwards we were able to recruit, or sought to recruit, the regional neighbours, both the friendly ones, Saudi and Jordan, and the others to our policies. Was this an active line?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** All the way through the period there was a British emphasis, led by the Foreign Office, on the international aspects of this and international support -- a whole series of international support mechanisms, whether the very big ones, the meetings in Brussels, or the regional neighbours type ones. So there was a lot of ingenuity that went into that. I think there was an effort to try and get the neighbours to establish proper relations and normal relations with Iraq, to establish embassies, to give political support and with some success. I think the Jordanians established and one or two of the others did. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I think things were probably better between Saudi Arabia and Iraq than they were earlier on, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

We tried all sorts of things. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. So I think this was a strand of British activity which was probably partly successful but not more than that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We would like to spend just a minute or two on your time as Ambassador in Washington, particularly during the Bush era, before we come to your reflections.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** So we started with you in the EU and now we move on to you in Washington. When you arrived in Washington in July 2007, what was your assessment of Britain's standing in Washington?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, I think then as I think now, it is very high.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** In the context of Iraq?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Oh I see, in that sense. Well, you know, the majority view, particularly among the American public -- and we are talking about the public as a whole -- was one of gratitude for standing by them and working with them and making the alliance a reality. I think if you talk to Americans that will continue to be their feeling in recognition of our bravery and the political risks that our government took and Tony Blair personally took.

There were nuances, obviously, in the Democratic Party and those who opposed it from the beginning, who were less happy that we had gone in; and particularly among the military and retired military there were some questions over our role in Basra and some questions about whether we had succeeded as well there as we had hoped and as we would have liked. That came out both publicly and semi-publicly over that period. So that was there, but I wouldn't say it was the major thing. Most Americans would be completely unaware of that, but it was certainly there in the Washington pol mil chattering classes.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** I think it was in May 2008 that you wrote to David Miliband and you said:

" ... to protect the UK's national and military reputation. Our best chance of achieving this is by being seen to deliver a satisfactory outcome in Basra."

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes. The best chance, yes.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Were the decision-makers sensitive to this?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Yes, I think so. I think the feeling was it's the same as the series of considerations that I was talking about before. We were talking about early 2007. Obviously it's much better to leave with your head high feeling you have achieved things. I think Gordon Brown put a lot of effort into the economic and development side of Basra partly for that reason as well, in order to show that there is something tangible that you are leaving behind. So I think that general sense of leaving with something accomplished is a perfectly natural, inevitable sort of political feeling.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** So was our announcement in July 2008 of the Iraq withdrawal, was it something they were resigned to or were they happy with it?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** This is potentially a very, very tricky issue in 2008. You've got the American elections going on with John McCain as the rapidly emerging Republican candidate and known views on Iraq, and the issue very alive within the Democratic party in their primaries and beyond. So you can see from my letter, in a way the most important bit of handling for me as ambassador was to avoid our politics and our own handling of the draw down getting entangled in their own election campaign and vice versa. That would have been a nightmare.

I think by and large we succeeded in avoiding that. I give a lot of credit to the Prime Minister, to Gordon Brown and to

Simon McDonald and others who were involved at the time because I think that they handled President Bush and the Bush people carefully; they were realistic about what they could expect from us; they weren't making ridiculous requests about staying on longer than we needed to; they understood the courage that it had taken to keep our forces there as long as they had, so that was handled well. I also give credit to them for handling this in a staged and progressive way and timing their statements in a way which turned out to be perfectly good from an American political point of view. So this interim statement in July and then making the definitive statement after the election when everything was clear and when I think there was no rancour even from the Bush administration at that point, the outgoing Bush administration. So I think one way or the other, the end of the story in terms of the American side of it was handled pretty well. But that was why I was active at that stage in trying to get across some basic points about American handling which I think the London side navigated very well.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** When Obama became president, how far did Iraq shape our initial contact with the new administration at all?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Relatively little. They were aware from a number of contacts -- and indeed this may well have been discussed when Obama as a candidate met they were aware of our thinking, of the trend of our thinking, of our developed plans. I don't remember the detail of that, but of course it was entirely consistent with their own thinking to which they were committed publicly. The announcement that President Obama eventually made in whenever it was, February 2009, sat perfectly naturally alongside what Gordon Brown had already announced, so that was not problematic. Iraq was not the big issue in our

discussions with Obama. I suppose the big thing probably in that early stage was more the economy than anything else; the economy and Afghanistan and Iran would have been the main issues.

**BARONESS USHA PRASHAR:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We are about to conclude the session, but I would like, if I may, to ask if there are any final views you want to offer. Can I just point to two areas where your reflections would be appreciated? The first is, you have been at the centre of our strategic relationship with the United States for over seven years now in different capacities: any lessons for the future from that experience?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** On the UK/US?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and the other is essentially your role in Whitehall. Again you have been there for a good few years and bringing together Whitehall's advice from different departments to help ministers reach decisions and to ensure that their conclusions are given to Whitehall and are followed through and actually implemented and, as a side reflection, you have mentioned the difficulty Washington sometimes has in getting things done. It was a challenging task, that second one, so any lessons learned there?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** I have a few others, but let me deal first of all with those.

The US/UK, a very broad reflection. I don't think Tony Blair did this, because I don't think that he constructed our policy on Iraq in 2002 in order to cultivate his relationship with Bush or because of his relationship with Bush; he did it, rightly or wrongly, because he believed it was the correct policy for the UK. I'm not saying this because I think that he got it wrong, I am saying it because I believe that a cardinal principle in US/UK



relationships is that your decisions have to make sense for their own reasons and for UK reasons and to be justifiable in UK interests, not serving the ulterior purpose of comforting a relationship with anybody. That's the only way I think decisions, even when relationships are a significant factor, are sustainable over a period of time and that is particularly so when you are committing your forces to war, where lives are going to be lost and where you need to be ready for the long term and for a sustainable defence of your policies with the British public. So getting a public understanding that we do things on their merits, which is not frankly what the current British public or media understanding is of our relationship with the United States -- it would be advantageous for them to get to that position.

The second is that we are the junior partner. Our present Prime Minister has actually used the term. Other prime ministers have talked about it in different ways, and I think Tony Blair did use that term publicly, but we are. I think running through a lot of our discussions is the need, in confronting a war situation and the transition thereafter, to define in advance relative roles. Where are you going to put your weight? You have limited resources, America has huge resources and our other allies have bigger resources than we do. Where is our centre of gravity going to be? Where are we going to take the risks? Where are we going to put the money and where are we going to put the human capital in? We put a lot of effort into Iraq, lives and everything else, but it sort of came about in a -- it wasn't a chaotic manner, but it came about through a series of decisions made at the time rather than because of a plan, because there wasn't a plan as we all know. There was no proper planning for the aftermath.

My third point is about our influence with the United States.

We have real influence, and certainly taking part with them as military allies in conditions of real and political risk gives us a credibility with a super power like the United States which is real, which gives us extraordinary and unprecedented access compared with any country in the world and where we have real influence, but it isn't unlimited. It's always going to rub up against where their vital interests are involved and where they may be pulled different ways by their own public opinion or by other allies -- we are not the only ones with a close relationship with them -- and we need always to remember that and I think broadly we do.

Again, sometimes the media expectation is that such is the closeness in the relationship that we can just raise our hand or wiggle our finger and it will happen, and it isn't like that. But there are some areas where, because of expertise, cogency of argument, brilliance of individuals, we are going to get our way and I've tried to identify areas, broadly in the areas of the political process and I would say also in some areas where we had an influence on the development of their own counter-insurgency doctrine, where the UK has had an influence on the United States, but it has to be judged carefully.

Lastly, I think our military reputation did take a bit of a knock in Basra and although there was a bit of criticism early on over aspects of Helmand, by and large the very positive view taken of our role in Afghanistan, and that is the current issue, has erased that. I don't think it is a big issue in American minds. I think it has been overtaken by that sense of the strength of our commitment in Afghanistan. So those would be my few things on that one.

On Whitehall. Well, there are some things which aren't to do with structures. I mean the sort of prior issues are to do with political will and the political solidarity of the government.

Obviously this was a divisive issue publicly, it had an impact on senior politicians and it was a very difficult issue for them to handle. So maintaining a sense of commitment, wanting to be associated publicly with Iraq throughout this period; it was difficult for the senior ministers concerned. This was an issue where, all the way through the period I was dealing with it, there was basically a clear majority in public opinion against our role. So that's the background. The background is one of intense political difficulty. Add to that the fact that there was a fair amount of fatigue in Whitehall, so I think, you know, it's difficult to say that it would ever have been very easy, whatever our structures were.

A couple of thoughts. A number of people have said to you that it would have been better had there been a single minister charged with doing this. I have an open mind about that, I'm mildly in favour of it if anything, but I don't think it's a substitute for what I was talking about earlier. For that to be effective, you need that and a sense of collective political will in the government itself, otherwise you run up against exactly the same problems. But certainly speaking from where I was, with the Cabinet Office and then No. 10, I think it would have been helpful at different times to have had under the Prime Minister somebody of real political weight, you know, if they were genuinely able to crack the whip. That raises a whole load of corollary issues, as some of your witnesses have said: what is the role of the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary? You have their statutory responsibilities, so what if someone else is given overall responsibility? But on balance, to me, there would have been moments when it would have been helpful.

In terms of Whitehall, a couple of things. First of all on funding, I do think that the Iraq situation showed some real problems about funding. I do think you need some funding on the

civilian side which is much more flexible and which gives access to the Foreign Office to money on the same basis as the MoD is able to access the reserve. Now, funnily enough -- and Margaret was involved in this -- with Afghanistan I think early in 2007 we were able to access the reserve for activity [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and that was accompanying an additional troop reinforcement.

**MARGARET ALDRED:** It was part of the decision.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Part of the decision, but I don't remember that ever happening as far as Iraq was concerned. We struggled with the DfID budget because, although they put a lot of money in it, Iraq was not their core business and we got a fair amount out but it was never the central theme for them. The Foreign Office, as far as I know, were never given any significant additional help. So I think somehow or other, by way of prior decision, as you are planning for a war, readying yourself, you do need to have a fundamentally different set of funding provisions and maybe that will happen anyway as a new government comes in and is looking at these things.

Lastly, as far as our bit of this is concerned, the Cabinet Office and No. 10; we now have the National Security Adviser which formalises the trend of recent years. But the other thing which is maybe even more important is that that team in the Cabinet Office is now a much more substantial one than was the case when I was there. I think that is necessary, because I think that when Margaret and I were doing this, there was a huge expectation sometimes of what the centre was able to coordinate with virtually no resources. So on Afghanistan<sup>6</sup> there was a chunk of me, there was a chunk of Margaret, there was a chunk of an assistant secretary who was heading up the foreign policy team

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Nigel meant to say "Iraq" not "Afghanistan".

and a part of one desk officer in the Cabinet Office and that was it, dealing with Iraq. We had in Margaret an originally MoD civilian official; but we had no direct military advice.

So I think that that wasn't a realistic way of handling it and actually even that model involved more resources than when I started in 2003, and we vired resources within our system. But there was a continuing reluctance on the part of the powers-that-be to give more resource to the Cabinet Office at a time when there was pressure all around and a feeling that the departments themselves needed to get on with it. I don't think that's a realistic situation when you've got an operation to coordinate and maybe the hope early on was that the Iraq Policy Unit, which had a sort of inter-departmental remit, might do more of that but certainly in my time it functioned as a Foreign Office department more than as an inter-departmental structure.

So all I'm doing is giving you a vote for a reasonable level of staffing at the centre to cope with a crisis, including, I would say for the future, with proper military -- I would have a serving officer on secondment from the CDS, who would have very close links to the chiefs and be able to be present as part of the central structure.

But for the rest of it, whether it is a good idea to have a national security adviser and all of rest of it, I don't know whether you will get into that. But what I say on that is, just to be clear, what I tried to do in my whole time at No. 10 was to bring the best Whitehall advice to the Prime Minister across the board. We were synthesising stuff from the whole Whitehall system, from our posts, we were aligning with the departments concerned and we weren't trying to crowd them out and I think if you read the record of what was going on in No. 10, the Prime Minister received a huge amount of information fed to him on a pretty professional basis by his Cabinet Office and No. 10

team. That's what we were able to do and that was the rationale for creating this role in the first place, to make sure that that funnelling was done more effectively than in the past.

**THE CHAIR:** It would interesting to know whether President Chirac or President Bush felt they were getting that quality of service.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well!

**THE CHAIR:** I know time presses on you, but are there any other reflections or observations?

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Well, we've gone through a few of them as we've gone through, really. I've mentioned most of them. Just very briefly I would just say -- I will just spend one or two seconds on planning -- obviously inadequate; dominating the security space early on in the campaign, so we never gave ourselves a chance really by allowing the security situation to run away with itself; shorten the political transition as much as you possibly can, don't make yourself vulnerable; even where you need some deba'athification, or whatever the equivalent is for a future conflict, minimise it so that you maintain as much as you can of the functioning government; keep faith in the political process -- and I think that's ultimately your exit strategy. It was not wrong for the UK to put its emphasis on that. Maybe we put it on because it didn't involve huge resources, but it just involved brain power and effort, and we did put our effort into it and it was right to do so. Build in flexibility. Everything takes longer.

But lastly, and this maybe a bit more controversial, not everything is our fault and recognising the destructiveness and brutality of the people who decided to cause this level of carnage is also quite important and needs to come out too.

**THE CHAIR:** I think King Faisal agreed with you in 1932! Well,

this has been an exceptionally long session, so thank you very much indeed. It has been as valuable as it has been long, so thanks very much for that. If there were anything that came into your mind subsequently, you could always send us a little note.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Okay. Just one very small thing I forgot to mention when we were talking about the Ja'afari deal. William Patey said to you, and this is a matter of maybe a difference of recollection, he said to you that No. 10 was on the phone to him every day. I don't think that's right. There would be periods, like when the government was being formed in 2006, where we would certainly be on the phone every day just to find out what was going on, just mainly to get information. For the rest of it, we would be on the phone occasionally. I used to try and ring our embassy in Baghdad basically once a week. I used to ring them on a Monday morning on my way in, because I knew I would be asked by the Prime Minister when we had our normal Monday morning meeting what the latest was, because I wanted to convey to him the latest from the front. But I think William's recollection is of a slightly greater and more insistent contact.

But I would say two things. Number one it was often two-way. I found that Whitehall and certainly our posts liked the fact that there was interest and actually found some advantage in using that in getting what they wanted done. Number two, the Prime Minister felt a genuine sense of responsibility for what was going on and liked to keep in touch directly with people and liked for them to feel there was interest in what was going on. If ever there was a security incident very often it would be his message of support to them which would get to them before any other messages from Whitehall. So that was his style and I think you heard from Michael Jay, when he was ambassador in Paris, that

it was quite normal for the Prime Minister to come on the phone and he did do that. That was what I was trying to do, but I think William gave the impression that there was a sort of insistent, you know, rat-a-tat-tat, and I don't think it was like that. I would want to correct it.

**THE CHAIR:** Right, noted. With that, Nigel, thank you again very much indeed and thank you for your indulgence in time.

**SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD:** Thank you very much.

**(The session concluded)**

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