

**DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL FORCES 2001-2003 (DSF1)**

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Welcome. This is a welcome to DSF1; this session is being held in private because we recognise that much of the evidence we wish to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's Protocol on Sensitive Information -- for example, on grounds of national security, international relations or defence capability -- and we may also wish to refer to issues covered by classified documents.

We will apply the protocol between the Inquiry and Her Majesty's Government regarding documents and other written and electronic information in considering whether and how evidence given in relation to classified documents and/or sensitive matters more widely can be drawn on and explained in public, either in the Inquiry report or, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.

If other evidence is given during this hearing which neither relates to classified documents, nor engages any of the categories set out in the Protocol on Sensitive Information, that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry secretary's letter to you. We recognise 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. I remind every witness on each occasion they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given is truthful, fair and accurate.

Now, for security reasons, we will not be releasing copies of the transcript outside the Inquiry's offices upstairs here. You will, of course, be able to access the transcript whenever you

want to review it.

With that, let's get on to the questions. I'll turn to Sir Martin Gilbert first.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** I wonder if you would explain to us first the generic role the Special Forces are supposed to play in conventional warfare and in enduring campaigns like Iraq.

**DSF1:** I suppose the world tends to see Special Forces in a somewhat clinical fashion -- they're either swinging through a window and burning down the Iranian embassy, or they are wearing greatcoats somewhere in the north of Africa seeking out Rommel -- and tend to sort of fit them into that category.

The truth is that they have trained capabilities for insertion. They have trained capabilities of competencies. Their real strength lies in their innovation, depending upon the circumstances that they are presented with. So they will work both independently. They will work in support of conventional forces.

[REDACTED]

So their approach is somewhat entrepreneurial. Their skillset gives them the capability to be able to adjust to the task that in many ways is not predisposed from before the event, but is defined and then calculated for the event that has occurred.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** When did the Special Forces begin specifically preparing for the possibility of military action in Iraq?

**DSF1:** We mentally -- obviously 9/11 occurred, and we were absolutely consumed by it. There was the residual [REDACTED], which did not go away, counter-terrorism and the like, in post September 2001. [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]

So by about the spring, I suppose, of 2002, one began to sense an energy which was looking towards the potential, the possibility of Iraq. There was a number of discussions that were going about where there was an association between [REDACTED] whether that was connected to terrorism to -- to Saddam Hussein. But in many ways these were just indicators which gave one enough reason to then begin to think what would be the implications of looking at a re-run into Iraq.

So we began to therefore look at Iraq as a possible. We do this all the time in the military, but it doesn't mean we are

going to go there -- as we went through therefore the mid to the latter part of 2002, and in the course of that, of course, we had -- in the [REDACTED] operation, we had established very good working relationships with CentCom and General Franks, and the various actors that were part and parcel of that, and therefore we found ourselves planning I think it was referred to as Option Zero or Option-- I think it was Option Zero. It was almost assumed that in some way, if America was to do something, then the thought is we<sup>1</sup> would find ourselves probably first on call.

Therefore we had that expectation. It didn't mean that until obviously the Government, the Prime Minister and all the rest of it elected to say that was the case, but our thought process was that we could easily find ourselves committed and what we did in the meantime was obviously help our American friends to get their mind around how they might wish to deal with those areas where the conventional force would not find itself [REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** To become involved in terms of what the UK participation might be?

**DSF1:** Yes. So we were just conscious that, you know, the air force, the army and the navy contribution from a UK PLC point of view was something that people were talking about. My interest was to make sure that what the Americans did at least understood the implications<sup>2</sup> because obviously we had been intimately involved in [REDACTED] Iraq the first time around, in the First Gulf War in 1990/1991.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** [REDACTED]

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<sup>1</sup> Witness clarification: ie UK Special Forces

<sup>2</sup> Witness clarification: ie the implications of war in Iraq

[REDACTED]

**DSF1:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Were you involved from the outset in this<sup>3</sup> --

**DSF1:** Yes. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** In terms of your involvement with the UK military, and for example the different packages that were under discussion, were you involved in that discussion?

**DSF1:** Personally, no. The answer is that I was aware that the First Armoured Division was that that was being nominated or being looked at. They were under various, as I recall, restrictions on what they could plan, what they could do.

We weren't so constrained, just because we are able to operate in a quieter and less obvious fashion. So one was aware that they were looking at their operations, but of course our ability to be able to go in and say, "This is what we are about to do, or we think we are about to do, and this is what we can do for you", while they are in a position where they are almost under remit not to talk about talking about what they want to talk about, makes it almost a ridiculous conversation.

So I was aware that Robin Brims was looking at the

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<sup>3</sup> ie Operation TELIC

difficulties, responsibilities he had. The Americans -- for instance, I think in November, I remember Tommy Franks committing \$1 billion to lay concrete; not because it was a precursor to the war, but without laying that concrete there was no way that they could start the war what people were talking about, if that decision was to be taken.

Of course, somebody said that just shows they were predisposed to that. It wasn't at all. It was just without the concrete, you couldn't get the vehicles, you couldn't get the people. You could not achieve what people would have by way of an expectation.

As it was for the UK, I think, as I recall, it was 17 January, the President -- the Prime Minister -- Freudian slip there -- the Prime Minister said we were going to go and do this, and of course actually the First Armoured Division crossed the start line by 20 March with some 43,000<sup>4</sup> people, which was -- I'm not sure any other organisation, other than an army, could have met those timelines, and broadly been in good shape to be able to conduct that.

[REDACTED] for the point in time that they were aware that that decision was taken, then we had liaison and we had some support in there, but in many ways, it's not a case of trying to go and say, "We're the Special Forces, so you must give us a job. You couldn't possibly do this without us". Of course they can very happily do it without us, and in fact 1003 Victor, which was the ultimate plan<sup>5</sup> that ran through, was, I think, destined for an operation that was going to run 125 days, and in fact we were in the middle of Baghdad within 23. So actually the conventional operation worked pretty well.

But in this case we were seeing where we could then bring and

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<sup>4</sup> The witness later revised this figure to 30,000

<sup>5</sup> Witness clarification - ie the coalition plan



[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** How was the decision made for us to take the area we did take?

**DSF1:** I have no idea. My sense was that we were logistically limited to support the force that we had. So our ability to go to Baghdad would have probably, I think -- I'm almost certain -- would have outmatched our logistic chain. We had looked originally, of course, coming in from the north, a conventional force, and coming in through the gap and then down on the eastern flank or the western flank --

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** When the Turkish option was --

**DSF1:** The Turkish option, and that was going to be a single brigade, as I remember. Seventh brigade was going to come down. I think CGS at the time was uncomfortable with the slight exposure<sup>6</sup> that --, given the fact that you had along the green line, as it was referred, a whole series of Iraqi divisions sitting there, and therefore you felt that was slightly out of kilter.

But otherwise the limitation, I think, on how far we could go, and what we should do, was coming from being late into a battle plan which was principally American, who they had been looking at for a while, before we made a commitment to join; secondly, I think the reality of -- I think it was Wellington

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<sup>6</sup> Witness clarification: ie the exposure that brigade would face









[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** I turn to Sir Lawrence now.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Just following on from that, on the Scuds, at what point did you decide or was it decided that there probably weren't going to be any Scuds firing into Israel?

**DSF1:** [REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So you had people hanging around there waiting for stuff?

**DSF1:** No, because the intention was not to go and find a Scud. The idea was exactly the same in the first. We weren't trying to re-run the old battle plan of 1991, [REDACTED] the construction of that plan in the First Gulf War. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

**DSF1:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The sum of which was pretty clear. At that time the American military did not do nation building. They didn't do Phase IV, and he<sup>9</sup> was very clear in not drifting or accepting mission creep, whereby people sort of suggested that somehow the American military would just then do this part of the operation.

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<sup>9</sup> General Franks



He was very clear, saying, "We don't do nation building. We are there to remove Saddam from power. We are there to get into the centre of Baghdad. At that point in time, our mission is completed".

My sense was that -- and the reason I can only think -- you are now testing my memory well beyond its capacity -- around that time is obviously people were beginning to look at and discuss Phase IV, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So I'd therefore seen a sense of good intention, humanity at work, all the good things in life being applied to something that would all look too easy, but from my perspective as an operator on the ground, I know only too well that in fact it was anything but too easy, and therefore this was a warning in many ways to turn round and say that if people were really seriously thinking about beyond [the invasion], the American military do not intend to, and they had not at that point in time been ordered to.

There was talk about, you know, some sort of martial law for 12 months, but Franks had designed a plan in 1003 Victor which was about the removal of the regime in 125 days. The force levels were limited, there was no force that could be put out into the Euphrates Valley because there was no force available. The force was capable of knocking off, with the air and the land and the marine manoeuvre, it was able of removing the republican guard and the force that was in place. It was not capable of securing a country.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** But that indicated a potential vacuum after the war. There was a very --

**DSF1:** Yes.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Somebody of your experience knew full well the implications of General Franks' view.

**DSF1:** Yes. So if the whole thing went spiffingly well, all would be well. But it never goes spiffingly well.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Can I just have a follow up, to know how much of this is General Franks' own history and his own concept, and how much was political direction from Rumsfeld, or were the two in fact chiming quite harmoniously?

**DSF1:** I never met Rumsfeld. I'm sort of other end of a VTC and that sort of stuff. So I'm not really the one to judge on Rumsfeld. But Franks would have a conversation with Rumsfeld every morning for 20 minutes, just to say where are we, where are we going, and of course the American chain of command, which people often misunderstand, goes direct from Franks to Rumsfeld, Rumsfeld to POTUS. That's how it works. It doesn't go through the Chiefs, and so therefore in fact we often see the Chiefs as being central to the debate, that's how it's done.

In this case I am unsure of where Rumsfeld sat on this, but Franks was pretty clear that he didn't have the force and he didn't have the competencies within that force to be able to do Phase IV stuff if it went badly. That was my judgment.

Now, did I ever have that specific conversation with Franks, and say, hey, just tell me, how is it looking? No, I doubt it.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** This is a pretty clear and accurate indication --

**DSF1:** Most uncommon for me.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Not at all. Did you talk about this with Robin Brims in terms of the potential risks?

**DSF1:** I would doubt it. It's just because of the meeting engagement following 9/11 that I had established a good, very close working relationship with Franks in a way of delivery. So I could have a fairly honest and straightforward conversation. Robin probably met him<sup>10</sup> -- he met people like Rumsfeld and the like, but I have no idea how --

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** This is a report back to CJO, to CDS and so on. So this is going back to London. That is helpful.

So when we actually get to the invasion itself, you have talked about some other objectives. Perhaps it would be useful if you took us through your role with British forces in southern Iraq and the decision to take Basra City.

**DSF1:** As I said, I was very conscious that for us<sup>11</sup> it was -- I had sort of taken it as a given. Even if our people had been taken out, our support in the intellectual thinking of how to do this [REDACTED] was well placed as we ran up through 2002 and then into 2003.

Until 17 January, therefore, there was no decision on what the Brits would do and how they might do it. I remember having a conversation with DCDS(C). At the time, General Pigott, back in about November time, where I said, "You are not going through Turkey". I had read a number of things in effect on the high side, which I said, you know, this is -- [REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Why did it take them so long to --

**DSF1:** Again, it's a bit like the Iraq awakening. The answer is I had a view in September/October time that wasn't really agreed

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<sup>10</sup> Witness subsequently added "but did not have the same working relationship"

<sup>11</sup> ie UK Special Forces

with until about February or March time the following year.

[REDACTED]

So therefore, at that point in time, my view was to then -- obviously we had liaison and all the rest -- was to ask Robin<sup>12</sup> and assist, give it all, sort of, "We stand ready to assist, what can we do, what would you like", et cetera, et cetera, "I'll put a liaison team in with you anyway", because -- to help to make sure that if we need to come in or do something, then that's all established, we've got the links. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Our real contribution was in many ways at the point in time that the commander 7 brigade, Binns<sup>13</sup>, not Brims, but Binnsy, Graham Binns had stopped short of the bridges on the approach to Basra, recognising that 1.5 million people was quite a big mouthful for even a pretty spectacularly equipped armoured brigade. But there was still coherence in the overall control of Basra at that time.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Do you mean civilian control by the Iraqis?

**DSF1:** Yes. You still had the Fedayeen. You still had the Ba'ath Party. Chemical Ali was still around in town. Basra was an interesting place at that time because intimidation was born of the events following the First Gulf War, and then this very extreme sort of record, how Saddam had treated the people of

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<sup>12</sup> General Robin Brims  
<sup>13</sup> Brigadier Graham Binns

Basra and, more important, the Shias down there.

So therefore people were not inclined to put their head above the parapet in any shape or form. So there seemed to be a sort of resilience in the defence of Basra. Graham Binns made absolutely the right call. Fine officer, no surprise there. Our contribution was really [REDACTED] to establish where members of the Ba'ath Party and some of the Fedayeen were meeting, which obviously was not in the Ba'ath Party headquarters, which had been destroyed obviously by the strike<sup>14</sup> quite early on.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** And this was for targeting, et cetera?

**DSF1:** This was just straightforward targeting. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I was pretty comfortable with the intelligence that we had, and gave that information to Brian Burridge, who was the Brit -- the NCC commander, as I recall, down in Qatar. He had the same delegated authority, again as I recall, for collateral damage, as Donald Rumsfeld. So the British system had delegated a lot more authority down to the NCC commander, which is held at a higher level for the US. The first target that we identified, which was [REDACTED] the Ba'ath -- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I remember going to pass this through and saying, we have the intelligence, these are the geo-coordinates, we are pretty comfortable this target is good, this is [REDACTED] and the removal of these individuals will upset and start to shatter the

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<sup>14</sup> Witness clarification: ie the coalition air strike

local cohesion of Basra.

I remember Brian Burrridge coming back, because obviously he was concerned at the collateral damage, and plus the fact that it was an urban area which, as an airman; he did not like - General Wheeler would have been far more comfortable<sup>15</sup> - this was an area he<sup>16</sup> was not that knowledgeable on, and he was dealing with somebody who [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] on intelligence that lacked that sort of clarity the Air Force would normally expect or the navy would expect in the clinical environments that they tend to operate in.

I remember him calling in and saying, "[DSF1], this is a dangerous target, the answer is that the collateral damage looks quite high. How sure are you?" I said, "It doesn't get any better than this. Bomb the target". He said, "No, no". I said, "Look, it really doesn't get any better than this. You have one opportunity. The kingfisher is flashing across the pond. You have to take this target, but it's your call".

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Could I just -- interesting words, "it never gets better than this". You shouldn't expect, in a specific conflict situation like a major city being defended, to get intelligence of a higher or more clinical quality. It just doesn't happen. Is that what it means?

**DSF1:** Correct. That's exactly right. But again, you know, to give Brian Burrridge the credit, he elected to -- and it was on his responsibility. He could have turned around and said, "DSF told me this was good", but ultimately he was the fellow with the authority to therefore make the call, and he had the good

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<sup>15</sup> Witness subsequently clarified that he meant that General Wheeler, as a soldier, would have been more comfortable with the urban environment than was Air Marshal Burrridge, an airman.

<sup>16</sup> Burrridge

judgment to do so.

But of course it was a foreign area in so much as -- so my personal relationship mattered, how I expressed it in fact, where we got the intelligence, how difficult it had been to get that intelligence and the like. The target was good and actually, in fact, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Then there was a bit of -- it wasn't mistargeting, necessarily, but hit some civilians, whom we met survivors or family members.

**DSF1:** And that just reinforces the first point, which was this is a pretty imprecise science. You have good indicators. You rely upon the people you work with. You establish a good rapport, and you have to make judgment calls. In this case the first two targets were good. The second one -- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** And much of what you tell us about authority levels, acting on target information, really was reserved to Donald Rumsfeld, was it?

**DSF1:** For that level of collateral, I think the collateral damage was something like [REDACTED]. I can't remember what the figure was, but the Americans were more restrictive in those

delegated authorities, as I recall.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** That is interesting. In other spheres we have heard evidence that really they had a more relaxed view of applying the criteria in terms of collateral damage. I'm thinking of operations not in Basra, but generally. I simply hadn't appreciated that the holding of those authorities was done at such a high level, though it is of course only one above the commander, isn't it?

**DSF1:** Correct. So you had Tommy Franks [REDACTED] in Qatar at that time, because that was the headquarters. Tommy Franks was there and that's where Brian Burridge was. So therefore it was just one above basically where T Franks sat, but again it was -- that was my recollection.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** We probably need to move on through the invasion.

What was your sort of disposition by the time major combat operations came to an end?

**DSF1:** They sort of stopped.<sup>17</sup> [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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<sup>17</sup> The witness described the Special Forces' distribution in Iraq, at that point, in some detail.



[REDACTED]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT:

[REDACTED]

DSF1: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I'm interested in how it was that you became based [REDACTED] in Baghdad, rather than with British forces.

**DSF1:** Because that's how we started the war. That's where our main principal linkage, that's where my sense of how we could best support -- I find, whether it's [REDACTED] or Iraq, there's a temptation for people to be sort of slightly focused on, well, that's the British forces so we only work -- my view is that Special Forces quite rightly operate at a higher level, and therefore it is about actually the success of the campaign. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So the campaign is the focus.

So therefore I was always very focused on the success of the campaign, and was acutely aware of all the sort of run-up to the fact that there was nothing out in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and we had not come across anything. The sensitive sites [REDACTED] were revealing nothing. There was, you know, a political responsibility that people would say, these things, where are they?

My view was that that rather dull [in the 1990s] scientists had counted them all out when he had been in there. He'd got rid of a percentage, but he hadn't got rid of them all. So there was something around. We just never found it. We still haven't found it. It didn't mean they didn't exist, because they did exist at some point.

So my view was therefore there was a sense of not trying to -- you know, I wasn't about to lose soldiers, trying to help somebody's career but I was interested about actually making

sure this stuff, if there was and where it may be, that we did actually check every closet, every sensitive site.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]?

**DSF1:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So there wasn't any particular discussion between you about the south?

**DSF1:** No, but if somebody had said 'I need them' --<sup>18</sup> [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. So I [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] then redeployed down in support of Robin Brims. That was really trying to clear up to find out where people like [REDACTED] had gone and the like. So there was a number of operations that ran through there.

So I pushed some extra force down there in order to help Robin, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** General, we are grateful. Thank you.

I think I have to remind you that the transcript needs to be reviewed and can only be reviewed in this building. Sorry about

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<sup>18</sup> Witness subsequently clarified that he had intended to indicate that if someone had said that they needed Special Forces he would have been open to discussions.

that, but at your convenience.

**(The hearing adjourned)**

FINAL