

Thursday, 7 January 2010

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(10.00 am)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning.

LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Good morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning and welcome everybody, including our witness. The objective of this session this morning is to understand the situation on the ground in Basra between February and August 2008. For the first session we have Lieutenant General Barney White-Spunner, who served, I think, as GOC MND South East during the period, and later in the morning we have the Consul General at the time and the head of the provincial reconstruction team.

I envisage this session as lasting about an hour or a bit more, and the only other preliminary I want to say, as I always do, we recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection of events, and we are, of course, checking what we hear against the papers to which we have access, and I remind every witness that he will later be asked to sign a transcript of the evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and contract.

I think without more preliminaries, I will turn to Sir Lawrence to open the questioning.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: General, you arrived a few weeks
2 before the Charge of the Knights, and we will talk about
3 that in a moment. I just thought it would be useful,
4 perhaps, if you could start by giving a sense of what
5 you were led to expect in your briefing before you
6 arrived and what you actually found when you did arrive,
7 your overall sense of the security situation and the
8 political situation in Basra.

9 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. Probably quite a lengthy
10 answer, is that okay just to talk on and you can stop
11 me?

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

13 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I got there, as you said,
14 before the beginning of the Charge of the Knights. Of
15 course, that was about five months after the withdrawal
16 from Basra to the airport, and it was -- about two
17 months after PIC in Basra province, which was
18 16 December.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: PIC is the --

20 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Provincial Iraqi Control.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- Provincial Iraqi Control, yes.

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We had already, as you will
23 have heard, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Maysan had already
24 PIC'd, so Basra was the last one to go.

25 The strategy, which I was briefed on, was to

1 maintain the operating base at the airport whilst
2 training up the Iraqi security forces so that they could
3 exercise more effective control.

4 The division we had originally trained in 2007,
5 10 Div, had, of course, gone from Basra by then,
6 General Habib's division, so we had started -- my
7 predecessors, 1 Div -- and I think Graham Binns is
8 coming on Monday -- had started training the 14 Division
9 under General Mohammed. When I arrived, we had two of
10 its brigades, 50 and 51 Brigade, trained and deployed,
11 but without MiTTs and I would quite like to come back to
12 the MiTT issue.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we will park that for
14 a moment.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The third brigade, 52 Brigade,
16 was forming up at Shaibah, which is where we did the
17 training, a short distance from the COB. The
18 multinational elements at the time was an Australian
19 contingent remaining at Tallil, who was still there, and
20 they were maintaining a liaison relationship and
21 overwatching Muthanna, and then there was a Czech
22 company who was helping us to guard the COB.

23 We were roughly at 4,100 troops at the COB, quite
24 lot of those tied up -- are you happy for me to use the
25 term "COB", are you familiar with it? With

1 a contingency operating base. Sorry, it is sort of army
2 shorthand, I am afraid.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Reduce the number of acronyms. Was
4 that 4,100 just the UK contingent?

5 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: That was the UK, 4,100 UK
6 contingent. You will, of course, have been briefed
7 that, on 8 October, the Prime Minister had announced
8 reducing British troops in the spring to 2,500. So,
9 when I deployed, there was an expectation that that
10 4,100 would reduce in the spring to 2,500. Events
11 obviously changed that.

12 Do you want me to chat through the political
13 situation in Basra?

14 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think that would be helpful.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think the first thing is
16 that overall in Iraq, in February to March 2008,
17 although things were beginning to go much better, the
18 Sunni attacks were decreasing, there was still -- the
19 situation was still, in General Petraeus' words,
20 fragile. There was still considerable violence in Mosul
21 and in parts of Baghdad and the Shia factions, although
22 the Sadrism ceasefire was still in place, and, in fact,
23 was renewed shortly after I got there, for what it was
24 worth.

25 THE CHAIRMAN: The national ceasefire?

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The Sadrs, OMS --

2 THE CHAIRMAN: As opposed to Basra.

3 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Precisely. Although, of
4 course, special groups were exempted by Moqtadr Al Sadr.
5 So when the ceasefire applied to the Iraqi security
6 forces, it didn't, of course, apply to attacks on the
7 coalition, he did charmingly exempt that.

8 Sadr himself was by this stage a waning
9 political force, I'm pretty certain he was in Iran for
10 much of the time I was there and the political situation
11 in Basra itself was also pretty fragile. The governor
12 was Wa'ili and -- with his Fadhila party, at odds with
13 Prime Minister Maliki and the Baghdad Government, and
14 open talk at the time of the south-east forming some
15 form of secessionist, if you like, sort of federation,
16 which I'm sure you are familiar with, which obviously
17 was fairly inimical to the nationalist Shia parties
18 because obviously it involves a large chunk of the Shia
19 vote, which is inside south east Iraq.

20 There was a feeling that the Fadhila administration
21 in Basra was incompetent. Basra was not, despite all
22 our efforts, functioning that well, and, from
23 a coalition perspective, ie from our perspective, two
24 things were really increasingly obvious to me.

25 The first, that we needed to redirect our training

1 of the ISF and we needed to make more -- dedicate more
2 of a mission to training, to develop 14 Division. That
3 was really the first thing.

4 I talked to General Mohan at length very soon
5 afternoon I arrived -- General Mohan, are you familiar,
6 who had been appointed the year before, was the overall
7 commander of the ISF in Basra -- about what he wanted,
8 and what he wanted then -- and again, I will explain the
9 military acronyms in a moment -- was offensive support.

10 By this we mean those weapons systems, collective
11 weapons systems, which support infantry rather than
12 being infantry themselves, particularly the ability to
13 target air and helicopters, intelligence and
14 surveillance assistance, assistance with command and
15 control and logistics.

16 Now, doing a sort of appreciation of what that
17 meant, that meant that we did -- to actually meet those
18 requirements, we were actively changing our lay-down.

19 I think, secondly, it was absolutely clear that we
20 needed an operation to clear the Shia militias out of
21 the city, because although we had gone to PIC, actually
22 the -- sorry, Provincial Iraqi Control in December, the
23 situation in Basra was not -- was not that good.

24 I don't know whether you have had evidence yet
25 from General Shirreff about Operation Sinbad.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, we have heard about that.

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think it is important to
3 take my remarks in the context of what Sinbad had
4 achieved and how the Iraqis perceived Sinbad to have
5 gone.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would probably be very helpful.

7 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I will come back to that if
8 I may, but Sinbad had taught a lot the lessons to the
9 Iraqis. Not least -- and actually, for these clearance
10 operations to be effective, they really had to be
11 Iraqi-led with us in support rather than the other way
12 on. Us being in the lead on Sinbad with them in
13 support, if you like, was still giving an excuse to the
14 extremist militias to attack us because they could use
15 us, if you like, as a rationale for --

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Sinbad had been late 2006.

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Late 2006 -- hold on, I can't
18 remember the exact dates. I just need to check the
19 exact dates, but it went on over a long-ish period.
20 Effectively, it was the sort of precursor to Charge of
21 the Knights. So what I started doing on arrival with
22 General Mohan was to plan these clearance operations.
23 He and I went up to Baghdad to brief General Petraeus
24 and Rubaie, who was Prime Minister Maliki's security
25 adviser, again whom I think you are all familiar with.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Just for the record, Sinbad is 2007, isn't
2 it?

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is late 2007. Zenith --

4 THE CHAIRMAN: 2006 was mentioned. It was 2007?

5 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: So General Mohan and I drew up
6 this plan which saw an Iraqi lead with us in support
7 rather than the other way on, as in Sinbad. We went up and
8 presented that to General Petraeus and Mr Rubaie and the
9 overall plan, which was actually very similar to Sinbad
10 in concept, it was a clearance of Basra and the whole
11 province by phases, was accepted and General Mohan
12 briefed it and I obviously supported it, but the issue
13 then was we had to fit it into the priorities of the
14 Multi-National Corps in Iraq.

15 I would just like to digress for a moment on the
16 command and control. May I do that?

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes.

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I was working to a US -- the
19 18th US Airborne Corps, who were new in theatre, almost
20 the same week I was, commanded by Lieutenant General
21 Lloyd Austin.

22 I think it is important, particularly in the way
23 Charge of the Knights developed, to realise that was
24 a very close relationship and our operational command
25 was very much exercised through the MNC-I, through the

1 Multi-National Corps Iraq, through General Austin.
2 Obviously, there was a strong UK influence, as you would
3 expect, and indeed as there should be, but it is
4 absolutely clear that we fitted our operations into
5 a pattern laid down by General Austin, not in some sort
6 of little UK enclave separate to that. I think that's
7 actually quite a key point.

8 Because, at that meeting in March, when we sat round
9 in Baghdad with General Petraeus and Mr Rubaie, the
10 point was made very clearly to us that we would need to
11 resource this operation in Basra effectively, if it was
12 going to work.

13 Just to remind you on the force ratios, in Basra, as
14 Iraq's second city, and with its only port, at that time
15 we had about seven weak-ish battalions for a city --
16 well, nobody knows exactly what the population of Basra
17 is but 2.5 probably 3 million compared to sort of 40 in
18 Baghdad.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have heard 2 million before, so
20 that indicates --

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: There was no accurate census.
22 No one could accurately define the population in Basra,
23 and of course, it changes as people come in, but the
24 point is it is the second city, a very large city, very large
25 population, but very low force levels.

1 So to actually do an operation like Charge of the
2 Knights, in the planning, we knew we would need at least
3 an extra division, if not more, and we would need
4 considerable Corps support to do it. General Austin was
5 absolutely clear that his priorities in
6 late February/beginning of March, where we now are, was
7 to finish the operations in Mosul and Diyala and parts
8 of Baghdad, and we had left that Baghdad meeting with a
9 start date of 1 June for Charge of the Knights, by which
10 time --

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was it known as Charge of the
12 Knights, or was that a later --

13 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think General Mohan called
14 it Charge of the Knights. I can't remember exactly, but
15 I think it was, yes.

16 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So this wasn't -- because it is
17 associated with what happened in March --

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It is the same operation.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I know it is the same operation
20 brought forward, but it is just --

21 THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry to intervene, speed of speech on both
22 sides. Can we slow down a little bit?

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Of course, sorry.

24 So we left Baghdad, clear that the plan was
25 supported, supported by Dr Rubaie, supported by

1 General Petraeus and would be resourced later in the
2 summer.

3 As I got back, I then also realised we would need
4 additional UK assets and it would take time to source
5 those. We were distracted by the kidnap of a British
6 journalist in Basra who'd gone into the city unescorted
7 and we had to devote considerable resources to his
8 release, but, during March, we were planning to develop
9 the operation and starting to just begin to start to do
10 the detailed planning.

11 I could describe the phases of that operation, if
12 that would be of interest.

13 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we can pass over that
14 because it didn't happen that way.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: So we started joint planning.

16 I then went to Germany to brief 7 Brigade, who were the
17 incoming brigade, and to have some mid-tour break early,
18 because I suspected, quite correctly, I would be unable
19 to do so later in the summer.

20 Then Prime Minister Maliki, unexpectedly to
21 everybody, moved down to Basra over the weekend of
22 22 and 23 March and it became apparent to us about two
23 days later, two days after that, that he intended to
24 mount Charge of the Knights.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you go back to Iraq?

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Absolutely, as soon as it
2 became clear what was happening. I had a fraught
3 journey back. Of course, the trouble is there were
4 insufficient troops in the city. Now, far be it for me
5 to divine Prime Minister Maliki's motives, but I have
6 described the political situation in Basra at the
7 beginning, but it was an anxious time because we didn't
8 have sufficient troops, 52 Brigade, as I said at the
9 beginning, was inadequately trained. I say
10 "inadequate", I mean they hadn't finished training.
11 I don't mean the training was inadequate. We hadn't
12 finished it. It was a worrying time and we had to do
13 several things fairly quickly to restore the situation, which
14 I'm happy to describe if you would like me to.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let's just pause and be clear where
16 we are. What you have described is a situation in which
17 there was evident tension between Baghdad and Basra
18 politically --

19 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- and a degree of urgency,
21 therefore, that attached to that situation with
22 Prime Minister Maliki.

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That the Americans were -- had
25 different priorities elsewhere still, that they were

1 looking at Mosul and Baghdad and that the general
2 agreement, which included the Iraqi military contingent
3 or military leadership was for June.

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that was the assumptions. So
6 now, all of a sudden, Prime Minister Maliki decides that
7 this timetable is presumably too relaxed, too gradual.

8 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. So now you find yourself
10 dashing back from Germany into this situation. What
11 were the immediate priorities?

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think they were sort of
13 fourfold really. The first was we had to get more
14 troops into the city, and going back to what I said at
15 the beginning, we had to maintain an Iraqi lead on this.
16 So -- we, the corps -- I would just like to pause to
17 describe this concept -- American concept of corps and
18 the main effort. It might sound like military
19 gobbledegook. Corps, as in C-O-R-P-S, ie the
20 organisation that held all the Multi-National assets,
21 most of which were American, bearing in mind our corps
22 had just returned from Kabul, the ARRC, was the
23 organisation which would flex and move troops. By "main
24 effort" we mean which had been previously been in Mosul,
25 we mean that operation to which the Corps Commander will

1 flex his assets, because it is, to him, the most
2 critical for the time being.

3 We were very well supported by the Americans in this
4 and General Austin immediately realised now that the
5 situation in Basra was challenging, and, therefore, by
6 making it the Corps main effort, we then came -- it
7 opened the doors for additional military support.

8 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I intervene for my own better
9 understanding? We heard evidence from General Wall
10 yesterday that certain key assets are held at Corps
11 level and deployed to the main effort at the time, and
12 by creating in March what should have been not required
13 until June, they had to be reallocated very fast.

14 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, that's entirely right.
15 There would have been -- by June also, we would have
16 brought out some specific additional UK assets, and
17 indeed we did, in the last week of March, bring out
18 a considerable number of extra --

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What sorts of numbers are we talking
20 about here?

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: In the hundreds, primarily
22 supporting things like air controllers, joint tactical
23 air controllers, specific communications support and
24 other support, which I'm happy to detail later.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What sort of numbers were the

1 Americans bringing in?

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The Americans were not
3 bringing in formations, they were not bringing in
4 regiments and battalions. The First Iraqi Division was
5 MiTTed -- sorry, this is again -- the American approach
6 to training --

7 THE CHAIRMAN: Just the acronym please.

8 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It is an embedded military
9 training team. So what the Americans had done with the
10 First Division, and indeed with most of their formations
11 for which they were responsible in the Iraqi army, was
12 they had put dedicated teams into that formation who
13 lived and worked with them. So when that formation
14 deployed, as the First Division did, it brought those
15 teams with it.

16 Now, if we had been doing the same, then -- for
17 example, if our 14 Div, for whom we were responsible,
18 had deployed, then it would have taken British troops
19 with it, and indeed we did have, at times, that happen.

20 So what we got from the Americans was, first of all,
21 going back to my point just now, a large slice of the
22 corps, C-O-R-P-S, assets, things which the Americans
23 were providing on behalf of the coalition. Specific
24 things which were really helpful to us, were
25 helicopters, were unmanned aerial vehicles, additional

1 support on -- money on the reconstruction side to follow
2 up this operation, which I'm happy to come back to,
3 those sort of assets.

4 At the same time, we had a slice of American staff
5 to help us task those who came and sat in our
6 headquarters, which was immensely helpful, and then we
7 had some American teams with the Iraqi troops, but you
8 didn't have American regiments or battalions going to
9 Basra.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But this would still have been quite
11 a substantial number of people involved?

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. It varied enormously.
13 I think at one point it was up to 1,000, and I think it
14 then reduced down later to a few hundred. It varied all
15 the time depending on -- you know, if a Corps decided on
16 a particular day that actually it needed its attack
17 helicopters somewhere else, then they would sort of
18 flex.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: Could I just go back one to the March/June
20 difference of timing? With the ISF 14 Div, it was
21 expected in March that it would be declared ready
22 by June?

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Exactly so, yes. That was
24 part of a logic and that's why General Mohan and I were
25 very happy with and to accept the June timing.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: The fact that it was not ready in March when
2 Prime Minister Maliki wanted to have to go into the
3 operation, did that generate a requirement for
4 additional boots on the ground, infantry, or rather was
5 it just there was a general unpreparedness?

6 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Two of its brigades did quite
7 well, the two trained ones. 52 Brigade didn't do
8 particularly well. Therefore, that created a vacuum,
9 exactly as you say, and that's why the arrival of the
10 Iraqi 1st Division was absolutely critical.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It would be quite useful just to
12 describe the concept of operations, what the Knights
13 were supposed to be doing as they charged.

14 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: To start with, there wasn't
15 one, because, of course, the detailed planning hadn't
16 been done. That's why the first few days were very
17 anxious, because -- particularly for General Mohan --
18 because there was really no plan for his existing
19 troops -- 14 Div, and the police, of
20 course, there was a large number of police -- to work
21 to.

22 Then the second thing which I was going to describe
23 was what we then did was put a planning team in with him
24 and got him to set up -- he had already got
25 a headquarters, but thickened up his headquarters in the

1 Shatt Al Arab Hotel building down in the south of Basra,
2 to form that into a proper headquarters.

3 Bear in mind, at this time we still had
4 Prime Minister Maliki in Basra Palace. So to get
5 a proper planning team in with him was absolutely
6 critical and we moved a lot of extra -- I say a lot, in
7 the region of roughly 100 -- I can't remember roughly
8 what the figure was -- extra British officers in from
9 our corps headquarters to help him. The Americans
10 provided considerable assistance as well.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is intriguing the role that
12 Prime Minister Maliki saw himself playing in this. You
13 can imagine giving symbolic political support, but was
14 he going back to sort of 18th Century models of the
15 sovereign leading -- commanding from the front?

16 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: That is neatly put. I mean,
17 there was -- it really isn't for me, as a British tactical
18 commander, to speculate on the Iraqi Prime Minister's
19 motives, but, yes, that is effectively what he was
20 doing, he moved his Cabinet or a large part of his
21 Cabinet down to Basra.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But was he sort of -- wishing to
23 give operational orders to the troops?

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, he sat, to start off
25 with, with General Mohan, and one of the first things we

1 needed to do was to get a proper military -- to get
2 a proper planning team, which, again, we had started
3 building up in preparation for June. I had
4 Colonel Richard Iron, who was my liaison officer to him,
5 with him already developing a team. We were actually
6 building an operations room down there in the
7 Shatt Al Arab. We had to very quickly make that work
8 effectively and to thrash out an operational plan,
9 which, actually, as I said at the beginning, ended up
10 looking not unlike Operation Sinbad. It was
11 a systematic clearance of areas of Basra, followed by
12 a sort of holding operation to hold the areas cleared
13 and then to try and rebuild and reconstruct them. A lot
14 was done by us, by the Iraqis, and, again,
15 particularly -- a lot of American help on the
16 reconstruction, on clearing areas.

17 Again -- I'll come back to the other two things, but
18 are you happy if I just do one digression on that? Is
19 that okay?

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, but slowly again.

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Slowly. It was very
22 interesting how quickly the Shia militias crumbled.
23 When the Iraqi people, when people in Basra saw that the
24 operation was being led by their own army, there was
25 no -- the rationale for opposition had gone, hence the

1 whole concept of Charge of the Knights, and they
2 crumbled extremely quickly. A certain number of militia
3 and militia leaders were killed. A fair number went
4 back to Iran and a lot of the rank and file just melted
5 away.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: When you say went back to Iran, was
7 this because they were Iranian or because Iran had been
8 their base?

9 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Not necessarily Iranian, but
10 certainly had received training and assistance from
11 Iran.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were these militias largely seen as
13 being Iranian-inspired and run or were some of the
14 militias?

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: They were, yes. The exact
16 nature of the Iranian support is almost a separate
17 issue, but certainly the support for the extremist Shia
18 militias, of whom there were several groupings, and
19 again I could very happily --

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have had evidence on that.

21 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: A lot more than I. What was definitely
22 coming over the border, as was a lot of the weaponry. So they
23 did crumble quite quickly, and the population in Basra, as
24 soon as they saw the Iraqi army which had had a set-back
25 in the early days, then, if you like, operating in

1 support with us, with the coalition, with our teams --
2 I will come back to how we reorganised in a minute --
3 you know, operating with them, with air support and
4 accurate targeting, something else I might come back to,
5 if you are happy -- it was -- they collapsed very
6 quickly, it was a phased operation, we did 13 phases of
7 Charge of the Knights.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So how long did those 13 phases
9 take?

10 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The last phase ended in end
11 of May when we did Al Qurnah, the last operation
12 4 Brigade did. It was rapidly clear, after that anxious
13 start, that this was going to be a major success. It
14 had taken us by surprise with absolutely no argument.
15 We were taken by surprise, as were the Iraqi army, as
16 was General Petraeus, by Prime Minister Maliki's move
17 and we had a very worrying week.

18 But having got over that, and having -- there were
19 another couple of measures we took, sorry, which I will
20 come back to, another couple of things we did.
21 Actually, it was very rapidly clear this was going to be
22 a major success.

23 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How long did Prime Minister Maliki
24 stay in Basra while this was going on?

25 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I can't remember exactly, but

1 roughly ten days, I think.

2 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So he was there to give initial
3 impetus?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: But he then left other Cabinet
5 ministers down there to keep an eye on his generals.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did this effect civil/military
7 relations? It was quite an unusual situation.

8 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It put Governor Wa'ili in
9 a very difficult position, but I think Governor Wa'ili
10 realised that Charge of the Knights had effectively
11 spelled the end of Fadhila as a force in Basra, and
12 indeed the elections confirmed that.

13 Two other things which I should just go back to,
14 other things which we did in that week. A considerable
15 amount of support given, which is sometimes, I think,
16 overlooked by the coalition, even in those very early
17 chaotic few days, and I would just -- if you haven't, as
18 a Committee, you may like to look at some of the
19 gallantry citations from us, and certainly I can think
20 of a couple over that period. There were some really
21 gutsy things happening, people reacting and falling back
22 on what resources they had.

23 But I think the third major thing was we radically
24 changed our posture, in that we did -- we brought
25 forward what I had been planning to do again, which was

1 to change the way that we trained and mentored the
2 Iraqis. So instead of training them and then deploying
3 brigades, without us, if you like, sort of casting them
4 loose, we changed that system, and I have to say I got
5 extremely rapid ministerial agreement here to do that.
6 I think you have seen the submission I put up. If you
7 haven't, I know that the MoD has certainly got it and
8 I think you have seen it.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, I think this is the MiTTing
10 thing again.

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Exactly.

12 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to that. I would
13 just like to see what the scene is now developing in
14 terms of the configuration within Basra. You have had
15 a major initiative taken by Prime Minister Maliki
16 perhaps, rescued with the help of the coalition, but the
17 Iraqi forces were in the lead, as we had always wanted.
18 But you have also now got the Americans, a much more
19 substantial presence in Basra.

20 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I'm interested in how that affected
22 the way that you saw your role and how that affected the
23 concepts of operations that were developing at the time.

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Hugely welcome. Hugely welcome, because,
25 again, to go back to this, bear in mind I think we were I said at

1 the beginning, 4,100 British troops working in an American
2 force of 160,000, that you know, Basra had -- sorry,
3 I was going to use an eloquent expression which
4 I won't -- Basra had always been slightly starved of
5 resources because it hadn't been the priority until
6 Prime Minister Maliki made it so. So to actually
7 suddenly be the focus and to have these extra resources
8 was (a) absolutely essential, particularly in the areas
9 of air support, but -- enormously welcome both to us and
10 of course to General Mohan, because it meant that -- you
11 know, we didn't have them all summer, Charge of the
12 Knights evidently went better and problems, as you are
13 aware, were still evident in Baghdad in Sadr City and Mosul so
14 obviously we lost a lot of them.

15 So we had, say, roughly 1,000 Americans supporting
16 us and their assets for a short period, and then, as
17 things went well in Basra, they were flexed back up to back
18 to Sadr City and Mosul.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: It is very important for the Committee to
20 understand that this is not a significant American
21 infantry presence. It is a very specialised asset.

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, they are the things which
23 a corps holds -- the things the American corps held on
24 behalf of the coalition. Primarily, the things which
25 were really critical were the helicopters, particularly

1 the attack helicopters and the unmanned aerial vehicles,
2 particularly the system known as the Predator system,
3 which enabled very accurate targeting, and I will just
4 cover a point of perception, which -- actually, I will
5 cover it now, if you want.

6 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Please.

7 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We were asked at times in
8 those very chaotic early days to do some things by the
9 Iraqis, which, if we had agreed to, I would be sitting
10 in front of a very different tribunal now, and the
11 American -- American rules of engagement were slightly
12 easier, not hugely, slightly, which meant they were able
13 to do some things that we weren't. I have to say which
14 I think quite correctly we weren't.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think it would be helpful to have
16 some examples of what you are talking about, I think we
17 can guess.

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We were invited to drop aerial
19 ordnance on areas which we considered not to have been
20 thoroughly enough vetted and which could have caused
21 considerable civilian casualties.

22 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was both from the Iraqi
23 commanders, but the Americans somewhere in between where
24 we --

25 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, it is too far to say the

1 Americans somewhere in between. This is the lack of
2 planning, because you know, if we had done the planning
3 thoroughly for this, if we had had the time, we would
4 have known what the targets were, we would have studied
5 them and we had very clear rules as to the amount of
6 acceptable damage. They are very, as you would expect,
7 in an operation like that, extremely restrictive in
8 a city like Basra.

9 But it is inaccurate to say the Americans were
10 somewhere in the middle. The American rules were very
11 similar to ours. There were occasions when they could
12 use aerial weapon systems when we could not, but it
13 would be going far too far to say that was half way from what the
14 Iraqi commanders wanted.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This was quite an important issue in terms
16 of the potential tensions, going back to what I was asking before
17 about civil/military relations. In all Multi-National operations
18 these issues arise, but we have encouraged the Iraqis to be in the
19 lead and in control, but that you don't -- you don't want to be seen
20 to be attacking civilians. So how do you handle these
21 relations with the Iraqis?

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It causes some
23 misunderstanding and there are some -- there are some
24 moments when the Iraqis are irritated with us because we
25 haven't done exactly what they ask, but, as we got this

1 planning cell together and we got people alongside
2 General Mohan's -- we got the proper planning team in,
3 they gradually go. So I'm talking about --
4 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This in the first --
5 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: This is in the first days,
6 almost hours. But it did give rise to some people
7 saying, oh, we weren't as co-operative as we could have
8 been, but there were very good reasons.
9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I was going to ask about that,
10 because reading about this at the time and things that
11 were said, you got a sense, first, of some tensions
12 between the Americans and the Iraqis, because this
13 wasn't how the Americans would have prioritised
14 operations at that time, and then, second, both of them,
15 perhaps not quite sure exactly what the Brits were
16 contributing to things. I mean, were you aware of these
17 sorts of perceptions around at the time?
18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Funnily enough, not so much at
19 the time. There was no western media in Basra at the
20 time. Indeed, there wasn't for some months afterwards.
21 There was the odd -- one visit. But there was very --
22 we were aware that the Iraqis were asking us to do some
23 things, as I have described, we didn't want to do and
24 wouldn't do, but generally, on the ground, the sort
25 of -- the relationship between us and the corps and

1 General Mohan's headquarters was incredibly close, as
2 indeed it had to be, because we were prosecuting daily
3 operations with all our soldiers in danger.

4 So there was a sort of -- I'm not totally certain
5 where this has all come from, to be honest. We actually
6 perceived tension in the early days of some
7 misunderstanding in the early days, as I have described
8 but very quickly resolving, particularly when we
9 started MiTTing. I know you don't want to talk about
10 mitts, but I'll come back to --

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Before I hand over to
12 Baroness Prashar, I just want to see again where we are.

13 Initially, Basra is the British area, this was our
14 responsibility and we were training the forces to
15 operate in that area, we were trying to bring law and
16 order and so on, and you have described a situation
17 where actually we haven't done that well, the position
18 in Basra was not a paragon of law and order, shall we
19 say, and now -- and we had always wanted the Iraqis to
20 come in, but now the Americans are also having to move
21 in quite strongly as well. So -- and this is obviously
22 referring to a very long period of time that the
23 situation has developed, but would it be fair to say
24 that, as this situation works itself through, the
25 British have become a more marginal factor in overall

1 situation?

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, I don't think it would, to
3 be honest. I think in the early days the effort in
4 Basra was with 1 Division, the Iraqi 1 Division, because
5 14 Division had suffered quite badly, as I described,
6 during that initial week. So the bulk of the
7 operations, if you like -- I can't remember the exact
8 timeline -- in the sort of, maybe, the subsequent
9 10 days was led by the Iraqi 1 Division which had the
10 American teams with it, and we still at the time, the
11 bulk of the air assets, the -- the reconnaissance
12 assets, surveillance assets, ISTARs -- more military
13 acronyms and I promised I wouldn't -- you know, were
14 corps provided. I think it is always better to say
15 "corps" rather than "American", although most of them
16 were American. You don't sort of see it in national
17 blocks, we were part of a multinational coalition, as
18 I have described.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I can see militarily that would be
20 so. If you have worked through NATO, that's how you
21 would see things, but politically it may not appear that
22 way.

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, it may not, and my eyes
24 were down on the ground in Basra. But then -- yes, as
25 the -- as 14 Division was rehabilitated and

1 reconstructed, then, with our embedded teams, for the
2 latter stages of Charge of the Knights it was
3 14 Division who were conducting a large part of the
4 operations, and indeed 1 Division was subsequently
5 moved, as, again, the main effort moved to different
6 bits of Iraq.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Could I explore a little further the
9 relationship between US and UK, because it was an agreed
10 mission in Basra by April?

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

12 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were there any differences in our
13 strategies with the US and the UK or were you working as
14 a cohesive force?

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: My boss was American, my
16 orders were from General Austin, and through him from
17 General Petraeus. We were very much part of the corps,
18 and although I would talk obviously to the headquarters
19 in Northwood and occasionally, when asked to do so, to
20 ministers and officials here, the operational -- my
21 orders were coming very much from General Austin.

22 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What kind of messages were you
23 getting from Northwood and ministers?

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Very supportive. I think,
25 like all of us, taken back in those early days but then

1 very quickly realising that this -- you know, the
2 opportunity that, although it wasn't to our timing, it
3 was the operation we had always wanted, and pushing it
4 and exploiting it.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But wasn't our strategy at that time
6 to draw down?

7 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: The Americans -- they were not
9 drawing down?

10 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The Americans were beginning
11 to draw down, yes, to a slightly different timetable to
12 us, but, yes, there was the beginnings of an American
13 drawdown. I can't remember the exact details of it
14 but -- it is still going on, as I'm sure you know.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Was our approach and their approach
16 to MITting the same, the question of overwatch?

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We changed -- one of those
18 things we did in the first days of Charge of the Knights
19 was bring forward what we had wanted to do, what we had
20 realised we had to do in February, which was to put
21 teams in with the MITTs we keep mentioning, to put them
22 in with the Iraqi formations to whom we were
23 responsible.

24 So that was a major change, but I have to say that,
25 once we got authority to do it, we had the 1st Battalion

1 Royal Regiment of Scotland out the same evening in that
2 format.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were the Americans doing the same?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. Ultimately, we looked at
5 what they were doing and certainly it was very
6 influential. Our construct was slightly different, and
7 indeed it is a construct that we are developing in
8 Afghanistan at the moment, but the point was that we
9 reversed what had been British policy up until then,
10 which wasn't to do this, and had very strong and
11 immediate support -- I put a submission in to the
12 Ministry of Defence I think on 1 April and had authority
13 the next day to do this. So I thought that showed great
14 sort of flexibility and ability to adapt.

15 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What did that mean in terms of --
16 did you think you had the skills to do it?

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, we had to bring some extra
18 people in. We had to bring in specialists like the air
19 controllers particularly. We were short of them and
20 other specialists. I mean, the construct of the teams
21 I'm very happy to describe. It is actually in that bit
22 of -- oh, okay.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes, please.

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Certainly. It has a commander
25 who led it and who acted as the mentor to his Iraqi

1 counterpart. He would have obviously an interpreter, he
2 would have a communicator. He would have a medic and he
3 would have one of these joint tactical air controllers,
4 because what was critical in this was accuracy of
5 targeting and the Basrawi population very soon -- they
6 become irritated if they saw a considerable amount of
7 collateral damage. Hence some of my issues in the early
8 days of this thing.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What did that actually mean in terms
10 of fitting in with the Council General and the
11 Provincial -- the reconstruction teams, you know, how
12 was that relationship working?

13 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: That relationship was -- the
14 Provincial Reconstruction Teams had found it difficult
15 to operate over the winter of 2007 to 2008, and the
16 reason for that was that, having gone to Provincial
17 Iraqi Control -- I didn't say "PIC" -- in Basra, we
18 didn't have the freedom of manoeuvre that we wanted and
19 they were not able to get access.

20 What happened fairly immediately as a result of the
21 Charge of the Knights is they had considerably improved
22 access, and, indeed, were beginning to drive fairly
23 freely around Basra. One of the things which to me was
24 a seminal moment was Nigel Haywood, who you will be
25 hearing from this afternoon.

1 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This afternoon, yes.

2 THE CHAIRMAN: This morning.

3 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Nigel opening the Jameat meat
4 market. The Jameat building, you may recall, was
5 a building that had been used as a Sadrists headquarters
6 and they had taken hostage British servicemen in --
7 I can't remember the date, but I'm sure you have got
8 it -- in 2006/2007 -- 2006 I think -- it was in
9 12 Brigade's time.

10 Now, one very symbolic moment to us was that
11 building, having been demolished by us, being rebuilt
12 and opened as a meat market by the Consul General.
13 Fairly -- certainly before the end of Charge of the
14 Knights, I can't remember the exact date, and that was
15 a -- a lot of Iraqi press coverage for that, which was
16 excellent.

17 So to answer your question, considerably improved,
18 and, of course, we had those very welcome initiatives at
19 the time from the Prime Minister, with the Basra
20 Development Commission headed by Michael Wareing.
21 I don't know whether Michael is giving evidence to you,
22 but he was then head of KPMG and was active in sort of
23 getting private enterprise into Basra. We were seeing
24 a lot of him. We had a lot of support again from the
25 Americans because American funding is easier for

1 reconstruction and there was a system known as the
2 CERPS -- you are going to ask me what it stands for.
3 It is basically American money which is given for the
4 reconstruction of missions which the Americans are
5 leading on, and, as we were working to an American
6 corps, we were given an allocation of that.

7 We had a joint office that -- some Americans in it,
8 some from Basra's Provincial Council's own development
9 people, our own DFID people and our own military people
10 whom we have on that side, and there was quite rapid
11 progress in some areas.

12 Now, the big underlying problems in Basra were
13 obviously not tackled early on in Charge of the Knights:
14 sewage, electricity, the clearance of the waterways.
15 The big projects obviously were going to take longer,
16 although we did get Umm Qasr port open really quite early
17 on, very soon, which was very encouraging.

18 THE CHAIRMAN: For commercial rather than --

19 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: For limited commercial, not
20 for -- one of the problems of Umm Qasr is you can't turn
21 a big modern ship in it because it is too narrow,
22 but you can tie it up outside and offload it.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What sort of military support were
24 you providing for the civilian activity at this stage?

25 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Some protection,

1 communications, liaison, transport, that sort of thing.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: How did the situation evolve during
3 your time in Basra? Can you just describe to me the
4 time you got there to the time you left?

5 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. It improved, but slowly.

6 It was -- Basra was economically in a bad situation
7 in February, I think and we had spent a lot of money.
8 Again, the Americans had spent a lot of money in Basra.
9 A lot of that had been to very good effect, but it
10 was -- I think -- throughout this operation, I think it
11 is fair to say that we underestimated the amount of
12 damage that had been done to the economy in Basra
13 province under Saddam and that very vindictive series of
14 operations that he ran in the south-east of Iraq
15 after -- well, the early to mid-90s.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: Is that physical damage to infrastructure, or
17 also, as it were, damage to civil society, to --

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: It is both, sir. The problem
19 with civil society is that the action he took against
20 the Marsh Arabs had actually pushed a lot of people from
21 the countryside into the environs of Basra. I go back
22 to why I defy anybody to give you an accurate census of
23 Basra, and there were a lot of people almost shanty town
24 living, not quite, but almost, and, of course, the
25 tribal structure, which is important in Iraq, had

1 actually broken down in bits of Basra. In some bits the
2 tribal structure was quite intact.

3 THE CHAIRMAN: Bits of Basra province?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: And in Basra City, actually,
5 but mostly in Basra province. The trouble with the
6 clearance of the marshes -- and it is awful flying now
7 north from Basra up to Amarah. The devastation wrought
8 on those communities was terrible and a lot of young
9 people had drifted. Of course, there was very little
10 work. So socially, Basra, and still is, remains
11 fragile, although Basra, as a whole, is getting better
12 and better all the time. I will come back to again, if
13 I may. So big societal problems and those will take
14 some time to solve.

15 The other trouble, of course, was there was
16 a serious drought going on through all this period, and
17 in southern Iran at the time, and farming was just not
18 producing a living and farms that had previously
19 supported big families actually were unable to do so and
20 you found children being sent into the city to find
21 other livelihoods.

22 So if you would like -- slow progress. I think what
23 happened during our time was the security finally came
24 and in the way we wanted, in an unintended way. I don't
25 say for a moment -- not unintended, but in the wrong

1 timing.

2 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: That enabled you to look at other
3 issues?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: You will find, if you then, as
5 I hope I'm sure you are, taking evidence from the
6 headquarters that came after us, the last headquarters,
7 they were really able to concentrate and Nigel Haywood
8 I hope will talk about this -- were really able to
9 concentrate on development.

10 But I would say, if you look at Basra now, it is
11 quite satisfactory the way it is progressing, a huge
12 increase in property prices. The Sunnis, the Sunni
13 diaspora returned, the Sunni mosques operating, a lot of
14 the wider Basra diaspora having come back, and if you
15 look at the situation in Iraq, Basra, touch wood, is
16 pretty stable. It is beginning to work.

17 It took a lot of getting there and we made a lot of
18 mistakes along the way, nobody would deny that, but it
19 has actually -- touch wood, it has been successful.

20 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But by the time you left Basra, the
21 Prime Minister had announced a fundamental change of the
22 mission in the first few months of 2009.

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes.

24 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What contribution did you make to
25 assessing how the mission should end? Were you actually

1 involved in that?

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: We were involved heavily
3 because obviously the Prime Minister's office talked
4 endlessly to the Ministry of Defence and the
5 Foreign Office. It became rapidly clear to us that the
6 nature of support that the Iraqi security forces wanted
7 had changed with Charge of the Knights. Actually, it
8 had changed in the way that General Mohan and I had
9 discussed previously. So we had those discussions, we
10 were going to do it.

11 Charge of the Knights meant we had to adjust very
12 rapidly and untidily, but we did it, and then we took
13 stock and when 7 Brigade came in, in June/July, to
14 replace 4 Brigade, they came with a slightly different
15 construct and it became clear that actually what the
16 Iraqi security forces now wanted was a different level
17 of training and a different sophistication: help with
18 issues like the Naval training team in Um Qasr, staff
19 colleges et al, so subtly different.

20 So we were endlessly feeding into the work that was
21 going on, again very closely co-ordinated with the
22 Americans, as to how the British strategy would develop.

23 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were they actually reacting to the
24 feedback that you were giving? Do you think policy
25 decisions were being made in response to events on the

1 ground --

2 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think they were then, yes.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: -- or were there other factors?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Obviously there were other

5 factors. I was a tactical commander in Basra.

6 Obviously, there were other factors which are going to

7 influence ministerial and high level official decisions

8 here, but I was confident that what I was feeding back

9 from Basra was being listened to and was being

10 accommodated, and, indeed, you could see it in how the

11 policy played out. We recommended strongly that

12 20 Brigade should deploy, which they duly did

13 after 7 Brigade.

14 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When Basra had achieved the

15 Provincial Iraqi Control, the multinational force was

16 withdrawn completely and it was all with the US

17 military. Is that --

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Sorry?

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It went to the US military?

20 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No. When Basra went to

21 Provincial Iraqi Control on 16 December 2007, there were

22 no US military in Basra. The US military only came in

23 then to help us when we became, as I say, corps main

24 effort. There was an American presence in Basra as part

25 of the overall Iraq drawdown plan, but that didn't come

1 in until early 2009, I think, so much, much later, two
2 years later.

3 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Yes.

4 THE CHAIRMAN: You said the essential handover was to Iraqi
5 security forces?

6 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, that was two months
7 before I got there.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As you were saying, what was
9 expected was that you realised by the end?

10 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think so. I say untidily,
11 and I wouldn't for a moment pretend everything went
12 exactly according to plan, but military operations
13 don't, that is the nature of them. The key is to
14 exploit the opportunities they offer, and that happened.

15 I point to Basra now and you look at the state of
16 Basra and Iraq overall, you know, I think one should be
17 cautious, but I think we should draw encouragement from
18 it.

19 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were there any overall observations
20 you wanted to make in the way the UK team worked
21 together, the way you worked with the Americans and the
22 Iraqis?

23 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think very well.

24 Inevitably, in something like that there will be the odd
25 tension and, as I mentioned, you know, there was some

1 Iraqi annoyance in -- at our targeting policy, which
2 I understood. I wasn't going to compromise on it, but
3 I understood it. So there are going to be tensions like
4 that. But overall, the relationships -- were very
5 strong. I mean very strong between us and the corps,
6 and very strong with us and the ISF and General Mohammed
7 who took over after General Mohan as the overall
8 commander in Basra. You know, very supportive, very
9 keen on continued involvement and a lot of -- an
10 enormous support in Basra.

11 I mean, I think it is important to realise that this
12 started from freeing Basra from Saddam Hussein. There
13 was a huge -- there were -- there will always be the nay
14 sayers and they will always get airtime because that is
15 the nature of life, but the majority of the Basrawi
16 population are extremely appreciative of the huge
17 efforts that were made. General Mohammed, if I thanked
18 him for anything, he would see always say back to me,
19 "No, thank you for coming from your country to be here",
20 et cetera. I mean, there was a real depth of
21 appreciation which is sometimes missed in this debate.
22 It was a very happy relationship.

23 Yes, I mean, inevitably, people will turn to those
24 now who have got more money to invest, and inevitably,
25 you know, market forces will now take off and countries

1 who maybe weren't involved in the operation, but are
2 happy to invest there, will, I'm sure, find a welcome
3 too. But we shouldn't underplay the real depth of
4 warmth in Basra.

5 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It seems to me that we started with
6 wanting Basra to be the exemplar and then our
7 expectations were scaled down, and we were told, I think
8 a couple of days ago, that it was to kind of leave it
9 with our reputation intact. Do you think we did that?

10 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, I do. I think Charge of
11 the Knights was a shock and we had to react quickly.
12 But we did so. I certainly think that -- as I say, the
13 proof of a pudding will be in how Basra develops, won't
14 it? If Basra continues as it is in the next few years,
15 we can hold our heads up very high.

16 If Basra descends into chaos -- one of the things I
17 haven't covered is, at the end of the Charge of the
18 Knights, General Mohammed and I put together, I hope,
19 quite a sophisticated counter-terrorist structure in
20 Basra with a co-ordination committee which brought all
21 the Iraqi security forces together. We fused them into
22 various intelligence agencies, which I will be very
23 happy to develop later. We were able to combine police
24 and army posts across the city. We were able to put in
25 a structure to try and stop those special -- Shia

1 special groups coming back.

2 Now, I don't deny that the problems in Iran probably
3 helped Basra as well, but the fact is there is
4 a structure in the city, which I think is now enduring,
5 and which is now -- well, almost entirely Iraqi-run,
6 obviously with some American support as they are now
7 there instead of us, which was put together by the
8 British and Iraqis together.

9 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can you say a little bit about the
10 policing?

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, of course. The police --
12 I don't think the police came out of Charge of the
13 Knights very well, if I'm being honest. I think we
14 need -- we do need to look at how we trained the police
15 prior to that. I think we may have erred on the side of
16 training the police in what I would call sort of
17 UK/Home Counties policing, whereas actually what was
18 probably wanted was something slightly more robust.
19 I think that's a lesson we very much learned for
20 Afghanistan. I was in Afghanistan during police training
21 the other day and it is going quite well
22 there.

23 What happened during the Charge of the Knights was
24 actually a lot of the police collapsed effectively and
25 it took a lot of time to rebuild them and we tried to

1 rebuild them on a different model, on more what I would
2 call almost sort of what I think you call a paramilitary basis,
3 so that they could fire weapons, defend themselves and
4 restore order as much as they could take fingerprints
5 and gather evidence.

6 So there was a -- yes, there was quite a -- work to
7 do on the police. It was -- yes.

8 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you very much.

9 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask one question
10 following on from that? You talked about army/police
11 working together. Was this to have the army watch over
12 the police more, to mentor the police more?

13 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, effectively. It was
14 because the police were felt to be less reliable than
15 the Iraqi army. The Iraqi army has always been to the
16 fore in Iraq under Saddam and before, and there was
17 a feeling that the police would be morally and
18 physically strengthened by having the Iraqi army
19 posted alongside them.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You said they didn't cover
21 themselves with glory during Charge of the Knights and
22 the assumption is that a large number of them were
23 infiltrated by the militia.

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: They were, yes.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did they fight on the other side?

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: A few, very few. Some units
2 did very well. I certainly wouldn't want to be
3 overcritical of the force as a whole and General Jalil,
4 the commander of the police at the time, is a friend of
5 mine and a very competent and decent man, and some of
6 his units did very well, but a lot just put their
7 weapons down and melted away. Some were infiltrated by
8 JAM.

9 I think the lessons from it, one needed to vet the
10 police more closely, the people who were going into it.
11 As I say, I think we needed to make the training more on
12 the side of the military rather than on the policing.
13 But, no, some did well, and, of course, in Iraq you have
14 this national police as well and the national police
15 battalion in Basra did very well. It was posted up near
16 Basra Palace. I'm talking about, if you like, the civil
17 police, the local police force.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, okay.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder whether we could hear just a little
20 bit more before we finish about MITting, concepts, how
21 it worked and our shift of concept and doctrine.

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think, as I said, it was --
23 clear in February that we needed to -- once
24 Provincial Iraqi Control had happened, we needed to look
25 critically at how we were doing the training. Given

1 that discussion I had with Mohan, General Mohan, about
2 what he wanted, it was clear that, to deliver that, we
3 were going to have to change the approach.

4 We were going to do that in measured time, between,
5 really, prior to the start of the planned operation on
6 1 June, but then we had to do it very quickly, and the
7 construct was one I described to Baroness Prashar just
8 now. The only bit I didn't get round to describing was
9 the force protection element that we put with it.
10 Obviously it is a risky undertaking, MiTTing. But
11 that's what armies are for and there were various things
12 we could put in.

13 THE CHAIRMAN: You did mention about bringing in specialised
14 resources.

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I did.

16 THE CHAIRMAN: I just wonder whether you could characterise
17 those.

18 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes. The joint tactical air
19 controllers, who were critical. We needed more
20 communicators, we needed more medics, and we needed more
21 interpreters. We had an issue with vehicles because,
22 for MiTT to really work well, it wants to always be slightly
23 unobtrusive, if you see what I mean, and we had large
24 protective vehicles because of the dangers we had been
25 facing.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Whereas the ISF elements within which we were
2 embedding --

3 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Were mostly in humvees and
4 other types of vehicles. In practical terms, it would
5 just have been completely impossible to have overnight
6 produced an ideal vehicle that would have met the government's
7 very proper requirements for protection and with
8 a profile we wanted. Industry just can't do this, they
9 are not in the showroom. So we had to use the Mastiff
10 vehicles, which, you know, it is an excellent vehicle,
11 Mastiff, it is just slightly large for going down the
12 more delicate bits of the Hanaya.

13 BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Were you having to provide special
14 protection for the interpreters?

15 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The interpreters worked with
16 the teams and were protected by the teams. By this
17 stage, we were -- going on at this time was the issue
18 of, you know, the overall future of interpreters who had
19 worked with us, which is something Nigel Haywood was
20 heavily involved with as well. But the interpreters we
21 were using for this were protected by living in the
22 team, but, of course, you know, they are Iraqis with
23 Iraqi troops now. That is very different to being an
24 Iraqi interpreter just with a British unit. They were
25 with their brothers, if you like.

1 THE CHAIRMAN: Just before asking my other colleagues
2 whether they have got things they would like to ask,
3 lessons learnt for us from this. Two. On policing,
4 you, as other witnesses, have made fairly clear where we
5 need to go and indeed where we are with Afghanistan.
6 I think this Inquiry will simply need to register that
7 and take a view about it perhaps, but the other is
8 MiTTing itself, the training, enabling of local forces,
9 are there lessons learned or have we actually got them
10 now?

11 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: There were very respectable
12 reasons why it wasn't done before. I won't comment on
13 them because I wasn't there and it will be for others
14 you are questioning to be asked about that, but it was
15 a big success when it happened.

16 In my current job, I command the Field Army. We
17 have looked at this exhaustively. In fact, I spent all day
18 yesterday looking at the construct, developing how we
19 are going to fulfil General McChrystal's directives on
20 embedded partnering, which is effectively the same
21 thing, in Afghanistan.

22 There is no one sort of pattern fits all in this.
23 Each operation imposes a different requirement. So we
24 don't want to end up with us saying we have always got
25 to do it that way. As I say, there were very

1 respectable reasons why this wasn't done before. The
2 requirement, when I was there, was to do it, and we did
3 it, and got huge support, and very quick. Literally,
4 I mean, it turned round overnight from the MoD from the
5 Secretary of State to do so. But -- and we have learned
6 from that for Afghanistan, but for future military
7 operations, we don't want to say we always have to do it
8 like that. We need to trust the judgment of the people
9 who are on the ground really.

10 THE CHAIRMAN: So part of the lesson to be learned is adapt
11 to the next situation.

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Yes, adapt. I'm afraid it is
13 the nature of military operations. Things don't always
14 go particularly smoothly.

15 THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Martin?

16 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned your friendship with
17 General Jalil and your relationship with
18 General Mohammed and so on. I wonder if you could tell
19 us something generally about the relationship with
20 senior Iraqis, the relationship between your officers
21 and even your --

22 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think there are those --
23 again, my remarks probably concern the south and not
24 necessarily the Sunni tribes, because I had less
25 dealing, fairly obviously, with the Sunni elements. So

1 I won't sort of talk about, if you like, what I call the
2 Takriti clique. Generally, extremely warm and very
3 appreciative. Most of these officers had been -- nearly
4 all the senior ones, almost without exception, had been
5 senior officers in Saddam's army, and what I always
6 found slightly odd is that, having all been got rid of
7 early on in this operation, they all reappeared in
8 uniform quite soon thereafter.

9 So they were very professional people and they had
10 a lot of operational experience in the Iraq/Iran war,
11 which, of course, was for Basra, is a very, very deep and
12 formative experience. It was a very -- you know better
13 than I do, it was a very bloody and unpleasant conflict.
14 So a lot of operational experience, a lot of the same
15 values in the care of soldiers as we have.

16 I think, as always, they would like us to have
17 produced more equipment, produced the more sophisticated
18 systems we had for them. Now, obviously, it is not
19 always possible. We worked through the -- what's called
20 MNSTC, and I apologise for the abbreviation, ie that
21 part of the coalition, which was very much a coalition
22 effort, although American-run, which actually generated
23 the Iraqi army.

24 But in terms of planning, once we got over the
25 hiatus of the early days of Charge of the Knights,

1 professional, very receptive, and a very warm
2 relationship. The casualties were all cared for by
3 British hospitals, the logistics were nearly all
4 provided by us, and, obviously, when you work that
5 closely -- I mean our team is living and working day by
6 day -- you build up a very close relationship. Yes.

7 Now, I mean very -- and obviously there are those
8 in -- there are those in Iraqi politics who think back
9 to previous British periods in Iraq. There were those
10 in senior positions in Iraq who aren't necessarily very
11 pro-British per se, but in my sort of local level, my
12 level in Basra, one couldn't have wanted for a better
13 relationship.

14 THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic?

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just to be clear about this, the
16 commanders you were working with had been disqualified
17 by Paul Bremer's de-Ba'athification provisions and had
18 to be rehabilitated?

19 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Some. Some had actually
20 fallen foul before that, and I couldn't comment --
21 I couldn't generalise on that, but certainly quite
22 a lot. The more senior ones and people like
23 General Mohan, actually -- I really don't think I should
24 talk too much about him personally, about his personal
25 experience, because it is his own privacy, but he had

1 actually had issues with Saddam beforehand, and so some
2 of the senior officers actually were sort of beyond
3 that, but I think if you looked at some of what I would call the
4 middle-ranking battalion officers, the majors and the
5 captains, a lot of them had actually been victims of
6 that but had actually fairly quickly joined up again
7 into the new Iraqi army.

8 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Just coming back to a point you were
9 discussing with Baroness Prashar and Lawrence Freedman,
10 you were reporting, as you have explained, to an
11 American corps commander, but you were also talking to
12 PJHQ and to ministers and officials.

13 Did you feel that you were at any stage being
14 subjected to undue backseat driving from Whitehall or
15 were you left to make the appropriate tactical decisions
16 at the tactical level?

17 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, very much the latter.
18 Again, this goes back to the point of perception,
19 I think, that Sir Lawrence raised earlier.

20 We saw ourselves, as indeed we were, as part of
21 a multinational coalition which was American-led. We
22 didn't see ourselves as a little England in the
23 south-east doing a national effort. It just wasn't like
24 that.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was there political pressure to make

1 British control appear to be a successful factor down
2 there, or were you allowed to operate freely within the
3 coalition?

4 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: There were issues like, you
5 know, we were subject to British law, there were rules
6 of engagement, fairly obviously. There were issues on
7 how we interpret reconstruction and we use aid, which
8 were different, but in terms of the military operation,
9 no, I mean, it was very clear and of course we did
10 have --

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: You weren't being told to wave the flag?

12 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: No, we did actually have
13 senior British officers in Baghdad. You had people also
14 in the corps. We had a Major General in the corps.
15 There was little divergence really. It was in our
16 national interests for Charge of the Knights to be
17 successful.

18 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Finally on targeting, you said there were
19 some differences, not huge, between us and the
20 Americans. Was this because they had a different
21 approach to collateral damage or was it because they had
22 greater confidence in the position of their aerial
23 ordnance?

24 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: The ordnance was very
25 similar. It is rules of engagement, their laws are

1 slightly different and the rules of engagement that
2 result from them are slightly different. Not hugely.
3 They are similar. But there are -- there were small
4 differences.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

6 THE CHAIRMAN: This has been very helpful. We could go on
7 a very long time, but time is against us.

8 I wonder, are there any particular points you would
9 like to raise finally before we move on after the break?

10 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: I think, sir, we have covered
11 most of them. I think we have talked about Basra.
12 I think we have talked about the perception issue, and
13 a point I was very keen to get over is this issue of how
14 we fitted into the Americans.

15 I think this perception has grown up that there was
16 more American involvement than there perhaps was, and but
17 I don't want to underplay the huge assistance that the
18 corps gave.

19 THE CHAIRMAN: I think you and witnesses in the last day or
20 two have given us a helpful understanding of the
21 distinction, if you like, between the Americans on the
22 one hand and corps on the other, and also the nature of
23 the kind of American military which went in behind
24 Charge of the Knights, that this was not fully-formed
25 battalions or cavalry.

1 LT GEN BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER: Obviously not, no. Unless
2 there was anything else?

3 THE CHAIRMAN: In that case, can we thank you very much? We
4 are going to have a break now until 11.30 am, at which
5 point we will have Nigel Haywood, who was our
6 Consul General in Basra at the relevant time, together
7 with Keith MacKiggan, who ran the Provincial
8 Reconstruction Team. So back at 11.30 am.

9 Just before we do, for the record, there was
10 a slight uncertainty, which I take responsibility for,
11 about the exact timing of Operation Sinbad.
12 Sir Lawrence Freedman and, indeed, our witness were
13 correct. This was in fact begun in September 2006 and
14 it was Zenith which began in early 2007.

15 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Thank you.

16 (11.17 am)

17 (Short break)

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