

DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL FORCES 2003-2005 (DSF2)

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Good afternoon.

DSF2: Good afternoon.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Welcome [REDACTED]. This afternoon we welcome DSF2; this session is being held in private because we recognise much of the evidence we want to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's Protocol on Sensitive Information -- for example, on grounds of international relations or national security or defence capability, and we want to use this session to explore issues covered by classified documents.

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

One thing is important. 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 would in principle be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry Secretary's letter to you.

Can I also add an important thing? The Inquiry is presently seeking advice from the MOD and other Government departments because of other inquiries or prospective inquiries regarding detention and interrogation policy, and we don't therefore want to get into the detail of that today.

Now, we recognise witnesses give evidence based on their

recollection. We of course check what we hear against the papers to which we have access, and I remind each witness on each occasion they will later be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence given is truthful, fair and accurate, and for security reasons, in respect of this session, we can't release copies of the transcript outside these offices upstairs. So at your convenience, if you could come here to review them, we would be grateful.

With that out of the way, let's turn straight to the questions.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When you took up your post, can you explain to us where UK forces, Special Forces were based and in what numbers, a general overview?

DSF2: I'll try. I took over in [REDACTED] 2003, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I suppose, and our forces were essentially -- I'm trying to remember.

The main force was in Baghdad [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on a mission from CJO to assist the people finding weapons of mass destruction.

In addition, there were forces on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] And there were troops -- I couldn't tell you how many -- in Afghanistan.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think our concern is principally with Iraq, of course.

DSF2: In which case let's stick with Iraq then. There was [REDACTED] in Baghdad at that time that was the -- who deployed after the main -- that [REDACTED] had been the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], I think, based in the UK during the operation itself, and had flown out there to relieve what you might call the war

fighting [REDACTED], and had gone to Baghdad to assist the [REDACTED] weapons of mass destruction. I don't think there were any UKSF troops down in Basra at that time, but I could be wrong. I just can't remember.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: And the numbers?

DSF2: Numbers [REDACTED] are always rather hard to number. It depends whether you are talking about badged or everybody else, and also I can't quite remember. But let us say in the region of [REDACTED]. Would that satisfy?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: During your time as DSF the mission for our Special Forces in Iraq underwent various evolutions. Could you talk us through them?

DSF2: Yes. I arrived -- I went there on a recce in June, and what I saw there really shaped, I think, the rest of my time as DSF, but also had an impact, as I shall relate, on defence more widely in the sense that I went there and had a briefing from the [REDACTED] commander. I was accompanied by the CO of [REDACTED].

What became apparent was that the mission for which they had been sent there, the [REDACTED] weapons of mass destruction, was really seeming pretty fruitless. It didn't seem to be going anywhere. It had been going on some time. There didn't seem help that SF was required to give.

By far the greater threat emerging or issue arising was the terrorism that was starting to happen around the town, but also the intelligence that was coming in of -- to use the analogy of the honeypot. Someone had opened the honeypot, and people were just coming from across the world to take part in this campaign against the Coalition forces.

That gave rise to a signal or an email that I sent to my boss back home, DCDS(C) as he was then called -- he's called DCDS

(Ops) now -- General Pigott, who was the three-starred commitments chap, which basically made two recommendations.

First of all, I recommended that we should change the mission in Baghdad from being a [REDACTED] weapons of mass destruction mission to a counter-terrorist mission; and secondly,¹ [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Both of those recommendations were accepted. DCDS(C) readily accepted that we should change the mission in Baghdad. So we took the UKSF [REDACTED]. That is when Op [REDACTED] changed to Op [REDACTED]. That's when command and control changed from being through CJO, which it had been on the weapons of mass destruction campaign, to being what we call the discrete op, which was basically from me to DCDS(C) and then CDS. So that was the first change.

The second change which occurred after I had been called in by CDS, then Mike Walker, who said to me, is it right that an SO1 in your headquarters should write a [REDACTED] counter-terrorist campaign. I said no, not really, but I think it needs doing, and no one is doing it, so we'll do it, and he said fine, okay, crack on.

What that led to a month later, two months later in fact, on 11 September 2003 -- irony entirely unintentional -- was the first meeting that I ever attended where there was a big meeting at which the policy question was considered as to whether MOD needed to set up a global counter-terrorist campaign, and

¹ The witness explained the wider context affecting Special Forces' missions at the time.

question that I always asked -- and re-reading the notes, I see we constantly came back to in the post op reports -- was this question of what is the effect of what we are doing? Okay, so we are nail bashing, but so what? What is the effect? And trying to judge effect up there was quite difficult. And therefore trying to decide which areas you were trying to influence and have an effect on was also quite difficult.

The target set we adopted in terms of priority changed over time. If I can just refer to my notes which just quote some of the documents which you will have had before this. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

What was the mission? It was [REDACTED] operations -- here we go. Over August -- well, I haven't got one actually. I haven't found a document that told me what the precise mission was for [REDACTED], but if we take the [REDACTED] mission, it was [REDACTED] operations to disrupt anti-Coalition and anti-Iraqi terrorist activity. [REDACTED]

Now, that gave us a great scope as to who the target array was going to be, and the sort of competing centres of attraction was the Former Regime Elements, it was Al Qaeda, it was other Islamic extremists. And this was an issue of debate throughout my time there. Every visit: which is our priority and what's

the main effort? And that consultation took place with the [REDACTED] who actually owned the mission, with [REDACTED] and Government agencies, because very much this was an effort in support of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But it was very much done on a national basis, rather than just our own.

To start with, I think everybody identified that the Former Regime Elements were the big problem. I was interested, reading the notes, again, if you look at 2 February 2005, the ops officer [REDACTED] says:

"The [REDACTED] target set remains correct. Indeed, the Former Regime Elements are increasingly recognised by MNFI as the enduring political threat to a sustainable national Iraqi government. The mission and scheme of manoeuvre remain valid to deliver the priority tasks.²

" [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]"

[REDACTED]
" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

" [REDACTED]

" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]"

So that sort of sets, I think even that in February 2005, we were still in accord with MNCI in seeing FRE as the main elements. But it is quite clear again from reading the notes, but by the end of the year the FREs had withered away, and I don't think that was by then the priority.

I don't have the records of who we pursued after I had left command, but certainly what I've heard, they went on to much more an AQ attacking footing, which may have been appropriate then or it may not. I don't know and I can't judge.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: You mentioned the change in command structure before. How did that affect the resources available to you?

DSF2: To start with -- well, actually not at all. Not at all. If anything, the switch -- what happened in December 2003 was that we then changed to Op [REDACTED] from Op [REDACTED], and the only difference there really was that it became a joint operation under CJO.

The reason that happened was because of the scale of the resources that we were starting to ask for. And given that CJO owned the resources, it struck me that this was a better way to gain resources.

But in terms of operational flexibility, there's always a trade off in the SF community whether you keep discrete, so you can keep what you want to do, or whether you put yourself under command of someone else, with all the advantage of being playing in a bigger team, compared to the potential disadvantage that you may have your freedom of action curtailed and you may get more tactical, rather than strategic.

My own view was that ever since taking over the job as DSF, I had made it my business to keep CJO fully informed of everything I was doing because I believe SF need to be part of the greater national team. And I did not fear that latter worry, that he would in any way restrict our freedom, or indeed if he did, it was for very good reasons that I would probably agree with.

² The remainder of the text quoted by the witness set out what the priority tasks were.

On the other hand, I could recognise absolutely that he owned all the helicopter assets, he owned the ISTAR assets. He had to make the critical judgment between Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, on ISTAR, and therefore I felt it appropriate that we were under CJO's command and control.

So if anything, I would say that the resource picture got better, having put them under CJO, but I can't put my hand on my heart and say -- I can't substantiate that by any facts. I just think it was the right thing to do for resource reasons.³

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can I turn to the question of the two hostage crises which took place in your time, I think, Kenneth Bigley and Margaret Hassan?

DSF2: Yes.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Can you explain to us the role that Special Forces played in these hostage crises?

DSF2: I think in those hostage crises, again going through the notes, that became [REDACTED] [a] priority. That's clear from the post visit reports.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How did this work tie in with the FCO [REDACTED]?

DSF2: Well, I think it became the national top priority. That's the point.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: So essentially it was a combined --

DSF2: Yes, absolutely.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How effective did you judge the co-operation at the time?

³ The witness subsequently added the following detail: 'And furthermore CJO never in my time attempted to alter my direction to SF ops. The legal constraints [REDACTED] were national, not CJO, constraints.'

DSF2: I couldn't comment specifically on those instances. I was too far away. But I would just make the comment that in terms of how I saw UKSF, that sort of national teamwork play was absolutely central to my vision of UKSF's place in the nation, and I don't think that's placing it too highly.

It's an interesting contrast to the role of JSOC, our American comparators, in the American scale of things in that JSOC are fundamentally a military asset, working to a military chain of command, within that stovepipe, and that affects the way they look and the way they operate.

UKSF, by contrast, is a national asset. It may be paid for by MOD, but it works with other [REDACTED] in a way that our competitors don't -- [REDACTED].⁴ That aspect of being a national asset means you have to play the national game, it seems to me. So when something like Ken Bigley comes up, it's a national top priority, so [REDACTED] resources⁵ swing to the main effort.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did that have an impact on other Special Force tasks in Iraq at the time?

DSF2: [REDACTED].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: [REDACTED]?

DSF2: [REDACTED].

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: One final question on the hostage point from me. Do you think there's anything more that can be done to try to bring about a positive result from these hostage situations, which in both these cases was so dire?

⁴The witness subsequently added the following clarification: 'UKSF provide the executive arm for [other government departments and law enforcement agencies]. By contrast, US agencies [REDACTED] have their own separate executive arm [REDACTED].'

DSF2: I'm not aware if I can offer any suggestions on how to do things better. I don't know. I was too far away from the coalface to actually make -- I just know that at the top level, as I say, it became the nation's top priority in Baghdad, and that's what [REDACTED] turned our hand to.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just a tail piece to that, if I may. That's how you fuse all the different kinds of intelligence sourcing that cluster in on a hostage situation. There's lot of experience in our system at how you do that in all sorts of operational contexts. Is the hostage situation just another one of those, or is there some special aspect to it where you are negotiating with the other side?

DSF2: I couldn't say. Sorry, I don't know. I couldn't say.

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: How much of a PR problem did you feel there was over the hostage handling? Clearly it would not be at all the instinct of Special Forces to publicise [REDACTED] this [REDACTED] priority, or indeed that they are involved at all. That would go against the grain of everything. But at the same time the families and the press are, because they don't have this information, demanding that more should be done,

⁵ The witness outlined the different organisations that could be involved in a hostage rescue operation.

ignorant of what has been done, and that then creates political pressures on the government to produce results, which then probably feeds back down to your own people. So you get a bit of a vicious circle developing there.

Is there any way out of that, or are we stuck with that?

DSF2: The press will always hanker for more.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So will families, inevitably, if it was your kids.

DSF2: That's very true. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the freedom of the Government not to have to admit it or talk about it, I still judge as something valuable and worth having.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: And if necessary, one has to pay a PR price for that. To this day, probably, the families do not know that this was [a] priority for your people on the ground.

DSF2: Well, I wouldn't know. I haven't spoken to them.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have met some of them, which is why I ask the question. But there isn't a neat way out of that.

DSF2: I don't think there is a neat way out, no. I think you've got to judge the long term against the short term. My judgment has always been that long term you are better off not talking about it.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let's move to MND South East for a bit. Usha, you have some questions.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I would just like some explanation as to what assets you had based in Basra --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: This is SF in MND South East.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What assets you had based in Basra on a permanent basis.

DSF2: It fluctuated from nothing to the occasional surge of [REDACTED] I suppose at some stages. But that was very much the exception.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: You did have [REDACTED] there?

DSF2: I was going to say, I was just correcting myself. You are quite right. I was thinking in terms of main [REDACTED] strike force.

I suppose you could say there were [REDACTED] levels of SF potential presence down there, which themselves fluctuated.

When I said there was sometimes nothing, it was sometimes there were no ordinary strike force troops. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sometimes there was an SFLO with the GOC. Sometimes there wasn't. And the arbiter on that particular force was the GOC himself.

After a while -- again, to go back to my earlier comment about being a team player -- I was conscious that there was much criticism of SF during Op [REDACTED] that they'd gone off and weren't working to the national effort, and the SF response, rightly, was that they were working at a strategic level and were working to the CentCom commander and were working at that level, and that there were plenty of people, enough people doing the job in the south that they didn't need us. Those sort of

arguments went on, and [DSF1⁶] will have told you much more about that.

Nonetheless, it left a scar within the British military. Just as I made it my business to make sure that CJO was kept fully abreast and happy, that that tension didn't arise in my time, that he was happy with what we were doing and didn't feel there was that tension; so I also wanted to make sure that the GOCs down in the south felt they had whatever SF they wanted, and if we weren't there, it was because they didn't want us, not because we were in any way shunning them.

Through most of the time I was there, frankly they didn't see the need for us.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But when they did see the need for you, how did you decide when to devote the Special Forces in the south?

DSF2: Well, you are asking -- it's going to sound rather -- I would need to be asking quite a tactical question there, and that decision would have rested with the [REDACTED] commander. So in a sense I didn't.

But it was quite clear to them. Well, they could look at the target set, they could look at the requirement, they could look at the chance of the hit and the business case, and they would make a judgment. And if it got -- it would go up the chain of command, first of all to CO [REDACTED] to make a judgment about priorities, and eventually it might come to me, but frankly it never did come to me.

But the basic message I always gave to the GOCs was if they wanted stuff, then they should ask for it, and we would try and give it to them. So the intent to support them was there, and

⁶ The witness' predecessor as Director of Special Forces is referred to as DSF1 in the Inquiry's documentation.

very much they set the parameters on how much SF they got in terms of strike force.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: So you wouldn't have known if any requests were turned down?

DSF2: I can't tell of any requests that were turned down. I don't know of any. I don't know. I don't necessarily know that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: You kind of delegated it?

DSF2: In a sense it becomes -- he commanded the force in Iraq, the [REDACTED] commander. He sat atop the [REDACTED] in Baghdad, whatever elements were down in Basra. That was his span of command.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: DSF3⁷ told us that by working alongside the US counterparts, you had access to all sorts of enablers which were actually essential in allowing you to do your business. Was this the case in your time as the Director of Special Forces?

DSF2: Absolutely, yes.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: And were there any specific difficulties operating alongside the British Army, for example with operational security?

DSF2: Alongside the British Army?

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In the south east.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I have gone to the south east.

DSF2: I can't -- again, I can't put my hand on heart and give you any instances where there were difficulties of op sec. I can see the theoretical possibility there would be

difficulties, but in a sense --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: With the British Army, the green army in the south east, working alongside the nascent Iraqi security forces.

DSF2: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Bleed across --

DSF2: There were huge difficulties working with the Iraqis. There were huge difficulties working with the Iraqi security forces. The command and control though, I think, is indicative and might go some way to answering your question in the sense of portraying why it was perhaps inevitable, in the sense that if you are operating in MND South East, you had to get clearance for the operation through the GOC, and that's something I made very clear. The guy who turns the turf owns the turf because he has got to pick up the consequences, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I felt morally on the high ground to impose that condition [REDACTED].

So in a sense, any time you wanted to operate in the south, certainly as a strike force, you had to operate through the GOC and get his clearance. So to an extent you were forced to clear what you wanted to do through him. He owned the battle space. He was the, as the Americans call it, habitual battle space commander, and therefore some risk of op sec was in that sense inevitable. It was up to him to how he exercised that control of information.

But just to go back to what Sir John was saying, all working with Iraqis was fraught with op sec difficulties.

⁷ The witness' successor as Director of Special Forces is referred to as DSF3 in the Inquiry's documentation.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In late 2006 there was an increase in the UK security forces assets based in Basra, with the creation of Taskforce [REDACTED]. Were there any discussions in your time whether the [REDACTED] Special Forces presence in MND should be increased?

DSF2: There were always discussions. Every time -- I used to go and visit [REDACTED] up in Baghdad, and that involved coming back down through Basra, and me having discussions with the GOC to say, are you happy, do you want anything else, what do you want. And as I said previously, they fluctuated in how much they wanted. Sometimes they didn't see a need for an LO. Sometimes they wanted an LO. But the need was pretty minimal. This was still in an area of -- I wouldn't say success, but of not really wanting to employ SF down there, or not seeing the need for it.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ?⁸

DSF2: Well, by 2007 we were much more in a kinetic striking game. We were in a different game. We were in a period of the most intense kinetic ops since the invasion. So very much, and SF were fully integrated [REDACTED] and the SF troops themselves were hugely important.

So yes, the game had changed. But I think 19 September 2005 was the seminal moment, when the Jameat incident and all that revealed some truths we had probably been trying to not face up to.

⁸ Baroness Prashar asked about the witness' opinion on the need for SF in the later part of the campaign, after his time as DSF.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just again a tail piece on that. Reading the Op [REDACTED] study that was done last year by [REDACTED], the key doctrinal leap was the adoption of [REDACTED] which we learned about.

DSF2: [REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. I think attached to that is the judgment that even now it would be difficult, [REDACTED] without US assets [REDACTED] ISTAR in particular.

Was that at all relevant to how you allocate or find a basis for prioritising between Baghdad or Iraq as a whole on the one hand, and MND South East? Because those assets would be held by corps or held outside country, and so it would be a different tempo of operations, UKSF in the south operating on their own.

DSF2: I think that's a fair point. Given that all the intelligence was held centrally, there was probably no reason why you couldn't have done some of that work down south. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] That was a level that we never replicated in the south.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Going back to what you just said to Baroness Prashar, a different target and different operational context anyway.

DSF2: It was in the south. Yes, it was. It was much more complicated.

It was much more politically complicated in terms of it being a Shia target set, rather than Sunni, which created its own difficulties. That American model was apparently extremely efficient. I didn't see that. I only sort of heard about it second hand [REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We have heard a lot about it, including from one or two Americans.

DSF2: Indeed. The only thing I would say about that, if I could just make a comment on that, is that Op [REDACTED] -- I was surprised reading that same report, which I hadn't seen before, that Op [REDACTED] was seen as a [REDACTED] mission.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

DSF2: Which shows how far it had gone from the mission when I set it up in 2003, which I thought was interesting. From my own conception of SF, and I don't know what other questions you are going to ask me, but from my own conception of SF, I think it's interesting that SF had narrowed its remit to a [REDACTED] mission, whereas I gave it a more political mission, and there may well have been circumstances that justified that. But I think it's interesting to note.

Myself, in my gut, I would hate to take away that that's what SF do, [REDACTED], and that's what they do, full stop.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Anyway, [REDACTED] is confined to Iraq. So that's not SF globally. That's SF Iraq, historically.

DSF2: Indeed, but even within Iraq, that's quite a narrow remit.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: A different tack. I mentioned in my opening remarks, we don't want to talk about detention details, all of that, but there are one or two general questions I would quite like to put.

Going back now to 2004, we had inhibitions on passing people that UK Special Forces detained into US custody in Balad.

Now, first question, I suppose, is what impact did that have on our relations with our US colleagues, the fact that we

weren't able to pass over the prisoners?

DSF2: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Not good?

DSF2: Incomprehension, dismay, disappointment. They sort of understood it because they're governed by -- they understand legal interference in operations as well as we do. It's just that their legal parameters were set in a different place to ours. It was a visit by someone in the SIS to the detention facility, and then reporting back that it wasn't quite compliant, that set the whole thing back and put us in a very awkward position.

But it was wider than just the detentions issue. It was the whole legality and interpretation of the rules of engagement, which led, for instance, to our guys not being allowed to take part in the mission on Fallujah.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. For better or for worse.

DSF2: For better or for worse. But the whole legal differences -- and it's particularly at the strategic level. We're meant to be operating on a strategic level with our US colleagues. The fact that you're working on different legal interpretation, and also different political domestic drivers, makes life quite tricky.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: How far was that resolved, insofar as it could be resolved, at the operational level, and how far did it have to come from, in our case, MOD policy makers and legal advisers working with their American counterparts? Or was it both of them?

DSF2: Well, it's both, but it was mainly a legal question. The political question you can almost sort out because you can -- but the legal ones were set very much, certainly at that

timeframe, by the Leg Ads, the legal advisers, at PJHQ.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: And was that advice timely enough, within the limits of what legal advice can be?

DSF2: Sometimes irritatingly timely. Yes. The tempo of things -- yes, I have to say, it was timely enough. It was a fairly long running issue, and the parameters were set fairly early on, and made life quite difficult actually.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, and that went on because, ultimately, we did have two separate bodies of law or understandings.

DSF2: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, so much for that. Still on Anglo-US relations in theatre, intelligence sharing and the NOFORN problem. How big a difficulty was that for Special Forces?

DSF2: ⁹ [REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: [REDACTED]?

DSF2: [REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

DSF2: [REDACTED].

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Okay. Turning to our own internal relations, Special Forces and our other national assets [REDACTED]

⁹ The witness described the intelligence relationship with US Special Forces.

[REDACTED]

DSF2: I can't remember if that happened or not. I don't know.

[REDACTED]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Purely for my better understanding and information, you're an SF commander in theatre with something you want to do or somebody wants you to do something. The intelligence surrounding you comes from [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] All of that comes together quite naturally and easily now, does it? I'm looking at the SF commander and what he's getting.

DSF2: I would say for the SF commander it does, yes. Certainly by the time I left in 2005 it was getting very sophisticated.

[REDACTED]

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes.

DSF2: But there's no doubt, in terms of capacity and what we might call bandwidth, the Americans were so much bigger than ours that increasingly, I think, we got caught up, and I suspect

that's what happened. But [DSF3] will have told you more about that.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes. I do think, from what I can recall, that the south east is a separate entity, as it were.

DSF2: The south east is a very separate entity, yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Okay.

DSF2: But just to talk about that, the south east became more important to what you might call the Iraqi picture for focus from Balad as the Iranian issue was seen to rise, and latterly, I suspect, the whole Shia problem started to register on the American radar, which is of course down south what we had been coping with all along.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, so 2005 onwards?

DSF2: Yes.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Just a bit on equipment. Our Special Forces, in my understanding, from a long way away in Whitehall, was that you can pretty much lay your hands on whatever you can find by way of equipment, but there were some scarcities, I think.

[REDACTED]

But the general picture of rapidly changing needs, procuring the solutions to those needs, how did that go throughout your time? Some view of ours were very slow.

DSF2: I'm sure that's true. I think the biggest problem is you can ask for what you want, but if it isn't there, you are not going to get it. Helicopters are the best example of that. One of the reasons that we ended up losing our Chinook -- I remember one particular conversation, looking at the helicopter availability within the UKSF fleet, and we were burning up

Chinook hours in a way that was unsustainable. So we ended up having to take a holiday on CH47, then asking CJO for some -- I have forgotten the name now -- again, they're from Northern Ireland -- Pumas, and Puma went up there as a stopgap and turned out to be rather good, but with problems with the pilots, as we've seen, because they weren't actually Special Forces trained pilots. So there were risks there. But that was a problem that the resources just simply didn't exist in the inventory.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Still on helicopters, just one question. I read in the material that we used [REDACTED] for quite a wide variety of SF purposes, for none of which was it ideal, but for the whole bundle of things could make a fist of it. But the Americans had one or two helicopters which were highly specialised and, frankly, better for SF purposes. That was the case. That was it. Better kit.

DSF2: [REDACTED], fantastic. The list goes on. They're superb, of course.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: The other thing is simply armoured vehicles for carrying people across the ground. At one point our Special Forces were burning them up higher than the potential replacement rate could cope with. Was that just a feature of the category of vehicle or the vehicle fleet concerned, or was it that our whole supply system couldn't keep up with the tempo?

DSF2: The honest answer is I don't know. I can't recall either the incident or the detail.

I'm surprised if that was the case, and I wonder when that was the case, because equally, I can remember other times when people used to deploy on operations -- I think there was one [REDACTED] that deployed for a four-month period and didn't fire a single shot because the situation had got -- I think that was [REDACTED] in 2005. Anyway, so I'm sorry, I can't --

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: In a sense, you have given a helpful answer that no general judgment is possible. It depends on the time, the situation and the equipment concerned.

DSF2: Yes, I would say so.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I suppose, before we move on, we have already touched on enablers in terms of the operating cycle. Where would UK Special Forces in Iraq look in the first case for a packet of enablers for a particular operation? Do they go to corps headquarters in Baghdad, or do they go to CJO?

DSF2: They'd come back nationally.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: They would? Because if you were the green army commander [REDACTED] you would go to Baghdad first. That's fine¹¹, thank you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: John, one more equipment related question. We didn't have, [REDACTED] a top secret IT net --

DSF2: Sorry, could I just answer that? I suspect the first people you turn to would be your American counterparts, and say, "Can we borrow one of yours for this op?" And if that didn't happen, then you would.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: IT nets. We didn't have a top secret net that linked up [REDACTED]?

DSF2: [REDACTED]?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED] - you noted this, I think, in a couple of places, a couple of documents I've read -- how big a problem was this?

¹¹ The witness subsequently requested the following statement be added: 'I'm not sure I agree with my implied consent. For air assets we usually would ask Corps. But for land assets, for reasons of fleet compatibility and logistics we would ask CJO.'

DSF2: I think [REDACTED] a big problem. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] It's remarkable, the obstacles we place in front of us. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Okay. Being an obstacle, operationally, what was the sort of cost, the handicap that we had to bear [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]? Was it an irritation, or did we pay an operational price [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]?

DSF2: I suspect, but it's only a suspicion, it would have been just one of [REDACTED]. There may well have been -- and I can't put my hand on my heart and give you an instance to say that there might have been cases where it was actually significant. I can't put my hand on my heart and give details on that, I'm afraid.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mentioned [REDACTED] earlier. A couple of the [REDACTED] post-operation reports expressed considerable frustration that [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Were [REDACTED] failing to make proper use, from our point of view, of their capabilities, or did this improve over time?

DSF2: I would say more the latter than the former. I don't

think there was any failure of intent.

I think there's also -- I'm getting an echo of a quite technical debate about [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just one final question, which is I would be interested in any comparisons you might like to make between the provision of equipment to Special Forces and to the

green army.

DSF2: Yes, there is a difference. The difference manifests itself in many ways. I think the most important one, though, is size, quantity. Special Forces requirements are generally quite small. In the grand scheme of things it's an affordable luxury. It's also the number 1 defence priority. So it tends to be both those things. It tends to be top priority, and it tends to be, in the grand scheme of things, relatively cheap.

One of the challenges that SF has faced over the years, and that defence faces, is that actually -- and this was my observation when I was in charge -- whereas I inherited a situation where SF could live off the crumbs off the big boys' tables, actually during the time of my time there, I recognised that the assets we were asking for and the call on big resources was so big that actually we were a fourth beast at the table, if you like, and that old system could no longer apply. That's why I argued that DSF ought to be a two-star in the main building, fighting his own battles, which is why my successor became a two-star.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Fighting battles?

DSF2: Well, I don't think he actually does what I'd envisaged on that. I think he's just a two-star field commander, but that's another issue. We could discuss that one.

But I just think that now SF has become such a big devourer of defence resource, that actually it needs to stand on its own two feet and fight its own battles against the navy, air force and army for resource, instead of living off the crumbs of the table.

So I think that's rather changed, and that whole resource issue and the size of the resource bill was one of the reasons why I volunteered us to go under command CJO for Op [REDACTED]

from Christmas, because that resource bill, we needed defence resources and I thought it was only fair. We wanted the best deal.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Right. We have come to the end. Final reflections. I would be grateful for any reflections you have on the strategic effect of the contribution by our SF to the Iraq campaign successes. Did it have a particularly important effect in maintaining US military relationships?

[REDACTED] and well within the privacy of this session, Special Forces, the overall effect, success, influence. You have already talked about it with Sir Roderic a bit.

DSF2: Evidently, given the praise that has been lavished on us since last year, the end of Op [REDACTED], it's held in high regard by the Americans.

From my period of 2003 to 2005 though, if that's primarily the period you are talking about, it wasn't the same level then. We were working to different target sets. We were very much in my time a UK asset working with the US. As I said in that earlier description of the tasking priorities, priority 1 was

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and the reason for that was because [REDACTED] the Foreign Office were trying to develop a political line of operation in Baghdad, and the Americans weren't doing any political line at all. So, given the whole political approach, that seemed to be the top issue.

JSOC were just after [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] which I thought rather proved the point that this wasn't necessarily SF work. You know, trying to operate

the strategic level and do the politics. So I felt fully justified in that.

I have to say that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Other decisions I'm not going to judge.

Was it appreciated? Very much. Because actually there wasn't very much -- for all the Foreign Office and FCO's trying to, there wasn't that much political line of operation to be developed. So most of the time, what the SF [REDACTED] were doing was doing strike operations. They were going and doing arrest operations, and they were a very nice complement to the Americans and worked very closely with them, and relations were very good. But it wasn't by that stage -- in 2005 it wasn't the same level as it became thereafter.

Of course, as we have just mentioned, or as we mentioned earlier, the legal problems, which drove a bit of a wedge between the two, meant there were limits to our co-operation, which I understand went away once they had rebuilt their DIF and got that compliant with the legality and everything, and suddenly they could move into much closer operations.

So it was good in my time. Operations were going well there, and again [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So in that sense it was very good.

Strategic effect? Well, you will have read the report. It's interesting that some people like Robin Brims in his report at one stage says the only thing we do useful is actually

[REDACTED]. Someone else says the only reason we got the assets to [REDACTED] was because of the work we

did with JSOC. So we actually managed to use one to leverage support for the other.

So there was a lot of doubt in the British camp, in the wider British society, about whether we were useful or not. But having said that, not once did I get any kickback from the system back here, or the chiefs who I briefed regularly, from DCDS(C), from CDS, from CJO, about what we were doing or any pullback on anything.

In terms of priority for assets, we pretty much got what we asked for. So in terms of nationally, I think we were ascribed the top priority.

Did the Americans support us? Absolutely. It was very close. It was a very close relationship, I think.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: And that, as it were, prevails, even with changes of personality, which can be quite rapid?

DSF2: Yes, they can. Stan McChyrstal and I -- if you're talking personalities, Stan and I are quite different people. We had not necessarily a very easy relationship. We are very different people with different perspectives. So I don't think he and I had necessarily the warmest relationship, but professionally I think it worked well.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. That's an important comment, the balance between the influence of personalities and deeper institutions, cultural features matter.

DSF2: It's very important. There's a big trust issue there.

SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. Let's close there. The transcript has got to be looked at in this building, I'm afraid, but no hurry. Thank you very much indeed.

(The hearing adjourned)