(11.30 am)

RT HON ADAM INGRAM

THE CHAIRMAN: Welcome back to those in the room and welcome to our witness for our final session today, the Rt Hon Adam Ingram. You were Minister of State for the Armed Forces from 2001 to 2007.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I was, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: We want to focus primarily in this hearing on a number of personnel-related issues, many of which remain of concern to the families of service personnel who died in Iraq or to those who were seriously injured.

Now, we have already taken evidence from your successor as Minister for the Armed Forces, Bob Ainsworth, and we are shortly taking evidence from senior military officers with responsibility for personnel and medical issues.

I say on each occasion, we recognise that witnesses give evidence based on their recollection of events and we, of course, check with what we hear against the papers to which we have access and which are still coming in.

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

With those preliminaries, I'll turn to Sir Roderic Lyne. Roderic?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: As the Minister of State -- indeed the longest-serving ever Defence Minister, if the biography is accurate -- to what extent --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: That was my description of myself, but I think it's accurate as well, hopefully.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It probably felt like it, too.

How far were you involved in the planning for the military action in Iraq in the year or so before it took off?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Well, I mean, the way the department would have worked, working with the Secretary of State would have been very much a component part of what I was expected to do. In fact, the whole definition of what the armed forces should be doing, what its structure should be, was something that would sit with me.

In terms of being advised on what was happening, I would be kept closely advised of all of that, but a decision-maker in terms of the force component, that would largely have been a military determination, but I would be advised of it. You would be kept fully informed of it, you would be kept appraised of some of the difficulties associated with it. And, because of my responsibility for the Defence Logistics Organisation,

then clearly that was another important area where I had to be very closely engaged and, as the process was developing, we were engaged in a range of quite fundamental changes within the department, both in terms of future infrastructure, army structure and also in terms of the Logistics Support Organisation, which was undergoing major transformation and which continued to undergo that transformation right through my time there.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So things like the decisions to send a division of ground forces in addition to air and naval assets, the package 3, the big package that we opted for, was something you were advised of but you weren't actually involved in the argument over whether or not we should do it, would that be right?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Whether or not we should do it?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I wasn't in the process of making a decision as to whether we should or should not do it. It so happened that I was quite prepared to justify, and still do, what we did.

I was very closely made aware of the changing parameters, ie going from the north and then into the south, and what that meant in terms of how we could deliver that. It meant new relationships with Kuwait and the quick establishment of the relationships there.

So I would have had full visibility of this, but it wouldn't have been my role to have said -- I wouldn't -- "Let's put more aircraft in, more fast jets or more helicopters" or "It seems to me the land component is light or too heavy" or whatever. That would not be a civilian or a Defence Minister's 's role, I would argue.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Was it important for the morale of the army and the standing of the British military internationally that we actually should have troops on the ground there and not just in secondary roles in the air and at sea?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: For the morale?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Yes.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I mean, I think the military mindset was -- the military would rather be engaged than not engaged, would be the mindset of the military, but that doesn't mean to say that they would want to go to war just for the sake of it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Specifically, we have discussed in earlier sessions arguments that it appeared that the army were very keen to be there -- not just the navy and the air force -- in the war-fighting phase of campaign because that's what the British army does and, if they hadn't, it might have been a bit of a blow to their

prestige. Was this an argument that you heard?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Not with any great recollection, but it would just seem to me that the land component was an absolute essential in what we were seeking to do. We had to, in a sense, occupy the ground.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the Americans said they could do it without us. We weren't essential.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The Americans may have said that, but that was part of the discussions that were going on, and that -- what was very clear, that once the determination was made that there should be a coalition of forces -- and it was a genuine attempt to achieve a coalition, albeit the US being the largest part of that, with the UK second -- but to have other countries associated with all of that and all the expertise that they could bring to bear in terms of some of their specialisms was vital in all of that.

It would have just seemed to me, perhaps, on reflection, that not to have put an army component in would have led to major problems because, how then do you deal with an aftermath? Who then does the rebuilding? It is certainly not the air and it is certainly not the maritime component.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the major problems would have been to do with the aftermath if we hadn't done that.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: No, no. I'm saying that there is a kind of linear logic to all of that; that, if you hadn't done it initially, you may have had to have done it eventually.

Let me go back to my Northern Ireland experience. I was a Northern Ireland Minister.[1] When the army was put in -- not in my time -- put into Northern Ireland, it was because many people maintained, and probably correctly, that there was a complete breakdown in trust in terms of the civil administration, mainly in policing, and so the land element had to go in, the army had to go in to stabilise, to create conditions, and then you recreate the environment which allows the civilianisation, what became known as the normalisation in Northern Ireland.

So my experience and my instinct, I suppose my knowledge, would have said that this was an essential feature.

I don't think people were saying "it has to be" to me "because our morale will be broken if we are not there". If people are giving that evidence, I think they have got to stand by that view. It was not one that I can recollect that I don't think was necessarily current.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another argument to do with the aftermath point that was made at the time was that, if we did --

[1] A Northern Ireland Office Minister

if we played a leading part in the war-fighting phase, then we could reasonably expect to draw down rather quickly and let other people deal with the aftermath rather than be landed with that, which was a perhaps a less attractive bit of the package. In the end, of course, we ended up doing both. Did you hear that argument around the place?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think there was a lot of genuine awareness and quite deep frustration within the Ministry of Defence about the lack of capacity and determination and willingness to engage elsewhere within the government machine. 45,000 or so military personnel were engaged. You can count the others on a few hands, a few fingers.

So there was no comprehensive approach at that time and, as we know, that subsequently became an issue and over which we then -- over time, which we then had to attend to. But very quickly we established the Post-conflict Reconstruction Unit because it was clear where the gaps were, and the military taking on a role, albeit in the main, but the military personnel who were engaged in that role tended to be civilians, ie reservists, in the rest of their working life and they brought that expertise, whether they were engineers, water engineers, mechanical engineers, infrastructure

engineers, people who were able to recreate a positive effect on the ground.

But there wasn't an equivalent army, if that's the way to describe it, of civilians standing by in Whitehall or elsewhere to move in to take on that role and that became very apparent. That's why the Post-conflict Reconstruction Unit was established, mainly because of the pressure from the Ministry of Defence.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You mentioned that part of your area of responsibility was logistics. Were you concerned at the time that the military were given too little time to prepare for the campaign? They worked on a rule of thumb, they needed six months, in the end they only had about three for this. Did that bother you?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Bother? I just got on with the job. It was a case of you had to live within the reality. Do you want a better scenario? Yes, you do. Do you want more time? Yes, you do.

But the one thing again I learned, and I had been in the job about two years at that point, was that the military had a can do approach and that worked right through the command chain. They just needed to identify the problem, they then worked out a solution. If that solution didn't work, they would look for another

solution. It is a military mindset which is perhaps unique in government. Failure is not something they dwell on and, therefore, the reality was -- in one sense, a short period of time, but of course the embeds were already in the Pentagon at senior level, beginning to look to see what the reality was. There was a loosening of some of the pre-planning engagement on the basis that we had a genuine attempt by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair to seek another solution through the United Nations, and any indication that somewhere or other we had triggered in a very advanced way, a military component, well, that would have seemed to have contradicted everything we were generally trying to do through the diplomatic and UN channels.

So there was a problem associated it, but it was one that had to be surmounted in the military terms and, of course, the change in the military strategy became another issue that they had to attend to.

I remember well the advice being given by Major General Pigott at the time, with his very complex graphs about the movement of people on the ground. So from the military planning point of view, they had a very good grasp of what had to be done. Could then all the bits be assembled in time, then was what had to be determined.

Conclusion? It was. There were weaknesses, but they delivered.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did it allow enough time to prepare some of the other aspects, the preparations for potentially heavy casualties, to make sure that the welfare machine, all the packages needed on the personnel side were also geared up by the time the campaign started? I mean, that was also, I think, within your area of ministerial responsibility. Were you content with the preparations on that side?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: In one sense, strictly -- it didn't all necessarily rest with me. We had other ministers and that -- we could explore it, but we did restructure the departmental responsibilities in 2003/2004 on the back of some of the experience in terms of where the responsibilities lay, who had responsibility for veterans, personnel issues which, in the main, rested with me, but was -- should that be my main focus? So changes occurred at ministerial level in all of that.

I think the evidence you got from Lieutenant General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue more or less -- I would stand wholly behind his assessment as to what they were seeking to achieve and what was achieved in terms of medical care package, in terms of preparing for casualties -- and I have heard different figures.

I mean, I haven't been able to find any documents on it but I remember things like the number of body bags, because we thought there was going to be chemical and possibly biological attack.

This was a guy who had done this: Saddam Hussein had done this on his own people and our assumption was he was likely to do it on us.

So there was a lot of preparation and a lot of holding of breath, if that did eventually did arrive. But that's the nature, I would say, of going to war in very difficult circumstances.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Your former colleague Sally Keeble told us in her evidence that she had spoken to you about some of the concerns that DFID had before the invasion. Do you recall that? Do you recall what action followed from that?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I remember her speaking to me. It was in the lobbies of the House of Commons. I think she spoke to me perhaps on one other occasion. I don't think it was the concerns that DFID had. I think it was her concerns that she had about the role that DFID was not playing. She took a view that DFID was being constrained by the then Secretary of State. I think that -- Clare Short. I think that was common currency.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That was how it appeared from MoD as

well, was it?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Absolutely. It was a case of there was, in one sense, a putting together -- because they had the financial wherewithal to do it, but there were significant constraints.

Now, some of that may have been anecdotal. It would be a bit unfair to say I recollect the totality of the discussions a long time ago, but it was a case of "Do you know what she is doing?" -- this is Clare Short -- "She is stopping the senior people engaging with the MoD". They probably knew that, and there were good people within DFID who were trying to engage and a Secretary of State who was, in a sense, running her own show, saying this all had to be defined within a UN approach. Her mandate was UN, not UK Government, if that would be my -- I think that was my assessment at the time and I don't think really I have changed in all of that.

So those were points of frustration, and the other issue was the whole funding of it, because people looked at the DFID budget, saw it was massive and didn't quite understand the constraints on that budget in terms of -- 90 per cent, because of the Development Act, had to be committed in a particular way.

Now, it took us a number of years to break that

down, that -- both the logic of that and the mindset of that and I think your previous witness showed the efficacy of that change.

That change was occurring throughout, because the Treasury were then giving tranches of money to DFID, which should then have been -- and probably were being -- put to good use in Iraq. But there were constraints and there was a sea change on the change of Secretary of State, and there was then more marshalling of the co-ordinated and comprehensive components within Whitehall, would be my assessment.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll turn to Sir Lawrence Freedman now. It is going to be quite a long morning, not least for stenographer.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Slow down?

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Once the campaign in Iraq began, how did your role develop?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: How did it develop? Well, in the sense that I would be constantly engaged with military personnel, both in country and as a consequence of visits to Iraq and, again, from recollection, I think I visited in May 2003, October 2003. We had a periodic pattern of visits from ministers. I saw my role as one

getting ground truth of what was happening in Iraq. I made it -- a very major part of my role was, well, listening to what the command chain would be telling me, the senior generals and whoever else, was to talk to the ordinary soldiers on the ground. In fact, they weren't ordinary, they were all of them pretty unique people and exemplary people.

Using techniques like "I do not want a senior officer with me when I'm talking to the soldiers", and my after-visit reports would reflect all of this: one, whether I was being advised at senior level about where the weaknesses were and maybe in terms of equipment supply -- support, supply, or whatever else, but also what the individual serving soldier was saying about the operational welfare package, about, you know, a whole range of issues, about being able to contact families, and so you would pick up the ground truth and then see if you could then fix it.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Would you say that was the main purpose of your visit?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The main purpose of visit? No. Well, there were two elements to it. The purpose was to get the high-level strategic assessment, the feel for what was happening, what the senior commanders were saying, both the GOC and the operational commanders, where their

really worry lines were, but also to pick up that which was beginning to appear in the media. The urban myths that were around about boots melting and people not having combat, the clothing and so on, and just trying to -- really just trying to establish ground truth at the lower level, even the lower tactical level, to understanding the strategic issues as well --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: How did you find the reality matched with what you'd been led to expect.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I don't think I had been led to expect -- I don't understand that.

THE CHAIRMAN: In terms of briefings?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Oh, in terms of briefings?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You were presumably being kept informed reasonably well before you went to Iraq. Was what you found there in line with what --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: No, I think that's why I used the phrase "urban myths". We were reading in the press, because people -- I have many anecdotal stories I can tell about it, and I won't regale you with them, but I had one of my own constituents, a mother, on behalf of her son, complaining about the fact that her boy didn't have size 11 boots, and this went on for weeks and weeks until the point I said, "Well, is he running around barefoot?" to her. Of course, he wasn't. He had bought

his own boots, but she was annoyed that he -- she was saying he had not been issued with the size 11, and he had been.

So the urban myths were there, in terms -- and what was I being informed of? But we're talking over a number of years here --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Well --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Was there success? Were we achieving success? Yes, we were, up until a point, and then it became extremely difficult.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I -- there are very particular things we need to talk about, just to clarify what role you were playing.

First, during the actual military operations in the combat phase, as it were, did you have very particular responsibilities there or did your role really click in after the troops were established in Iraq?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Well, if I'm interpreting that question correctly, it just seems to me it is not the role of ministers to be instructing what the military should be doing on the ground, but to be kept well-informed of what was happening.

Of course we had regular, almost weekly, meetings following the Chiefs of Staff meeting. We had the ministerial meeting, where we would be fully informed,

usually by direct -- with direct connection to theatre, to Iraq, where the senior commanders would be telling us almost what had happened five minutes previous, because an incident may have occurred just as we were assembling the personnel to that meeting.

So being kept fully-informed and being engaged in helping, if there was a need to identify problems that needed resolution, and then to work their way to that resolution, whether it was equipment, supplies or whatever else.

So that would be the way in which the interface would occur and, also, when GOCs were returning at the end of tour, again, invariably, they would come in and brief me on their end-of-tour report, and I would tend to go out and visit when a new GOC was in place and see them at the end of tour.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: If we move on to some specific questions, one of the issues is the degree of stretch on the military and the impact that this was having upon the lives of service personnel.

I'm going to go into more depth with this with the Deputy Chiefs of Defence Staff (Personnel) whom we will be seeing in the next couple of weeks. But to start with, could you explain briefly the concept of the MoD's harmony guidelines?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The concept of it? Well, six -- again six months' deployment, 24 months' doing other things, retraining, re-roling, before we changed the arms plot, rest and recreation, reskilling or whatever -- the whole range of things would happen in that 24-month period and, again, it was very clear that the harmony guidelines were being breached.

There was just no way, in terms of the intensity of effort -- we had been involved in both Iraq and Afghanistan, still engaged in Northern Ireland, still having people in Cyprus, still having people in Sierra Leone and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and still having a significant lay-down in the Falklands.

All of that made it very difficult to meet harmony guidelines, although it varied between the services -- the army under most strain, the Royal Navy under least strain -- and significant key enablers within the army having those specialisms within -- the pinch point deliverers. They would be under quite considerable stretch. So medics, engineers, a raft of people who were under very significant strain. We knew that.

However, what was the solution? That was then something we then had to attend to.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You knew it. Did you know it prior to the invasion of Iraq that this was likely to put

a strain on the guidelines?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I don't recollect being told specifically that, but it wouldn't surprise me that I had been told that. "Understand something, this will put pressure on the system".

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Did you have discussions with advisers about the degree of flexibility that was tolerable -- they're guidelines rather than rules -- but presumably you can take a certain amount of relaxation but, after a while, it becomes intolerable.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Of course, it was an objective rather -- as you say, it was an objective rather than a contract we had. I mean, it was -- we hear a lot about the military covenant. The military covenant, of course, only applied in written form for the army. It didn't apply for the navy or for the RAF or indeed for the Royal Marines, which became very heavily used.

It just seemed to me -- and I would have used this language -- that the military covenant had never been honoured in this country. So it wasn't broken. It was just, as ever, under huge strain.

It certainly wasn't honoured after the First World War or after the Second World War or after Korea or after the Falklands or within more recent memory. The military covenant -- and I could go through what we

inherited as an incoming administration -- a broken-back housing system for personnel, an inadequate overseas welfare package, a whole raft of things that needed to be attended to, but which then had to be set against priorities -- ie, is the resource available?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So the conclusion one could draw from that is that, though these guidelines, these objectives, existed, these were always going to be difficult to honour? In fact, you would have had to have an act of faith to believe they ever would be honoured?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think in the last part that would be the case. I think there were some people who were, of course, getting the full honouring of that commitment, but knowing the stresses and strains that were on a particular post within the armed forces, probably in the main and within the army -- ie, the medics and the engineers and other specialisms -- there was a quite a significant shortfall in the mismatch between what we believed to be the required number and what we were able to recruit, and it is why, increasingly, and at that time, of course -- and it had come out of the Strategic Defence Review, the greater use and utility of the reserves.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We will come on to the question of

reserves later.

One of the consequences of this is the fact of the dangers associated with the operations in Iraq. There were practical and emotional issues for the personnel on operations and back home with their families. We have had very mixed reports of -- from families and military personnel we have spoken to.

Again, it is a big area and we need to stay brief, but could you describe how -- what was done for the welfare of military personnel on tour and for their families? How did these areas develop over the time of the Iraq mission?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Of course, what was happening in theatre became important in terms of the communication means by which the serving personnel could communicate back to their families and, at the beginning of a war phase, and shortly after it, it is very hard to deliver full communication and infrastructure. Indeed, even the military infrastructure, ie in terms of operational demand, was pretty fragile as well.

So you couldn't honour the commitment in terms of the amount of time that each soldier or each serving personnel would have to phone back to their family, but as the lay-down became more established, and investment could then be made in communications, and when we had

the communications infrastructure, we could then improve the availability and the time, then, that individual personnel could spend on that, whether it be through e-blueys, which were obviously through the Internet, or on personal telephone calls, and we increased that from, I think, 20 minutes to half an hour. Again, as a result of pressure, but also because we had the capacity then to do it.

Improvements to the operational welfare package, off the top of my head, I think we were spending round about ú12 million in 2001/2002 financial year. By 2006/2007, it was just short of ú50 million. Now, people say that's not a lot of money, but that's quite a substantial increase and that showed the type of investment we were seeking to make in all of that.

In terms of the home base, well, of course, a lot would depend upon what battle groups would do, what the regiments would do, and I remember visiting the Desert Rats, who had just returned in Germany, and they had what was called a "home rat" system, which was an incredible package of protection for the families in their permanent lay-down in Germany.

So they were kept informed, kept advised. If fatalities and injuries occurred, there was good communication within the home base and the home return

package was very well-thought-out as well, family events and so on.

So it was a bit variable, but it wasn't because others were not putting a lack effort in, it was just that some people put exceptional effort in, and in many ways they funded it themselves, but there was never -- I don't ever recollect a request saying "We need money" and the answer was "No, you are not getting it". If anything, "Let's see the case", and you would get it, because we understood the importance of that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Again, we have to be quite quick on these things but, first, we have raised the question of reliability of troop transport between Iraq and the UK and the impact this had on periods of leave.

Were you aware of that and what were you trying to do about it?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The air bridge, as it was known, was very fragile. We were dealing with aging aircraft, you just need an aircraft to break down for a few hours and the whole thing is thrown into dislocation.

It is why then, increasingly, that the procurement of commercial aircraft was then put in place, but they could break down as well, and there was nothing more frustrating than hundreds of personnel hoping to get home and then being contained somewhere else, whether it

was Cyprus or Oman or Kuwait or wherever their through passage was.

These were real issues, and there were not easy solutions to it. If we had had more time to prove the whole structure of expeditionary warfare and campaigns, which we didn't have, apart from the fact there was a major exercise -- which I don't know whether you have touched upon or not in detail -- the Saif Sareea exercise. 22,500 personnel were put into that exercise. Why? It was to test equipment, it was to test the concepts, but along then came -- well, at the same time, but just in advance of the exercise -- Afghanistan, of course.

Therefore, the switch from "live ex", as they were known as, training exercises, and there was another one -- a major other one to follow on from that to prove some of these things, to find the weaknesses, then to look at solutions, then how do you reprioritise -- we didn't have that luxury, because they were then into war-fighting in Afghanistan, many thousands of miles distant, and then along came Iraq --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One of the particular problems of the air bridge -- I mean, this is essentially a function of the age of our air transports and the limited number of air transports --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Correct --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: -- we had.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Well, the A400 then had not been delivered. I couldn't solve that. I couldn't go down to wherever it was being built and start assembling it, nor could any senior commanders. This was something that industry was delivering to us. It was why then we looked at alternative means, and the C17s then became part of the procurement process -- we first leased and then purchased -- and I was one who had been arguing that "Forget the A400, C17s carry more. It is a very good aircraft, an exceptional aircraft. Let's just buy more". But resources always apply. We had only so much money to spend.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Another issue you have mentioned already in terms of urban myths is some of the shortages of personnel equipment. Again, we have heard a certain amount about this.

In general, was your view that, actually, these things were exaggerated, things like food and toilet paper, we have heard soldiers have to go and borrow them from the Americans and so on. Is that in the category of urban myth?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I always remember General Jackson saying, if a soldier didn't carry his toilet paper in

his pack, he wasn't much of a soldier, and if he didn't keep one in reserve, then he probably needed a bit more training. I don't think that's quite what he said, but you know the point I'm making.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We can check it with him.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: You can check it with him. He would probably be a bit more blunt than I can possibly be.

But there were shortages. There was no question about there being shortages. Part of the problem was that the volumes were being sent out. It was then that concept known as asset tracking, which is where the breakdown was because, again, we had not invested enough in that part of the process, something which Saif Sareea was designed to show up the weaknesses in.

Then the tussle -- the arguments within the department, would have been "Should we invest more in this?" As against what? That was something that, by and large, tended to be pushed aside, the whole asset tracking because it was a higher priority, and I mean, I think we paid a bit of a penalty in that, in terms of the morale aspect of it, because the urban myths I would say was people being sent and deployed in green uniforms. Well, they were, but they were not going out fighting in green uniforms. There was combat gear waiting for them in theatre, and those who were doing

frontline fighting did not go out in green uniforms, and yet, if you read the Daily Mail or others, you would think that was the case.

Camouflage paint being washed off the tanks. It didn't happen. But that was a headline, that was a story.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So there were some things which were exaggerated but other things that were real problems because of --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think there were real (overtalking) -- there was no question there was real issues, and I remember being at the Shaibah base and looking at the ISO containers, of which there were hundreds, and the Quartermaster saying "I don't know what's in them", and that was an asset tracking issue. So what did they do? They just ordered more.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: We have taken some evidence on that which is clearly important.

The last question from me at the moment is about military housing and, again, something you have already alluded to, but we heard from Trevor Woolley that the level of spending on services accommodation had to be reduced in 2004. It was one of the consequences of the discussions that had been going on which, again, we have taken a lot of evidence on.

I am just wondering, given that you have already mentioned the quality of the service accommodation as an issue, how do you manage that sort of issue and balance priorities when it clearly is so important to morale?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Because the scale of fixing the problem was truly immense. It was an inherited disaster, both in single living accommodation and in married accommodation.

Geoff Hoon, to his great credit, it was one of the things that he did, was to shift the resource in advance obviously of both Afghanistan and Iraq from other areas into accommodation, I can't remember the detail on that, but it was quite a significant reprioritisation within the department. But then, other priorities then take place and we had a limited resource. It wasn't an urgent operational requirement.

My own personal view? It should have been. We should have been much more, as a nation, concerned about the quality of housing; as a nation, not as a Ministry of Defence. We had to go out as ministers and justify, "Yes, we are now spending -- whatever the figure was -- £4 billion, but it over ten years".

I come from the slums of Glasgow. I know what it is like to live in the slums. I was witnessing conditions, although I was a youngster by the time I left, that

would have appalled my parents. So it wasn't lack of commitment or understanding or need for change that was missing, it was resource.

The point I made earlier about the military covenant, it had never been honoured in this country and we were trying fix that.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: But nonetheless, in 2004, once again, the more immediate priorities meant that you had to scale back on something which you have described in rather graphic terms.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The question of priorities must be the language of government and, even if more money had been made available -- I used to use that argument; that if someone put £1 billion in front of me on the table, it would have gone like that. We could have spent it almost overnight in Defence, on good issues and right causes.

But that wasn't the way in which we were being funded, other than in terms of the urgent operational requirements and, even then, everything had to be very finely justified and there were constant tussles with the Treasury in all of that as to whether it was a UOR or whether it should come out of core expenditure and then who carried the ongoing responsibility once that UOR was procured.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Roderic, over to you.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would like to ask about Iraqi civilian casualties. A lot of work has been done, research published, by non-governmental organisations and academics, estimating Iraqi civilian deaths, but the British Government's line, which you started taking in Parliament during the conflict, understandably at that time, you said it is impossible to know for sure how many civilians have been injured or killed, but then, after the conflict in June 2003, you told Parliament:

"We have no reliable means of ascertaining the numbers of Iraqi civilians killed."

Then the government stuck parrot-like to this line ever thereafter. We had other ministers, Baroness Symons, 2004:

"No reliable figures for Iraqi civilian deaths since March 2003."

Kim Howells, 2007:

"The government does not collate figures for civilian casualties in Iraq."

And Baroness Kinnock in almost exactly the same words in February of this year.

Why couldn't the government make some settlement of Iraqi civilian deaths when others could do so?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: To what purpose?

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, there was clear public interest. You are constantly being asked in Parliament about it and by saying "We don't have any figures for this", are you not giving the impression that we don't care about it?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: No, I think the line was that we had no reliable means of attesting to this. Remember, the politics of Iraq was both a divided nation here and very hostile opinion abroad. The idea that somehow or other an NGO is the fount of all wisdom and knowledge and accuracy I don't think stands up.

So if we were going to take the figures from external sources, then we would have had to put effort and verification into that. Should we have done so? Perhaps, yes, and I'm not so sure it wasn't being done, but perhaps some of the examination -- because there were various figures being bandied around. There was a whole raft of different agencies and organisations saying different things. Some of them, I would have questioned their motivation as to why they were doing it.

Therefore, the concept of ground truth is absolutely vital in this and, by establishing that fact, wouldn't have altered where we were. Because we couldn't, in one

sense, easily have stopped the civilian casualties because it wasn't being carried out by us on the civilians, it was being carried out by the tribal wars, the family feuds, by the Sunni/Shia factionalism that was taking place, by the Shia on Shia factionalism that was taking place, but we, somehow or other, from a UK perspective, were being vilified, attacked and criticised that we had precipitated all of this.

I have to say I believe that to be a false logic, because that may have happened at any time under Saddam Hussein and, therefore, the establishment of the facts perhaps should have been carried out by -- elsewhere in government. I don't really think it was an MoD function in that sense.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I was asking about government and perhaps you could say, who, elsewhere in government, should have been -- I mean, as part of the coalition in Iraq, we must have had a better means of estimating -- obviously, you can't be precise about this -- these figures than people outside government and, if there is this wide range that you talk about, of figures being bandied about in the public, sometimes with an agenda attached to them, would it not have been helpful if some part of government had been able at least to give a ballpark estimate that we could have some reasonable faith in, in

order to inform public opinion and perhaps counteract the effect of some of the wilder figures --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: But I don't think we were discounting the extent of the problem. I don't think we were saying at any point there weren't mass casualties taking place. What we were not doing was putting a precise or an approximate figure on that. But we were not saying that "These are downright lies and not true". We were just simply saying we had not verified them and we had no means of so verifying them. What was going to happen? How did we verify them?

You have then to go to the hospitals. You then have to put civilians or a military person at that hospital counting the bodies in and the bodies out. So you need force protection to do that. You put people at risk to do that. Is that what people wanted, soldiers or civilians being killed at hospitals? Because they would have been at risk.

Within Iraq, people were killing their own, they were also prepared to kill ours, and we know, of course, that the bombing of the UN headquarters in 2003, the UN withdrew. So the UN may have been the mechanism by which we'd establish true facts, but they were withdrawn.

So there were points at which, yes, it would have

been desirable, but how do you achieve that objective? Do you put other lives at risk to do that? I would say no.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You say it wasn't MoD's job. Should it have been somebody else's job to deal with this?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Unquestionably. Is it something that DFID could have funded? Is it something the FCO should have taken ownership care of? The UN had become engaged -- it was still engaged, but not in terms of presence on the ground -- is it a role that they should have played? Yes. Of course the answer to that is yes.

But what -- the very establishment of the facts would not have changed what was happening. It would have confirmed what everyone knew, but it wouldn't have led to a solution, would have been the hard logic I'd I would have had to have applied to that.

If I had been asked, as the Minister of the Armed Forces, "Are you prepared to put units in every one of the hospitals to count the bodies in and the bodies out?" and it was my choice, "No", would have been my answer.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'll turn straight away to Baroness Prashar and then I think after that we will take a very short break. Thank you. Usha?

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I would like to look at some of the

early difficulties that bereaved families faced as a result of the losses in Iraq.

What planning had been done in advance to ensure that the MoD and other relevant services, like the coroners, were ready to cope with the fatalities that might have occurred?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think there are two elements to that, in terms of where -- where my responsibilities lay, because I had no control over the coroners, that was sitting elsewhere with the government and became an increasing point of frustration, about the delays and so on.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: We will come to that later.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I appreciate that. Even -- just to make the point, even today, one of the things we were trying to fix -- and that was to have fatal accident inquiries being held in Scotland -- has still not happened.

Now, there is something wrong in the delivery of government across the United Kingdom when you agree something has to happen, but it takes you two years to deliver, when you are dealing with human tragedy. So that was an increasing point of frustration.

In terms of what the MoD -- where the MoD's responsibilities lay, I guess we were not good in the

early days because there was a military mindset that -- where they just consumed their own grief, in a sense, that this was just something that happened within the military.

Remember, we had been losing people in Northern Ireland. Even fatalities in Northern Ireland ran into many hundreds and we didn't have a mechanism, which we now have, at that time. The Falklands, the same, and so on, and I think it was part of the military approach that they take the pain and increasingly that -- again, mainly because of family pressure and some public pressure, all of that had to change, but it takes time to change a mindset that has been there for decades, if not centuries, and yes, they did it very rapidly.

We put in place, very early on, the support of families. Again, progressively that improved over time. The work that was then done under the Armed Forces Act -- or Bill at the time and then became the Act -- all of that was laid down, again during my time, 2006/2007 and then delivered in 2008.

Another example of taking time to do it, mainly because we needed, in a sense, legislative structure to do it as well.

The Armed Forces Bill was a very big piece of

legislation, dealing with a whole range of things, military discipline and so on. The point I'm making here is that it wasn't that we were unaware of the problem; we were. Did we seek to fix it? Yes, we did, from about 2002 onwards. Should we have done it better from day one? Well, the answer to that is yes, but that's always the science of hindsight.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: One of the things the families raised with us was the problem of notification of the next of kin of those killed. You were aware of that particular problem?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I became increasingly aware of it. It would be unfair to say that, as a minister, you would say "There is going to be a problem here", because you would have assumed that there was an approach that was sympathetic to that.

I don't think it would have been expected of a minister to probe and to say "What you are going to do here?" You just had to assume, because they had been through decades of losing people, therefore you thought they were good at that.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: When this began to happen, notification as an issue, did you become aware of it, did you take any terms to rectify it?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The answer is yes, when we became aware

of it, because of family pressure, because of public pressure. I mean, this was, in a sense, the first war that had been a 24/7 war, that you were waking up in the morning and another story was on the --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: What steps did you take to rectify it?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: We did set up -- I have to say, the steps I took to rectify it, I think the military almost simultaneously realised it had to become more sophisticated. There was a greater -- I'm not saying they weren't compassionate, but a greater compassionate understanding of what they were then dealing with and, indeed, one of the issues that was then recommended to my area of responsibility was reputation of the armed forces, because it was under huge pressure and strain.

On the one hand, they are our heroes but, on the other hand, somehow or other, the whole lot of them are people who just don't understand things. Well, you can't be a hero and that, and of course, that was part of the mistruth that was being peddled within the media.

The military became -- to repeat the point -- very aware of where the weaknesses were, and I make this point because I had a lot of dealings with families who had lost people. I had done that in Northern Ireland as well. There was a very heavy, ministerial engagement

with families which had never, I would guess, ever happened before, and probably -- for good reasons or not, it had just never happened before in that sense. So we were becoming increasingly aware of the pressures on families, against a hostile political environment and trying to justify a whole range of things in those circumstances.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can I just ask something specific? Because, in 2005, June, I mean, your housing policy changed and regiments could stay longer in housing. Can you give the background --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: No, no, I don't think the housing policy changed, I think it just -- the pace of change was not as rapid. There was still -- we didn't stop doing things in housing. It was just the amount of money that had been committed in terms of housing had changed --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: No, but in the sense that they were not asked to move out of the housing immediately, they could stay longer.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Sorry. There was one example I'm aware of where -- and again, that was during Geoff Hoon's time -- the view was, "Well, this is going to dislocate all the other arrangements, if you let this widow stay in the house", and Geoff Hoon just said "So what? Fix

it", and it was fixed.

I think, to the best of my recollection, we didn't have a deluge of demand in that area. It may have been beneath the surface, but it never became a reality and, if it had been: yes, they can stay there, yes, we have to be sympathetic.

We had been through it before anyway, in terms of Sierra Leone, where we had the partner of the soldier -- the Special Forces soldier who was killed, and the argument was there should be no compensation paid because she was not married. Well, all those rules had to change and we did --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Do you accept more could have been done to anticipate those difficulties earlier on rather wait and respond to problems as they arose.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I don't think we were given the privilege of having that capacity to think of every eventuality. Ministers just -- someone -- if a minister had said "You had better make sure all these things are going to happen. We know how the Daily Mail is going to misreport this and exploit failings", I don't think it is within the capacity of anyone to do that, certainly not ministers who are exceptionally busy dealing with day-to-day, firefighting issues and looking so far ahead to see every eventuality and saying "Get this fixed".

You tended to deal with the issue as it came across your desk. "Does it need fixed? Can we do it? Let's do it".

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: As we heard earlier this week, assumptions are made in planning in terms of what the needs are likely to be.

Should there not have been planning done, in terms of what -- the anticipated problems that might arise from fatalities, in terms of, you know, getting in touch with next of kin, about housing difficulties? I mean, and all these things are part and parcel of the planning assumption, are they not?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Well, it wasn't the first time we had people being killed in action, and yet it had never become an issue. I make the point: hundreds of people had been killed over 38 years in Northern Ireland; it never manifested itself as a problem, certainly not that ministers had been made aware of.

Look, what happened during that period was an intense examination of what was becoming a new reality, a new climate, a new -- a need to have a completely new approach to the way in which we delivered welfare, both to families and to the armed forces personnel. This was not -- I make the point -- the first time we had been in conflict. We had been in conflict in the Falklands and

in Korea, and we can go right back. It is why I keep repeating the point: this wasn't something that was broken, it was something we had to establish as a wholly new way forward, and it wasn't necessarily delivered solely by ministers, although we, on many occasions, had to right it, to approve it. It was delivered by the system itself. It realised: a big sea change happening here, new attitudes have to apply.

You have a generational issue, people saying "In my day, this is what we did". Well, this is not your day, this is today. That was what was happening. That was the dynamic at play.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let's break for five minutes.

(12.31 pm)

(Short break)

(12.37 pm)

THE CHAIRMAN: Welcome back. I would like to start us off again with really a fairly broad question about the security sector reform.

We know you visited Iraq and had many visits in March 2005, and things had changed, and not for the better, in the southeast. John Reid becomes Secretary of State for Defence after the election in May 2005, and one of the first things he does on taking office is to call on Ronnie Flanagan, who is then

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, to review the policing contribution and, about the same time, the lead responsibility in Whitehall moves to the Ministry of Defence from the Foreign Office. I think it is common ground and we have had a lot of evidence, that policing in post-conflict situations is one of the hardest things to do and get right.

You, yourself, have a great deal of background in that, policing, not least in the policing/military interface. So I wondered, was both the setting up of the Flanagan Review and then dealing with it after Ronnie reports, something that was very much in your sights?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Absolutely, and it never went out of my sight. It did go back to the time when I was minister in Northern Ireland, at the time of Kosovo, when the request came that we needed armed policing capability to work alongside the military, ie our equivalent of a Carabinieri or something of that mode, and why was it RUC being asked? Because there wasn't a capacity within the UK to do that. Not that there weren't armed police officers, there were, but they were not trained in that way.

We did agree that component to go out to Kosovo and it then proved to me something which I didn't realise

I was going to be charged with, in terms of understanding and potential delivery on -- later on in my future career.

The whole question of capacity building, as you say, is something that has been examined. We have to make our mind up whether we can deliver or we can't and, if we can deliver, then it is not going to come from the civilian police.

There was an incident where ACC White, who was an ex-RUC officer, was working in Iraq, as part of the international delivery, who criticised a comment made by a senior police officer in this country that they were not going to send civilian police officers out because it was too risky. He made the comment "What are police officers for if they don't take risks?"

Again, that gave me another indication of some of the issues which were at stake.

If you do police mentoring and police training, you have a police trainer there. It doesn't matter whether it is someone from the Carabinieri or the Gendarmerie or, I would say, our equivalent in terms of the Royal Military Police, which is, I think, the second largest, if not the largest, armed police force in the country, in the UK.

You then need force protection, and the multipliers,

depending on the circumstances, can be quite significant. So one mentor can mean anything up to 14 protectors.

So what is it the army do, what does the MoD do? They say "This is very expensive in human resource to deliver in this, so should we be doing it?"

So, therefore, we have never really delivered it with full commitment. We have never been charged in any real way by a strong commitment, because the FCO, who has ownership of the delivery of that part of capacity building -- I'm not saying they weren't aware of the need for it, there was just no intensity of effort in finding a solution.

What was happening in Iraq, of course, was that much of the police training was taking place outside of Iraq in Jordan or in other areas, away from the difficult areas, for the very simple reason that you reduce the force protection component. But there is then a weakness inbuilt into that, because best training should be done close to the point of need and you can be out on the street, you can be showing them what has to happen in the circumstances.

Now, that, it was very clear to me, was a big weakness in terms of capacity building. SSR, the one thing that you need to get fixed early is your justice

delivery, prisons, your court system, and you need people apprehending the bad guys.

You can have the people apprehending the bad guys; if you can't put them in prison or you can't give them due process of law, there's no point apprehending them. So police then -- because police are trained to apprehend the bad guys, but then, if there is no follow-through, what's the point of doing it?

So, therefore, the intensity of effort in delivering of SSR, I believe was not fully supported -- it may well have been understood, but was not well-supported, and I still think today we talk about, "Yes, we are doing a lot of police training". Are we, to the extent that is required, as against the objective, rather than just saying we are doing it because we need to say something about it?

THE CHAIRMAN: It is a very important and difficult question. It is not -- and you must tell us -- simply a matter of policing, it is about the whole of a justice system, building from scratch.

But I have got one policing dimension I would like to ask you. We have heard about the systemic problem with the Great Britain police force -- and I deliberately say Great Britain -- being multiple and not capable of taking direction from central government,

risk and force protection cost, but there is also the question of the applicability of the concept of the unarmed civilian in uniform, which is the Great Britain concept of policing. Is it transferable into failed states post-conflict situations at all?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: In a word, no.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I mean, I could expand on it, but --

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that says it.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: You cannot do it because the threat level is -- that's why you have every police officer armed in Northern Ireland, because of the nature of the threat.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'll move swiftly on, with time against us. Martin.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to ask about the question of treatment of the injured personnel. The House of Commons Defence Committee report in February 2008 described the clinical care for servicemen and women seriously injured on operations as second to none, and we will be hearing in a later session from a former Surgeon General about how this standard of care has been achieved, but what do you see as the main lessons that the MoD has learned from the treatment of those injured in Iraq?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Of course, again, as part of the generational change that had taken place, the collapse of military hospitals, or the disbanding and closure of military hospitals because the level of need had changed over time -- and we did, again coming out of the Strategic Defence Review and as part of the ongoing process in advance of both Afghanistan and Iraq, establish what we were trying to do in terms of quality healthcare, because personnel were still being injured and, obviously, for those who were injured coming back, and we needed both the care within the hospital sector and then you needed the aftercare.

It became very clear early on that there was a problem at Selly Oak. It wasn't the question of the quality of the medical care. It was the fact that they were in mixed wards. You had soldiers who had been attended to by civilian nurses, civilian doctors and in the next bed there may well be a civilian injured person or old person.

That became a big issue. My instinct initially was -- and this is a personal view -- that if I was injured, I just wanted the best medical care. I just wanted to survive. I think there was -- that was the kind of thought-process around it, "Let's make sure that it is the very best" and it was. There was no

question of the quality of the care.

But, as a result of a number of visits, ministerial visits, it became abundantly clear we needed to do other things. So progressively, the number of military personnel, in terms of the medical care, changed to the extent that -- and I don't have the current picture -- I think there are exclusive exclusively military wards and military wings of the hospital.

The rehabilitation end, of course, was exclusively military. Headley Court, it was only military people who were there, in terms of rehabilitation, but of course, that was the good bit of what we were doing, so, therefore, it wasn't criticised. It was only the bad bit that came under -- probably correctly -- the critical scrutiny.

So again, perhaps similar to previous answers I have given, we had to learn as we went along, and yet, it was not unique. We had been treating injured personnel in that -- in those facilities. It was because of Iraq, because there was a hostility to what we were doing in Iraq, so, therefore, we were uncaring, we were indifferent. No, we weren't. We were actually learning how better to do it --

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: When you left, were there still specific improvements you felt needed to be made?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: It wasn't my immediate responsibility. It was the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State who had direct responsibility in that but, again, all ministers took a very close interest. We all carried out visits, we spoke to families, we spoke to patients as well.

I remember having quite heated discussions with one or two of the patients about why they were -- I remember one boy, who had lost his sight, saying why was there not a specialist in theatre who could have treated his eyes. I said "You go to other bits of the United Kingdom and you will find there are not eye specialists anywhere else".

Finding an eye specialist is quite difficult. We may want it, but you can't necessarily get people to join up to do it. So there were going to be gaps in what we did, because the military is a voluntary obligation, or a voluntary decision, and if specialists do not join, if the neurosurgeons don't join or the limb specialists don't join, we then have a problem.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'll turn to Baroness Prashar.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Thank you.

A number of families expressed concern that the lessons identified in inquiries that followed upon fatality were not learned or applied in order to prevent others.

Was there a system in place to ensure that lessons were learned and applied in order to prevent repeat occurrences?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Yes, I think part of the weakness and part of the justified criticism, although it was hard to remedy the criticism, was the length of time it took to learn the lesson.

The Boards of Inquiry would be established, what actually happened. You then charge very capable people to look at an event. They then discover other aspects to the event. They then discover more. It becomes like a multi-layered onion, and then attribution of blame, if necessary, courts martial came into all of this -- potential courts martial came into all of this. Were there systemic failures? Was it equipment failures? Was it people failures? Was it training failures?

So what looked like a simple incident which had resulted in a tragedy could have many aspects to it and Boards of Inquiries then could take an inordinate amount of time, and then we had the coroner's inquest as well, which then would probe other aspects or similar aspects in a different way.

That was terrible for families. How do we fix it? How do you establish the truth so you learn the proper lesson so you do the proper fix?

I have got to say there are times when you can't fix the problem. If it has been an accidental discharge by someone who kills a colleague, how do you stop that? But you have to probe that, you have to find out: was there anything else in there? But you will not stop fatalities in war. It was part of the hard lesson we had -- the hard reality we had to deal with. But how do you minimise it?

Friendly fire was a very good example in all of that. We could put blue-on-blue incidents, as they were known as, you could put any amount of technical systems in place, you could learn there was a failure in identification systems. Human mistakes still occur. The pilot of an aircraft may still press that trigger.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: I mean, was it a question that lessons were learned but there were difficulties in applying them, or was it that the department was approaching these cases on a case-by-case basis without really referring to the overall --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think there were two things. I think what did happen would be that -- again, military commanders had a huge amount of knowledge and expertise and, if they, before a Board of Inquiry came to a conclusion, or even the coroner's inquest, they may say something needs to be done and they would do it.

If it was a case of failing in training or whatever else, they would do it. They would pick up very quickly on that. So there was a kind of self-remedy, self-remedial process, that would -- but you would need to take more expert advice on that from military commanders, as to what they could and wouldn't do in those circumstances.

Military commanders operate on the basis of 110 per cent and more duty of care their people and, if something happens which results in an unnecessary death, then that weighs heavy. They have to find an answer to it. Meanwhile, there is another process underway which is the formal process, the Board of Inquiry, if it was a particular type of fatality and, unquestionably, the coroner's inquests.

So it was very difficult for families in those circumstances, trying to explain to them the complexity of all of that and, meanwhile, anything could be written about that -- I don't want to keep going on about the press, but the press just need to say what they believe to be the case, which is not necessarily the truth.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: It is not so much the press, but what the families have said to us.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: What I'm saying is, who feeds the frenzy? It does tend to be the media. I'm not saying

deliberately. I'm saying --

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In this instance, it is not the frenzy, it is the families who actually experience inquiries and made comments to us that, in their view, the lessons were not being learned. What you are explaining to me is the complexity of it.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think we -- there needs to be an evidential base to make, and we need to know what it was a particular family was saying as to what lesson was not learned.

I think in an earlier comment I said you may establish facts, but you cannot necessarily fix the problem, and it may -- it may not just be human, it may actually be mechanical or equipment-based or whatever else. There isn't a solution to it; ie, a rifle jamming, a piece of equipment jamming, or an involuntary -- you know, delivery of a charge-out of a weapon because of some mechanical weakness in it that only occurs very, very infrequently.

So I would need to know precisely what the complaint was and that is what we did. We would take every family's concern and -- I make this point -- the Secretary of State, myself and others, we would meet the families, we had to share as best we could some of that pain and we had to take a lot of criticism and try to

best explain it, and that would happen with the military as well in terms of the family support, the visiting officers, those who were charged by the military to carry out that interface with families and remembering those people are not trained counsellors. Okay?

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Martin?

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: During your visits to Iraq, did soldiers on the ground express to you their concerns about the level of protection the Snatch Land Rover was offering against IEDs?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: To be honest, I don't remember that ever being said to me as a result of a visit but I was aware of what was that concern. Snatch Land Rovers were still being used and they will be in use after we are out of Afghanistan and after we are out of Iraq because -- and I think we have heard the evidence -- they had a specific utility. You cannot take heavily armoured vehicles into a built-up -- closely built-up areas, and that was brought home to me by an Afghan friend, who said to me, when I was visiting Afghanistan, about the Germans: he said, "The difference between you, the British, and the Germans is that you take risks to meet us and talk to us. The Germans sit in their heavily armoured vehicles and the people of Kabul think the Russians have returned."

So how do you win hearts and minds. You have to take risks and as the threat changed, it was quite clear that commanders on the ground realised that they needed a different type of response. But in many ways that has to be driven by the military imperative: What do the professionals actually want, and then can we deliver? And again I think the amount of effort that was thrown into delivering armoured vehicles -- and even as we did that, some of them were found not to have proper efficacy: their axles kept breaking, they were not properly up-armoured for the new threat. So you could put a new piece of equipment in and it could be taken out by a new threat.

The other aspect that we see to this is, it doesn't matter how armoured the vehicle is, if you can get that soldier dismounted and shoot him, then that's the type of insurgency that we are dealing with. They can move quickly, we have to move slowly because we have to build up our protection, and we can't deliver it as quickly overnight as they can change their tactics.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to spend a little time on the use of reserve forces. So, Lawrence?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes. There were concerns, as you know, about the 14 days' notice to report that some

reservists had for Telic 1. Could you start by just explaining how this situation had arisen and the lessons that were learned from the experience with Telic 1?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: In terms of the notice to --

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Reservists.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: The notice given to reservists?

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, to report.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I don't know if this answers the question, but in the build-up to Telic 1 we had -- I can't remember the figures off the top of my head but it was, I think, something like -- I may actually have the figures. But there was notice put out to -- although I probably won't be able to find it quickly. There was 14,500 notices -- no, I apologise, there were 14,500 reservists used during the whole campaign. I thought I had the figures on that.

But there was a number of thousand of notices sent out. I think it was 3,500 army, 500 navy and something equivalent in the RAF, and the notices which were sent out, they were always going to be substantially greater than the ones who would actually be used because of a whole lot of reasons why people would then not be suitable, either (inaudible) their own family or circumstances or whatever, or whether they were not fit to be deployed. So you had to put a greater demand out

than you were going to use, a bit like the number of people you recruit and the number of people you actually get into the training environment. It is always greater because of the failure rate.

We would put a lot of effort into the reserves because they were absolutely essential to what we were trying to do. I think I'm maybe repeating the same explanation, that we learned as we went along a bit in this, because again we had never sought to test the conclusions of the strategic defence review up until the point of Saif Sareea, and then that was overtaken by events, ie the real events of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Also in terms of -- the aftercare package for reserves was not good. There were good reasons for that sometimes because they are individuals, they don't have a family -- they don't have a regimental home to go to; they go back into their civilian life.

All of that changed as well. We put in place very early on the whole reserves mounting and training exercise. They went through the same pipeline as regulars, so that they were integrated in pre-deployment as well as at the time of deployment.

In term of notice of callout, again I would have to check this but I think we were constrained by law in all of this. I think there was a kind of legal format to

that, you know, in terms of the notice of callout because there was also legal protection for those in terms of the demand placed upon them.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Out of all this learning, was that the concept of intelligent mobilisation? Can you explain what this concept is and how it was applied?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I have never heard the phrase but I can understand why someone would use it.

Yes, well, that's what the military does; it tries to operate in an intelligent way, and there is no point -- other than you have to mobilise almost instantly because the threat is at the gate and you do not have time to put other processes in place, then you should do it as intelligent a way as possible, ie to minimise the friction. The worst type of soldier is the unhappy soldier, surely, and therefore it doesn't matter whether that person is a regular or a reservist, they should be treated properly as they are mobilised.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Lastly, Bob Ainsworth mentioned a review of reserve forces which would have been ongoing in the latter part of your time as Minister of Armed Forces. Could you tell us about this review and its key findings?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I think there was an earlier review as well and that was about the re- -- in some ways the

rebrigading of the reserve component, mainly the army component but not exclusively so.

It was about the utilisation of the reserves and the closer integration of the reserves with their regional or local regimental structure.

Going back to an earlier comment, I think part of the military mindset was: the reservists are just not up to it; we are getting people who we have got to over man-manage.

But very quickly the experience told people that that was not the case. One, they were tremendous, enthusiastic people. They did need better training and there were problems about choking off a lot of the training days for the reservists because of resources, an insufficiency of resources, which caused problems.

So review was looking at all of those lessons to be learned. How do you make the reserves better focused, greater utility and more rapid utility and therefore instant capability in those circumstances?

So the weekend soldier, which had happened, and was experienced during, a bit unfairly, I think -- that comment would be applied during the Cold War period -- had in principle been written out in terms of the SDR, had never been tested, was beginning to be tested, when along came reality, and then intelligent mobilisation

then would have come into play.

What have we done wrong here? And pre-deployment training would be one of them, the early integration, and then back -- in terms of the permanent interface between regular and reserve when they were not active there had to be greater integration. So that meant reductions, it meant a whole new structure coming into play, and I think during my time, where we did one major restructuring of the reserves, almost universal acceptance of what we delivered, not because of what I had done but because of the intensity of effort from the reserve part of the Ministry of Defence, the effort they put in in consultation, explanation and justification for the changes.

Normally, in the House of Commons, when a defence minister announced something, there was an army against you. On reserves there was a pip squeak because of the work that the reserves and the Ministry of Defence had put into getting it right, and the same was happening with the second iteration.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just finally on the question of the reserves, because of Iraq and also Afghanistan, we have seen a far greater use of reserves in operations. I just wonder your views on the significance of this, including the relationship between the armed forces and

the wider society. Do you see them as having more sort of a bridging role, in addition to their actual functional role, with a greater degree of integration?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I'm a wee bit away from that now. I'm three years away from it now. It is clearly something that the new review of the defence lay-down in this country will have to attend to. We cannot deliver the regular strength that we could in previous decades.

I inherited a notional figure in the SDR of 108,500. We never met it. We were always about 6,000 to 7,000 short. The reality was the regular strength should have been about 102,000. We almost got to optimum manning at 104,000 but we could not have gone into conflict, into even medium-scale or beyond that, without the reserves, the 30,000-odd reserve component.

And why? Because they deliver specialisms, they were the comms people, they were the medics, they were the engineers, they were the intelligent corps, they were the very areas where we had problems in recruiting in the regulars.

So, whether it is bridging or whether it is integrated, there were fundamental changes over my period. I think we will see more development in that area -- would be my guess in this.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to invite any general reflections on the lessons from Iraq in just a moment but I think, Roderic, you have got just one you want to take.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Bob Ainsworth told us that, with respect to bereaved families, we simply weren't getting it right and we met representatives of these families and they too have been critical, including about the difficulties they had getting information about what had happened to their relatives who had died in the conflict.

What would your response be to that?

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I mean, I think I have accepted that we were not getting things right. I think at the early stages that there was a mismatch between expectation and delivery, and I have tried to explain some of the reasons for that. But did we quickly, certainly within MoD terms, change, maybe not quickly in terms of family perception, change? I think we did.

Could we have predicted this? And I do repeat this point: this was not the first time we had had fatalities. It goes back to this mindset. 700 soldiers had died in 38 years, I think is the figure or thereabouts, in Northern Ireland.

Why did that not manifest itself? And therefore it wasn't a case of people sleeping on the job or being

indifferent, it is because something changed, and what changed was the intensity of scrutiny that was going on into that particular conflict and is now going on into the conflict in Afghanistan.

We are in a different world now, is my assessment, and that means fundamental change in understanding and even to the extent of trying to predict it as best you can, but certainly, if you can't, in delivery. If you are getting it wrong, identify the problem and fix it.

There was another issue, of course, with families and that was that if you conceded failings, we are in a compensation culture as well and therefore you could have a lawyer saying, "Be careful in your wording here," because there is another element to this and I give the benefit of my experience as -- we established the position of Victims Minister in Northern Ireland to deal with the legacy in Northern Ireland and I was able to use some of that experience in my role as Minister for the Armed Forces.

But the ownership of grief is not unanimous within a family. There are tensions. And you can have the long-term partner wanting one thing in terms of the grief and the mother of the lost son wanting something else, and you can have splits between husbands, fathers and mothers about what should happen. Some want to move

on, some want more answers.

That creates unbelievable pressures on those who are trying to deal with all of that, and sitting alongside that is then the compensation culture, and the legal process out there, the ambulance chasers, as they are known as, going out trying to find cause to, in a sense, exploit the grief.

I may sound hard and harsh in all of this but my experience tells me that it is very wearing on ministers and those who have the interface with the grieving family. They are not trained to do that. Ministers are not trained to be counsellors, they are trained to be something else, and yet the expectation is they then have to meet all those families, and that is not difficult -- sorry, that is very difficult when you are being accused of causing the death. And the same applies, I would suggest, to -- in some cases, to visiting officers as well.

So I'm saying that this is very -- again, I'm repeating the point: it is in one way easy to make the accusation, much more difficult to deliver a solution.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: In a word are you saying that the compensation culture led to this lack of transparency about circumstances --

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: I'm not saying it was the single

motivation. I mean, I gave it as an example. It could well be there. I don't want to sort of highlight individual cases, of which there have been some quite intensive inquiry -- into which there have been some intensive inquiries. But, until the inquiry comes to a conclusion -- and I'm not talking about this one but we can think of others where there have been inquiries into events -- the demand is still out there for answers from the ministers, from the Ministry of Defence, before there is a conclusion. So you have to hold off and if you say something wrong or go over a line, you create another crisis in the handling of all of that.

We now have an inquiry culture. It is as simple as that, and I do pay tribute to all that you have been trying to do.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't want to prolong it but there was one strand in all our meetings with the bereaved families that did come through, which was that there was a feeling that when someone was a victim of a friendly fire incident, the defensive barriers were higher and more difficult to get through in terms of information, whatever. I don't know whether that was the experience of ministers in the MoD.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Yes. I think I kind of alluded to that slightly in terms of the complexity of friendly fire,

and it could be the negligent discharge of a weapon, and the instinct of the military family is to do the wraparound -- the person who did that -- as much as trying to, as best they can, look after the after-effect, and, I mean, I don't have a military background. As I say, I kind of became a bit native, grew into it, over six and a half years and began to understand the buddy-buddy culture and the need to say, "We sort our own problems out," and if you do too much, "You civilians, you ministers, you commentators, you destroy centuries of tradition."

I really genuinely think that the military mindset has changed dramatically in my time because of the experience, and all credit to them. They are some -- they are the best people around in our society, I would guess -- apart maybe from diplomats.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: He isn't one.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: He isn't one? No.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know if you want to add further reflections because you had such a long period of direct experience and responsibility from the Iraq enterprise.

RT HON ADAM INGRAM: Well, I mean, I remain an unreconstructed supporter of what we did, the liberal intervention. I pose a question: was it right to do so? My answer to that would be yes. You have to, at all

times, question your judgment and your conscience. I have never deviated from it. Is Iraq a better place because of what we did? My answer to that would be yes. Who delivered that? I would say the brave men and women of Her Majesty's armed forces. Did they make a difference? Yes, they have. Are Iraqis living in peace and potential democratic future for them? Yes, they are, because of the sacrifice and because they made a difference. And alongside that would be all of the civilians, who tend to be forgotten, many of whom also put their lives on a similar line in taking risks on behalf of that fundamental change.

So I mean, I just -- you wouldn't expect otherwise, but I pay genuine and sincere tribute to the members of Her Majesty' armed forces and those who serve within the Ministry of Defence and it was a privilege to have been able to be a minister for six and a half years with them.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I thank our witness, Rt Hon Adam Ingram.

We resume at 3 pm on Monday next, when we are going to hear evidence from Vice-Admiral Peter Wilkinson, Air Marshal David Pocock and Lt Gen Mark Mans, who held senior roles relating to military personnel from 2005 through to the end of the campaign in Iraq.

With that, I'll close the session.

(1.17 pm)

(The Inquiry adjourned until Monday 19 July 2010 at 3.00 pm)