

**DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL FORCES 2005-2009 (DSF3)**

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Good afternoon and welcome. This session we are welcoming DSF3.

This session is being held in private because we recognise that much of the evidence we wish to cover will be sensitive within the categories set out in the Inquiry's protocol on sensitive information, for example on grounds of national security, international relations or defence capability. We may also wish to refer to 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.

If other evidence is given during the hearing which neither relates to classified documents nor engages any of the categories set out in the "Protocol on sensitive information", that evidence would be capable of being published, subject to the procedures set out in the Inquiry Secretary's letter.

Can I also add that the Inquiry is seeking advice from the MoD and other 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.

We recognise that witnesses are giving evidence based on their recollection. We cross-check that against the papers to which we have access.

I remind each witness on every occasion that they will later

be asked to sign a transcript of their evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given is truthful, fair and accurate. For security reasons on this occasion we won't be releasing copies of this transcript outside the Inquiry's offices upstairs here. You, of course, will be able to access it whenever you want to review it.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].  
Could you just perhaps to start with give us an indication of where Special Forces were based, what numbers, when you took up post in [REDACTED] 2005?

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Because you were DSF for the whole while?

**DSF3:** Yes. Well, we had a taskforce in Baghdad which was already up and running when I arrived and I guess numbers [REDACTED] odd, maybe a bit more including the air component. At least that's certainly what it became.

We had representation down to Basra, there was a liaison officer from that taskforce who would go down to Basra when required, and we had a number of other commitments worldwide including a [REDACTED] domestic commitment.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** And how were their roles decided? What was the process, within Iraq obviously?

**DSF3:** When I arrived they were already engaged on countering threats to coalition mission success in Iraq, which manifested itself in contributing to the effort against Sunni extremists in Baghdad in the main.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** That was Operation [REDACTED]?

**DSF3:** It became Operation [REDACTED] and we were part, as you know, of an American taskforce. The forces were under my operational command and I exercised operational command on

behalf of the CJO -- the Chief of Joint Operations -- and then they were placed under the tactical control of Com JSOC, who was General Stan McChrystal.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** It sounds to the lay outsider a pretty complex bit of knitting, but in practice it worked?

**DSF3:** It was absolutely fine, yes.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So this operation had been going a couple of years already by the time ...

**DSF3:** It was already a relatively mature operation. It developed then over the next three years or so that I was DSF in various ways, you know, we developed our capabilities in certain areas and refined the way we did business.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So part of the question presumably was which groups produced the greatest threat, and again I'm interested in how you moved, focusing on one group to another, or taking on more groups?

**DSF3:** When I first arrived -- and it's difficult now to remember all the names and characters involved, but essentially we were looking at a range of Sunni extremist threats which was already delivering violence in Baghdad. AQ were growing into an ever more powerful force and elements like Ansar Al Sunna were coalescing around AQ which over the next few years became the foremost threat and that consisted of indigenous Sunni elements and an ever growing number of foreign fighters.

I think, as an observation, one of the ironies of the war perhaps from the British point of view was that whilst it didn't seem to those of us who had been involved in the strategy to counter the malign effects of Islamist extremism before this war, it didn't strike us as being perhaps the next logical move after Afghanistan. The irony was that AQ saw it as a window of

opportunity and went for it and we know very well from<sup>1</sup> [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** This is an interesting issue. If we can just sort of unpack it a bit from where you started the observation. We've looked at the role of who were considered the biggest threats in terms of WMD and Iraq wasn't at the top. So in terms of where terrorism might be likely to emerge again, Iraq wouldn't have been at the top. Just to note, as it were, where would you have said would have been the next important place to look?

**DSF3:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So, as I say, it wouldn't necessarily have been Iraq. In terms of the effort against Islamist extremism, I mean in effect Saddam Hussain was keeping the lid on that. Whether he was likely to, under the radar, provide a bit of support, who knows?

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So what you are then saying is, in a way, the coalition perhaps as a target of opportunity for AQ,

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<sup>1</sup> The witness described and critiqued AQ tactics in Iraq.

[REDACTED]

**DSF3:** Well, I think it was a happy accident that they were defeated in that way. I don't think it was part of the plan.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** No, I'm sure it wasn't part of the plan.

**DSF3:** On either side!

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** On either side. I mean, because it is an interesting commentary on what happened.

**DSF3:** Well I think it is an important aspect of this war. You know, that was the conflict within a conflict which had global implications.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** But when you are coming in in [REDACTED] 2005 as Director of Special Forces, so you have a view, and [REDACTED] 2006, do you see that as part of the equation?

**DSF3:** Yes. Yes, absolutely. But, the mission of taskforce [REDACTED] as it became was very clear: it wasn't primarily a [REDACTED] strategy against Al Qaeda and Islamist extremism, it was designed as I say to combat threats to coalition mission success in Iraq. What became clear was that it should become part of a [REDACTED] strategy and indeed the sort of inter-agency cooperation that we achieved in the context of that particular operation I believed very strongly should have been extended [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Coalition or UK, or both?

**DSF3:** Well, UK/US primarily and UK/US and host nation in every case. Sadly this didn't perhaps meet the aspirations of other members of the inter-agency community, so we had to instead go

about it in the normal way of allowing the thing to develop on its own logic whilst doing what we could in the military to take it forward. But I'm sorry, I digress slightly.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Well, no, not particularly, I think it's very interesting. I mean David KilCullun developed these ideas of global insurgency. Was this the sort of thing you are referring to?

**DSF3:** I think we were dealing with the reality of what we were looking at, which was that AQ's influence extended into various areas [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and that implied the agencies working as a team rather than as individual agencies, which was not without its challenges, of course, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] but I felt that we could have achieved things a little quicker. In the end, of course, one has to be pragmatic in these things and move forward at the pace that people are comfortable with, which is what we've subsequently done I think.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Just to get the timing right, when did Special Forces switch from targeting former regime elements to AQ?

**DSF3:** I don't think there was a formal switch. There was an array of threats and we were primarily going after the Sunni threats of which, as I say, Ansar Al Sunna was one of the groupings. AQ was beginning to sort of emerge as the major player, there were other minor groupings, and I can't remember the precise details, but over the months the clear emerging dominant threat was that which was coalescing around AQ.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Just moving on, can I ask you about the two hostage crises that took place while you were DSF. One was the Christian Peacemaker Team and the other was the five British nationals kidnapped in Baghdad. Could you perhaps explain in each case the role that Special Forces played?

**DSF3:** Well, [REDACTED] where a requirement unfortunately emerged, clearly we would be ready to devote resources to that in accordance with the priority, against other priorities, and clearly it was a relatively high priority to secure the release of these people if we possibly could. Of course the people involved were related to the threat networks that we were looking at anyway. So it was, if you like, a natural extension of the job and also one of particular national interest.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** And whose choice ultimately is it as between competing priorities -- as you had a lot on your plate in and around Baghdad. Is it the National Component Commander, is it London, is it the Corps commander in Baghdad? How does it work or is it a dialogue or a polylogue between them?

**DSF3:** They all have an input and what might not be so well understood in the SF environment is that very often the whole thing effectively gets generated from the initiative of those on the ground, you know: they see an opportunity, they develop it, they report it and say, "We are on to something here, do you want us to follow it up?", and you say, "Yes, do it", having of course got all the right clearances. The questions you ask at the time are: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

But the bottom

line is, if it is desirable, you know, people will do their very best to achieve it. [REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So against that backdrop, how were these two crises handled?

**DSF3:** On the Christian Peacemakers, I believe that [REDACTED]

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So that one ended happily. The other one less so.

**DSF3:** Well the problem with the other one as I remember, and of course the details are a little hazy at this distance, was that

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So you weren't particularly looking in general at Shia insurgents?

**DSF3:** Well, we were more later on, and at the time actually that that incident happened, we were starting to take on some of



the Shia targets, but they were more problematic because of where they were, and because of the politics.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So were they inside Sadr City?

**DSF3:** The linkages were inside Sadr City. Whether the hostages were or not was not completely clear. In fact there were a number of possibilities as to where they were.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** And at this time you were discussing with JAM the deal and so on, would that have had any effect on our ability to deal with this?

**DSF3:** Well, our freedom to go into Sadr City was never completely straightforward. (a) it was a very, very difficult operation in that environment, the threat was really quite serious, and (b) you know, one had to be mindful of the politics and I think, as others have alluded to in this Inquiry, the political angle on the Shia side was more complex.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** The basic problem was that this was an extremely hostile environment?

**DSF3:** Yes and it was very difficult and, you know, the core task of Taskforce [REDACTED] was against a series of Sunni AQ networks. We had very well-developed [intelligence] pictures of what those networks looked like, and where their connections extended, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We never had that degree of insight into the Shia networks, not nearly to the same extent.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So when this particular hostage crisis emerged, even if you had wanted to it would have been quite difficult to give it a high priority?

**DSF3:** We were as keen to achieve a successful outcome for that

crisis as we were for the other one, and indeed any one. I mean, you know, we did desperately want to be able to deliver a happy outcome to that and, had the opportunity arisen, we would have certainly gone for it, given the appropriate political clearance. It didn't work out.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Thanks very much.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Okay, thank you. You part-answered it just now I think, but it's the question of the level of Special Force engagement in Basra throughout. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. You never had more than a liaison officer down there from time to time, until I think you had a whole [REDACTED] in there later. That balance, was that because of the overall coalition strategy which was very much centered on Baghdad and Anbar or was it a lack of opportunity or what?

**DSF3:** Well, I would say in the early days, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] of course their focus then was on WMD.

Later on, as I say, we were pitching our effort at the campaign level, which is exactly, I would suggest, where Special Forces should be engaged, you know, we need to be operating at the operational and strategic level. It's a resource that is limited and it needs to deliver the maximum effect.

The other critical factor was that by working alongside our US counterparts we had access to all sorts of enablers which were actually essential in allowing us to do our business.

[REDACTED] which were non-existent in Basra. ISTAR, and excuse me for using the abbreviation but I think you are familiar with it --

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** We have come to learn this, yes.

**DSF3:** -- in particular unmanned aerial vehicles, and we had a

████████████████████ and access to US fixed wing aeroplanes, but the package only really came together in a satisfactory way by being under the US umbrella.

So without those enablers and also without a very clear vision of the ██████████ that we were after, doing business in Basra would have been extremely difficult. But I can assure you that frequently the question was asked of me, "Is there more you could be doing in Basra or in the south east?" and the answer was, "Yes, but you've got to understand that if we do it in the south east we will be working at a much, much lower tempo and we will leave a gap in what is being achieved in Baghdad, and instead of doing ██████████ operations, ██████████ ██████████ against a very, very serious threat to the coalition mission, we will be achieving a fraction of that, so give us the strategic priorities". But my advice was we were achieving more in Baghdad.

Now early in my tenure I did suggest that we might provide an SF capability in ██████████.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Yes. I'm in danger of having led this off into not a tangent but something that may come in later on. I'm just tempted by the thought of if you had been GOC MND(SE) rather than DSF you would have had the same conversation the other way around maybe.

**DSF3:** Well, I spoke to the GOCs. It was a question of what we could deliver for them that they actually needed. The circumstances facing the GOCs differed. In one particular GOC's time, for example, it was very much hands off anyway, so even if we had wanted to, or even if we had been in a position to deliver strike operations in Basra, he would not have been asking us to do that. At other times there was a real appetite for doing something in Basra and we responded to that by

producing taskforce [REDACTED], which actually was not that much smaller in toto than taskforce [REDACTED], when you added in the various bits. It was certainly a significant taskforce and achieved some interesting results.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** We will come back to [REDACTED], that belongs to Professor Freedman.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** A sense of propriety!

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** So I will turn to Sir Roderic Lyne. Rod?

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** I would just like to come back to the experience of having our Special Forces under the tactical control of the American general in charge of JSOC. What were the sort of practical problems that one encountered from this? Were there policy or doctrine differences between us? Overall, what lessons did our Special Forces learn from this experience over a number of years?

**DSF3:** I would say that we found it reasonably easy to integrate into the US command and control structures because we have an enduring close relationship with our colleagues from JSOC. We know them as individuals and as very often close friends. I developed a close relationship with General McChrystal during my time as DSF when he was Com JSOC and I think we were looking at the problem very much in the same way. So it was not difficult to get alongside them and work within their constructs, and in doing so we learned a great deal. I would say that that experience had a transformative effect on UK Special Forces: it brought us into the 21st century. As a result of working within the US taskforce we learned how to work in a networked manner, with flatter command structures, with -- I mean we were well used to devolving responsibility, but in the way that the command and control worked, we were able

to deliver huge tempo and we developed our ability to carry out that targeting cycle in a highly efficient manner, and learned all sorts of stuff that we are now applying in Afghanistan, and which applied in Basra when we set up Taskforce [REDACTED]. So we benefited immensely.

There were clearly differences of approach and interpretation on the legal and policy side and we had to work through that and, you know, there were some areas where our freedoms were slightly different and quite a lot of work was done on the policy side to make sure that, you know, our interpretation of our legal position would allow us to work in a certain way. I did feel that quite often it appeared that our policy area in MoD was slightly outpaced by the operational area -- this isn't unusual, but I was sufficiently concerned about it to ask for a dedicated one star civil servant in MoD to be responsible for SF policy and to have on his ticket, you know, all those urgent things which it seemed to me were not moving fast enough.

In saying this, I don't wish in any way to suggest that we were pushing to operate outside the bounds of what we are legally able to; on the contrary. We all understood that we have to sit very strictly within a legal framework, but certain issues I felt weren't moving particularly quickly in terms of the way that the construct was being analysed and the freedoms being recognised, and I think it was to do with perhaps in part the horse power that was looking in a dedicated manner at those issues. I hope very much that that adjustment in the construct in MoD will have gone some way towards improving that situation.

So if there was an area where there were differences, that was it, and it required quite a lot of work at my level and within MoD to address those issues. It very rarely proved to be so limiting that we couldn't operate properly, but there were some quite urgent things which needed sorting out in short order

as they emerged.

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** When you refer to the lessons in terms of networking you mean IT type networking as opposed to human interrelations?

**DSF3:** Well, clearly the IT was a part of it, but no I mean the way that all the agencies came together in tracking a target.<sup>2</sup>

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] All of it was within a carefully controlled construct where everybody knew the levels of freedoms they had, but within those levels of freedoms they had enormous scope for initiative. In that respect, as I say, it really has transformed the way we've done business.

Out of that came the drive to develop and integrate into our system ways of exploiting [REDACTED] intelligence, ways of [REDACTED] and all that sort of thing. So we learned a huge amount.

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Just one more question really. In terms of the way that we equipped our Special Forces, did the

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<sup>2</sup> The witness went on to describe the targeting process used in Iraq.

experience of being under American control and side by side with them, not for the first time, show us that we needed to actually improve the levels of equipment? Were you satisfied, certainly by the end of your time, which is what, just a year ago, that they had all the kit that they could reasonably expect to have and use?

**DSF3:** Well, the whole business of how well we are equipped is clearly an issue which is of huge interest outside this room and, you know, if you ask any military commander whether he has got enough kit, if he doesn't say "no" there's something wrong, because I've already indicated, you know, the nature of the operation was moving very, very fast so you are always needing new stuff and new ways of doing things.

Against that background, I would say that our experiences in Iraq and our constant pressure to deliver in certain areas I think has started to move us along the road of developing the right spectrum of capabilities for 21st century warfare, but it has taken a decade of the 21st century to get moving [REDACTED]

As an example, Stan McChrystal, General McChrystal, said at the time that he needed [REDACTED] to support his operations, which were perhaps [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] times larger than ours in scale. That implies [REDACTED] UAVs. Well, when I left my post as DSF I think we had three or four of the strategic assets [Reaper UAVs]. Of course we had other assets, but you know, it's taken us a long time to adjust to that. The answer is very easy to ascertain, you know, there's huge competition for expensive kit. But from my point of view as DSF, we had not got the right priority on things like UAVs, [REDACTED] and of course we never had the number of

helicopters that we really needed, Special Forces helicopters<sup>3</sup>.

Now, as I say, the reasons for that are very, very clear: because everybody was in competition.<sup>4</sup> All across the armed forces there was a requirement to improve and develop equipment, and so we did what we did with what we had and it was enough to do the job.

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** And it would be not unfair to say that your relatively small contingent of [REDACTED], not with the state of the art kit that the other side had, nevertheless were seen by Stan McChrystal, as he has said in public, as an extremely important part of the British Forces' contribution to the coalition. I mean disproportionate to their size.

**DSF3:** Well, because we were up alongside the Americans in Baghdad we were reasonably visible, and the job we were doing alongside our American colleagues -- clearly we were very much the minority part of that, but the job was absolutely critical and our particular specialisation of course was going after the vehicle borne IEDs, so the vehicle borne bombing networks, and that was a very, very serious threat to stability in Baghdad and to perceptions of the government and it was most important to reduce the amount of damage that was being done. We succeeded in doing that and of course it was a combination of all sorts of measures, you know, thousands and thousands of T-wall concrete blocks and all sorts of other things, all sort of other measures, but within that a small but very important element was this ruthless targeting [REDACTED] and, you know, it remorselessly crunched through them and did serious damage to

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<sup>3</sup> The witness later added the following detail: 'that is [REDACTED] with SF trained crews. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We had to rely on Puma, flown by non-SF trained crews in Iraq. They performed superbly, and their crews were real heroes, but we should have had SF helicopters flown by SF crews.'

<sup>4</sup> The witness later clarified that he had meant competition for resources.



them. We could see from our bar charts, you know, when a new network emerged we saw the escalation in vehicle borne IEDs going off, and you could see the relationship between the curve and the operations that went in after those very individuals. So the relationship was very clear, it was having an effect.

Clearly General McChrystal was very aware of that, therefore General Petraeus was very aware of that, and they were kind enough to say nice things about us, and perceptions, either fairly or not, about -- in the sort of mid-ranking American military, you know, perceptions about what was going on in Basra were sometimes a little negative, as I say, and not necessarily fair, but this helped to redress the balance a bit because we were up there with them, they knew we were there and they knew what we were doing.

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** Thank you --

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** [REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** I just want to ask about inter-agency cooperation on our side. First of all, how did our Special Forces develop their workings [REDACTED] in the course of this operation and what obstacles had to be overcome and what kind of a relationship was forged?

**DSF3:** <sup>5</sup> [REDACTED]

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<sup>5</sup> The witness described the interlocking relationship between Special Forces and UK intelligence assets, and their linkages with US counterparts.

[REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ?

**DSF3:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** When it came to the need of Special Forces for actionable intelligence in order to conduct targeted

operations, where was that to come from?

DSF3: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED] ?

DSF3: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

DSF3: [REDACTED]

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED].

DSF3: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

SIR RODERIC LYNE: [REDACTED] ?

DSF3: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** [REDACTED]

traditionally the mission of SIS is strategic intelligence gathering rather than tactical intelligence in a conflict. Did they have to go through some internal development in the course of this period in Iraq in order really to provide what you wanted?

**DSF3:** Yes, well, they had a number of priorities and it would be pertinent clearly to get them -- well, you probably have, to get them to comment on those. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** To what extent were the Special Forces able to generate their own intelligence on which to base their operations?

**DSF3:** <sup>6</sup> [REDACTED]

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<sup>6</sup> The witness explained how his personnel and defence intelligence staff devoted a significant effort to developing an understanding of the enemy.

[REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** Would you say the techniques were developing in parallel in these two theatres where you were engaged -- Afghanistan and Iraq -- or were lessons being transferred from one to the other that had been developed in one particular theatre?

**DSF3:** Lessons were being transferred from one to the other, but the theatres were different in many ways. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** [REDACTED] ?

**DSF3:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] clearly there would have been advantage in developing this inter-agency network more widely, and indeed it did, albeit perhaps a little more slowly than we

would have wished.

**SIR RODERIC LYNE:** Thank you.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Thanks. Lawrence?

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** You've described how Special Forces is an asset quite separate from the framework forces. One of the consequences of that, though, again from what you said earlier, is that in terms of the main threat to British forces which came from the Shia community, you had less sightings, less analysis, than you did of threats elsewhere. Did that create a degree of tension in the relationship with MND South East that you weren't able to help them as much as you were able to help forces elsewhere?

**DSF3:** Well, firstly, you said then that we were quite separate from framework forces and I wouldn't like to imply that. We clearly operate within and amongst framework forces and rely very heavily on the framework forces for all sorts of things, and indeed very often we are facilitating action by the framework forces themselves, which was the case in fact in Basra, in part. So it's not that we are not entirely integrated; the point I was making is that SF will naturally be used, targeted, against things at the theatre level, whereas the framework forces are by their very nature operating within an AO, a discrete part of that theatre, and not across it. So that was the point that I was making. But I would hate anybody to feel that we were in any way disconnected. In fact we've got to be absolutely integrated with framework forces to do business.

In relation to our ability to do business in Basra, I clearly saw a number of GOCs pass through MND South East while I was DSF and I was in and out of the country frequently and almost always called in on them when I was in theatre, and was at pains to point out to all of them that, you know, if there was an area

they wished us to address, you know, we would look at it very, very carefully and if we possibly could, we would deliver the goods. But they were all aware, because we told them, that the strike role that we were carrying out in Baghdad (a) was against a very important theatre level spectrum of targets, so they were all aware of the importance of it, but (b) it was facilitated by a number of things which simply weren't there in MND South East and which we had to develop in a more or less ad hoc way when we got the freedom to operate and the requirement to do that.

So the final point I would make was that, you know, when we were asked to do something down there and we were asked to make a more active contribution, we did so. In fact, soon after my arrival, you know, looking precisely at what it was we could contribute down in the south east, in the absence of a particularly clearly exploitable strike role, one of the problems which was pressing at the time was the degree of permeability of the border, particularly in Maysan, and I did propose that perhaps we could do something to assist [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

For one reason or another between the GOC and PJHQ they decided that it wouldn't be appropriate, and that may well have been to do with actually wishing to get out of Maysan and achieve handover to the Iraqis, and that it wouldn't have sat easily with that. But we were very aware, of course, that the Americans were expressing great concern about the permeability of the border and in attempting to address US concerns about UK activity down in the south east that seemed to be quite an important area to address.

In the event we didn't do it, and I mention it just to indicate that we were looking in a number of areas as to what precisely we could do in the south east to assist. Indeed, as

you know, when we did eventually get a combination of the appropriate circumstances to carry out strike activity and, you know, an identified threat in the south east, we did go there and we did do something about it.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So is that taskforce [REDACTED]?

**DSF3:** Yes.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Now this was the time of General Shirreff.

**DSF3:** That's right.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** And of your GOCs, because you obviously had a number, he seems to have been particularly anxious to get Special Forces engaged.

**DSF3:** He felt strongly that we had something to offer and I had made it quite clear that we would step up our contribution down in the south east, you know, when it was deemed to be appropriate and so, in response to his interest in having more support, we sent a full-time liaison officer down, and then a small team of [REDACTED] personnel, who then seized the initiative and looked at how they might develop the sort of capability that he wanted. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Their first notable success was against the [REDACTED], during which they detained a member of the [REDACTED], a fairly senior member, which immediately came up on the radar as quite a significant success. That then stimulated



the system to see whether we could actually get these folks through the [REDACTED], which was one of the policy challenges that we faced, which was achieved and they did, they went through that system, and in a series of operations thereafter they put quite a bit of pressure on JAM and I believe that that would have been part of a number of influences which probably encouraged JAM to talk rather than carry out business in other ways.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** That's interesting. But then possibly -- I mean I don't know the answer, but the agreement with JAM would have [REDACTED]?

**DSF3:** Yes, but the agreement with JAM I'm suggesting in part was possibly stimulated by this.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Yes, I can see that.

**DSF3:** So by demonstrating a clear readiness to go out and do something about what was described as the 'dark side', I think, by one witness, you know, one was encouraging the sort of shadow bits to get a little bit nearer the bits that were legitimate.

So interestingly also on one of those operations, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] bought UK forces down in MND South East quite a bit of credit with the Americans because there was a visible demonstration that MND South East was doing something about something which had done the Americans great harm, and it was greatly appreciated. Of course, these were not presented as SF operations, these were [simply] operations within MND South East as quite correctly they were viewed.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** I mean General Shirreff in his post-operational report observed, in part in tribute to what you have just been describing:

"I suspect that if we had concentrated strategic assets from the start of TELIC, the margin between success and failure wouldn't be so narrow as it appears now."

Do you think he had Special Forces in mind?

**DSF3:** Well, I read that and I'm sure that he did, in part, have Special Forces in mind. He perhaps was referring to other strategic assets as well, I don't know, but I would stress that it needed somebody with the willingness to ensure that Special Forces had the freedoms to act and the situation was such during his time as GOC that it was entirely appropriate that he did go on the offensive. Other GOCs I think faced rather a different time where the political fallout from going after Shia targets in the city of Basra might have been rather different and I think they've hinted at that in their evidence to you and clearly it's rather more for them to make that judgment. All I would say was that, as I have stressed again and again, you know, we were always ready to do something in Basra if the requirement was clearly stated and if the freedoms and the enablers were there to do it.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So you had the resources?

**DSF3:** Well no, we didn't have the resources, that's the point I made, you know. We could operate in the way we did and be as efficient as we were in Baghdad because we were under a US umbrella where quite a lot of the assets were provided.

But when we developed Taskforce [REDACTED] we started building those capabilities. So for instance because we didn't have [REDACTED] assets we pushed for the fitting of [REDACTED] in order that we could generate that capability in Basra. Now, a purely hypothetical question, but if we had been forced to be in Basra right from the beginning and if there had never been a question of operating in Baghdad,

would we have developed something different and quicker? Well, possibly, but it is a hypothetical question and of course it dismisses the fact that what we were doing in Baghdad was really, really important.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** So it is a question of allocation of scarce resource?

**DSF3:** It is, and I've no doubt that had -- one thing follows another, you know. The reason we had a taskforce of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] people by the time we had left in Baghdad was because the thing developed and, you know, gained a momentum and grew and became more and more efficient and it's impossible to predict quite what a similar approach in Baghdad<sup>7</sup> might have generated. I'm sure it would have gone off in very different directions and there is a strong chance that we wouldn't have gained quite a lot of that which we did by working alongside the Americans in the way we did. I'm sure, by being in Baghdad, we kept a relationship extremely strong which is, you know, continuing to benefit us in what we are doing now in Afghanistan.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Just one final question. You mentioned this issue of the permeability of the borders and that you made a proposal to look at the border with Syria.

**DSF3:** No, Iran.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** That's what I was checking, I thought you said Syria.

**DSF3:** It was the Maysan province.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** I thought I had misheard, I thought you said Syria. So was that similar to the one that was then undertaken

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<sup>7</sup> The witness later clarified that he was referring to Basra rather than Baghdad.

in 2008 with the Iraqis or was that a different sort?

**DSF3:** Well, in fact I believe that General Shirreff used some reconnaissance forces in the border area himself, so using Special Forces was not the only way of doing it. Indeed, reconnaissance forces<sup>8</sup> are designed for that purpose and might in many ways be seen to be more appropriate than diverting other scarce assets. But I felt that there might have been an area in which we could make a particular contribution, in particular by

[REDACTED] and that was the angle that I was looking at.

Of course, the majority of what we have been talking about in terms of SF activity has been strike activity, but the other very strong aspect of Special Forces capability is the ability to work alongside indigenous forces, and it was that side in particular I was looking to exploit. In the end it was deemed not to be necessary, so we were not asked to do it.

**SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN:** Okay, thank you.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Thanks. I'm going to venture rather tentatively into a bit of doctrine. We are given to understand that the Special Forces doctrine in the course of the operations in Iraq led to the creation or at least the evolution of the [REDACTED] doctrine. Could you just say a little bit about this and how it differs from standing doctrine that existed beforehand?

**DSF3:** Well, you know, we were very familiar with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in the context of conventional manoeuvre operations and this was clearly a development of that, but the significant thing, I think, was the bringing together of the

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<sup>8</sup> The witness later clarified that, by this, he had meant conventional forces.

agencies into a seamless process. I think that was the significant development, and integration of specific techniques to facilitate that [REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]?

**DSF3:** [REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** The other main question I would like to explore is you've said several times, and we've heard other evidence, that the Special Forces tempo of operations in Iraq was [REDACTED] high. At the same time, conventional guidance to commanders on insurgency operations is minimum force applied with maximum discretion. How do these two things gear together?

**DSF3:** Well, I think they are entirely consistent because the Special Forces strike element in the counter-insurgency campaign as a whole is a very small and particular bit of that campaign, and it is done with extreme precision. Where possible, it should have minimal impact on the local community and, you know, the best sort of operation is one which happens invisibly, as indeed some of these did, you know, [REDACTED]

But however soft, in the sense of applying soft power, a counter-insurgency campaign is, there's a hard edge to it which is the removal of irreconcilable elements to create space for political progress or to allow security to be delivered and, you know, counter-insurgency is not a gloves-on activity.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Okay. Two other questions if I may. One is just from the op [REDACTED] lessons learned documentation from June last year. One observation is that -- [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]:

"The UK would be unable to replicate this even now without US support."

Is that referring back to what you were saying a little while ago in terms of specialist kit and capabilities, or is it scale?

**DSF3:** Well, it's effectively scale. We do have a limited number of the sorts of assets that are required and of course I have been out of the job of DSF for a year and I'm quite sure that things have moved on considerably since I left, but I sort of hinted that I think we are coming to terms with the adjustment that is required for 21st century warfare across defence in terms of the priorities of certain kit, and whilst one would resist making an opportunist statement in the face of a defence review, I would merely state that UAVs are part of the spectrum of equipment that a 21st century defence force requires, as are [REDACTED] intelligence platforms and all the other bits.

Clearly others are determining where they sit amongst the priorities of all the other stuff that's out there, but from my point of view, throughout my time as DSF, I constantly impressed upon CDS and DCDS(C), and I know they understood the message, that we needed more of this capability, and one recognised entirely that this was against a background of needing more protected mobility, more helicopters, more this and more that, you know.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Okay. One other question, it is a bit of a venture, but you spoke about the absolute requirement for UK Special Forces to operate within a clear legal context and

framework. I was just struck, when you said that, by the fact that SIS operate under the Intelligence Services Act and, given clearance, act within a looser envelope than the laws of war or UK domestic law permit to Special Forces.<sup>9</sup> Is there a question mark in there about the need to evolve, define better, the widest acceptable and legal framework within which SF operations can be conducted abroad?

**DSF3:** Well, clearly it is desirable to have as much freedom as possible within the constraints of doing things in a legal manner, and very often the tricky bit is the interpretation of the legal position, and a lot of intellectual horse power goes into determining whether there is a way in which one can be seen to be operating within the law whilst exploiting a freedom. We exist to support international law, not to defy it, so it would be curious if we chose to operate outside it.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Nor would that be at all acceptable I'm sure. This is, it is quite well known now, an inquiry without any lawyers on it. Laws are there to be made as well as observed. You said that you had brought about, I think you said a one star command within the MoD designed to give intellectual input to this set of questions?

**DSF3:** There were all sorts of issues during my time which seemed to sort of bump along without a resolution. Every so often there was an urgent need to sort something out, because we were sitting there unable to proceed because of some wrinkle in our freedoms. When that happened it galvanised people into activity and they looked for the go-arounds -- and I don't mean this in an improper manner. They analysed things very carefully and identified where freedoms existed which had perhaps not been

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<sup>9</sup> Section 7 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 governs authorisation of acts carried out by SIS outside the British Islands.

identified before.

But there were other issues where we weren't sort of caught in the white heat of an emerging situation where things seemed to bump along a bit and that was quite frustrating [REDACTED]

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** So this is a lesson in the course of learning?

**DSF3:** Yes.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Perhaps it is a continuous state of affairs.

**DSF3:** I think it is a pretty normal state of affairs because, you know, military forces start doing their thing, you know, they expand the envelope when they seize the opportunities and sooner or later they come up against a policy hump and then it's got to be got through. So the policy area is always trying to catch up, or quite often trying to catch up. One fondly imagines that military things work the other way, you know, you have a policy and then you do stuff and actually the reality is that it often doesn't quite work out that way.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Okay, thank you very much. Last question now I think from Sir Martin. Martin?

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Looking back, how did you see the six years of enduring the high paced commitment in Iraq impact on UK Special Forces?

**DSF3:** Well, as I've already suggested, it stimulated some pretty incredible development and if you look at where Special



Forces were before that time,<sup>10</sup> [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] and here we were doing it against the most dangerous  
people potentially one would come across [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Incidentally it's one of the few areas where I think being attritional is absolutely what one is seeking to be. Of course there's quite a lot of manoevrism stuff going on within that. So Special Forces gained enormously in the development of techniques, in an understanding of the application of various techniques -- [REDACTED] -- and low level tactics developed usually. We became familiar with operating out of armoured vehicles in a way which seemed to be just not an SF thing before that, but that was the requirement at the time so we became familiar with it.

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

The effect of continuous tours in Iraq and the steady drum beat of casualties clearly did have an effect and, yes, it was quite a painful experience, and the army is seeing that in Afghanistan now. It didn't reduce people's determination to get out there and get on with the job in the slightest, but of course it had a pretty profound effect on people and I think

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<sup>10</sup> The witness compared the tempo of operations in Iraq to that of previous Special Forces' operations.



**DSF3:** Well, only as part of a US/UK team, but within that team, as I hinted, I would suggest that a strategic effect was achieved, not only in creating the conditions<sup>12</sup> -- or preventing AQ from creating the conditions that prevented political development, if you want to look at it that way. In Baghdad but also, as I hinted, I think it has delivered a fairly significant blow to Al Qaeda's global ambition. We did it in the context of the Iraq mission and, as I say, in that context alone I think it has delivered a strategic impact, albeit, you know, of a certain scale.

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** What impact did our working alongside the United States Special Forces in Iraq have generally on Anglo/American relations?

**DSF3:** Well, within the SF community, as you would imagine, it has served to strengthen an already very strong relationship.

[REDACTED]

**SIR MARTIN GILBERT:** Well, finally, you've given us many lessons learned, but are there any others you would like to draw our attention to?

**DSF3:** Well, only that, you know, the folks within Special Forces never cease to surprise one in -- even having sort of served at a relatively low level within the organisation, you know, when you sit as DSF and see people delivering what people

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<sup>12</sup> The witness later clarified that he had been referring to creating the conditions for political progress.

did in those operations, it's rather humbling.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** I'm just going to ask my colleagues if they have any final questions. I've only then got one. No?

Well, mine is simply a bit of a loose end from earlier on. One of the bits of evidence that we have from a lot of the people we've talked to was about the support of troops for Special Forces operations and the quality of training and equipment and whatever that they get. Was that in any sense a limiting factor from your experience in Iraq, or indeed Afghanistan now?

**DSF3:** Well, one of the great successes of my predecessors in his time as DSF was the development of the Special Forces Support Group, which actually stood up just about as I started the job. Whilst we were very used, over decades really, to working very closely alongside airborne forces, and very often they and the Royal Marines would operate very closely in conjunction with Special Forces, to have that as a formal grouping under command just took things forward into a different league. It has been a tremendous success and indeed, you know, the successes of [REDACTED] and the delivery of [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] was done by the support group, and they are an absolutely vital and integrated part of the strike forces.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** This is a general observation more than a question, I suppose, but by their very nature SF operations carry higher than normal risks perhaps to the personnel concerned and the casualties were not insignificant throughout op TELIC. Does that also go for the Support Group? Are they actually entering into a more hazardous domain in these operations?

**DSF3:** Well, I think when you see what conventional forces are

doing in Afghanistan, I think probably, the differentiation between the risks that people are exposed to<sup>13</sup> becomes pretty marginal frankly. But clearly, you know, there is a high risk involved in assaulting buildings where you know people are armed and, you know will frequently resort to suicide devices [REDACTED].

The support forces clearly were not involved in [REDACTED] but were in [REDACTED] and, you know, faced potentially quite significant threats and deserve the same level of protection and equipment as the other forces involved. Clearly the whole thing is evolving and when the Support Group was first set up it was set up with standard infantry equipment, and we have sought to augment their equipment as time goes by and bring it up to the level of everybody else.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** That would go for the air component as well I guess?

**DSF3:** Absolutely. But it goes back to my point about equipment. You are always trying to chase the latest technology and get things up to a level.

**SIR JOHN CHILCOT:** Okay. Any final, final remark?

In that case thank you very much indeed for your evidence, DSF3. Can I just remind you that the transcript will not leave this building and you can review it whenever is convenient upstairs. With that, I will close the session.

**(The session closed)**

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<sup>13</sup> Witness later clarified that he meant that the difference in risk faced by Special Forces and the risk faced by conventional forces was marginal.