

SECTION 16.1

THE WELFARE OF SERVICE PERSONNEL

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Introduction

1. This Section addresses:

- the military covenant and the Harmony Guidelines, which provided a framework for the provision of welfare support to Service Personnel, including Reservists, and their families;
- the provision of welfare support during deployments;
- changes to the welfare support available to Service Personnel, including Reservists, and their families; and
- the consideration given to the effects on Service Personnel in decisions to deploy troops, in particular in terms of the Harmony Guidelines.

2. The provision of medical care, in particular for seriously injured Service Personnel, is addressed in Section 16.2.

3. The preparations made for repatriating the bodies of those who lost their lives serving on Operation TELIC, how their deaths were investigated, and the support provided for bereaved families is addressed in Section 16.3.

4. The problems caused by deployments consistently exceeding the Defence Planning Assumptions in respect of the provision of military equipment are addressed in Sections 6.3 and 14.

5. The decision to deploy to Helmand province in Afghanistan, and the implications of that decision, are addressed in Section 9.

The military covenant and the Harmony Guidelines

6. The concept of a “covenant between the Army and its soldiers” was first articulated in the March 2000 British Army publication, *Values and Standards of the British Army*.¹ The foreword to that publication, written by General Sir Roger Wheeler,² Chief of the General Staff, stated:

“As a soldier in the British Army, much is expected of you. You may be required to deploy on operations which will be dangerous, to obey orders which could put your life at risk, and to live and work for long periods under extremely challenging conditions. Your comrades, your commanders and ultimately the Nation will depend on your courage, loyalty and commitment. They will rely on you to maintain the highest standards of professionalism and self-discipline at all times. In short, they must trust you and you need to trust them.

“This two-way obligation forms a covenant between the Army and its soldiers ... By volunteering as a soldier in the British Army you accept that, by putting the needs

¹ Ministry of Defence, *Values and Standards of the British Army*, March 2000.

² General Sir Roger Wheeler was the military adviser to the Iraq Inquiry.

of the Service before your own, you will forgo some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. But in return you can at all times expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as an individual, and to be rewarded by reasonable terms and conditions of service.”

7. The Armed Forces’ capacity to deploy and sustain expeditionary operations was determined by decisions in the 1998 *Strategic Defence Review* (SDR 98).³

8. SDR 98 set out the UK’s defence policy and translated that policy into detailed guidance for defence planning by using a number of “planning assumptions” which defined the required level of forces, or scale of effort, required for specific Military Tasks (see Section 6.1).

9. SDR 98 stated that the UK should be able to:

“– respond to a major international crisis which might require a military effort and combat operations of a similar scale and duration to the Gulf War when we deployed an armoured division, 26 major warships and over 80 combat aircraft.

or

– undertake a more extended overseas deployment on a lesser scale (as over the last few years in Bosnia) while retaining the ability to mount a second substantial deployment – which might involve a combat brigade and appropriate naval and air forces – if this were made necessary by a second crisis. We would not, however, expect both deployments to involve war fighting or to maintain them simultaneously for longer than six months.”

10. The principal scales of effort defined in SDR 98 were:

- Small scale: “a deployment of battalion size or equivalent”.
- Medium scale: “deployments of brigade size or equivalent” for war-fighting or other operations.
- Large scale: deployments of division size or equivalent. The most recent example was the UK contribution to the 1991 Gulf Conflict, “although on that occasion the British division deployed with only two of its three brigades”. This was “the maximum size of force we would plan to be able to contribute to peace enforcement operations, or to regional conflicts outside the NATO area”.
- Very large scale and full scale: all the forces that would be made available to NATO to meet a major threat such as significant aggression against an ally.

11. SDR 98 also defined:

- Endurance: the likely duration of individual Military Tasks. Each Service needed to be able to sustain tasks for the required period, including where necessary by

³ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, July 1998.

rotating individual units deployed and, where units were deployed on operations, allowing units a period of respite between each deployment as set out in the Service's Harmony Guidelines.

- **Concurrency:** the number of operations of a given scale of effort and duration that could be sustained by the force structure. SDR 98 concluded that “not to be able to conduct two medium scale operations at the same time would be an unacceptable constraint on our ability to discharge Britain’s commitments and responsibilities”.⁴

12. SDR 98 also considered the “underlying problems of under-manning and overstretch that we have inherited”.⁵ It defined overstretch as “trying to do too much with too little manpower”. One result was that units and individuals were separated from their families too often and for too long. Another was that preparation for other tasks and longer-term training suffered. The additional pressures from “persistent overstretch” contributed to higher exit rates from the Armed Forces, which exacerbated under-manning. SDR 98 concluded:

“We must break this vicious circle. To do so we must match the commitments we undertake to our planned resources, recognising that there will always be the risk of additional short-term pressures if we have to respond rapidly to an unforeseen crisis. We need to improve recruitment and retention so that our units are properly manned. And we need to use our manpower in the most effective manner, particularly seeking to avoid unnecessary separation or disruption to individuals and their families.

“The Review [SDR 98] has designed a future force structure matched to the level of commitments we plan to be able to undertake. These structural changes, combined with measures to increase recruiting and retention, will ease overstretch.”

13. The Harmony Guidelines described the maximum time that Service Personnel should spend away from their families (known as Individual Separated Service)⁶ and the minimum time that they should have between operational deployments (known as tour intervals).⁷

14. The MOD told the Inquiry that the Harmony Guidelines were developed to help it “get the work/life balance right” for Service Personnel and that, as the name suggested, these were for guidance and were not “rules”.

15. Each Service (the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force) derived its own Harmony Guidelines based on an “analysis of historical norms and judgements, training

⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review – Supporting Essay 6, Future Military Capabilities*, July 1998.

⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, July 1998.

⁶ The MOD defines Separated Service as “Absence from normal place of duty or lack of freedom to enjoy leisure at the normal place of duty/residence at place of duty”.

⁷ Paper MOD, 25 November 2009, ‘Harmony Guidelines’.

requirements, deployment patterns and the unique culture of each Service”, and on the “routine level of concurrency” that the Armed Forces were resourced and structured to sustain.

16. The table below shows the Harmony Guidelines for each Service in 2003.⁸

Table 1: Harmony Guidelines, 2003

	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Air Force
Individual Separated Service	In any 36 month period, no one to exceed 660 days.	In any 30 month period, no one to exceed 415 days.	In a 12 month period, not more than 2.5% of personnel to exceed 140 days.
Unit tour intervals	Fleet Units to spend maximum of 60% deployed in 36 months.	24 month average interval between Unit tours.	16 month average interval between Unit tours.

17. On 17 January 2003, Mr Blair agreed the deployment of a large scale UK ground force, comprising the headquarters 1st (UK) Armoured Division and three combat brigades, to Iraq (see Section 6.2).

18. There is no indication that the potential pressure on Service Personnel, including with respect to the Harmony Guidelines, was a consideration in that decision.

19. The Service Personnel Board (SPB), chaired by Lieutenant General Anthony Palmer, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Personnel) (DCDS(Personnel)), discussed the effect of current operations on personnel welfare on 21 January 2003.⁹ The SPB commented that the “shift to expeditionary operations was having a significant impact on people”. The lesson from Operation FRESCO¹⁰ was that “wider welfare considerations needed to be taken into account in advance of decisions on commitments”.

20. Mr Adam Ingram, Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Min(AF)), told the Inquiry that the Government knew that the invasion of Iraq would put additional strain on the Harmony Guidelines:

“... 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 ... and significant key enablers

⁸ Fourteenth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2007-2008, *Recruiting and Retaining Armed Forces Personnel*, HC424.

⁹ Minutes, 21 January 2003, Service Personnel Board meeting.

¹⁰ Op FRESCO was the provision of emergency cover by the Armed Forces in the event of industrial action by civilian firefighters.

within the Army ... 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 [Iraq] was then something we then had to attend to.”¹¹

Early priorities and concerns

Operational Welfare Package

21. The MOD provided an Operational Welfare Package (OWP) to deployed Service Personnel. Although tailored to each deployment, it typically included access to television and films, books, the internet, and a weekly telephone allowance.

22. This support was provided “consistent with the operational and environmental circumstances in which they [Service Personnel] are placed, and the availability of resources”.

23. In late January 2003, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), asked senior officers to scrutinise the lessons identified during Op JACANA (a UK operation in Afghanistan in 2002), and to report on progress in addressing lessons relevant to Op TELIC.¹²

24. Lt Gen Palmer responded on 31 January, outlining progress towards addressing several of the lessons that had been identified, including the importance of a workable “Welfare Telephone” system early in an operation.¹³ The Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) had made this, along with the delivery of mail, their priority for Op TELIC. The ratio of Welfare Telephones had been increased from one to 50 to one to 30 to meet the needs of manoeuvre forces.

Review of allowances

25. From 1 April 2003, all units (Regular and Reserve) from which more than five Service Personnel had deployed received a Family Welfare Support Enhancement (FWSE) of £1 per week per individual deployed.¹⁴ The FWSE was to be used by the unit to improve communications between families and deployed Service Personnel (for example by providing internet and telephone facilities) and to support welfare activities for families.

26. Lt Gen Palmer advised the Chiefs of Staff on 9 April 2003 that he had reviewed the MOD’s allowance policy “in support of Op TELIC Service Personnel and their families”,

¹¹ Public hearing, 16 July 2010, page 18.

¹² Minute DPSO/CDS to MA/CNS, 22 January 2003, ‘Op JACANA Lessons for TELIC’.

¹³ MC/DCDS(Pers) to DPSO/CDS, 31 January 2003, ‘Op JACANA Lessons for Op TELIC’.

¹⁴ Minute HQ Land Command [junior official] to HQ 2 Div, 25 October 2003, ‘Welfare Provision for Op TELIC 3 – Chain of Command Instruction’.

and had established a close link with the Treasury to ensure a rapid response to individual cases.¹⁵ A number of changes had been agreed, including:

- the Longer Separated Service Allowance and Longer Service at Sea Bonus enhancements would be introduced earlier than planned;
- the introduction of new arrangements to support close relatives of injured Service Personnel hospitalised in the UK; and
- enhanced support for Service Personnel and their dependants evacuated from permanent posts in the Middle East.

27. The new arrangement to support close relatives of injured Service Personnel referred to by Lt Gen Palmer was the extension of the Dangerously Ill Forwarding of Relatives (DILFOR) scheme (which previously provided for two people to visit seriously injured Service Personnel in hospitals overseas for up to 10 days, at public expense) to include hospitals in the UK.¹⁶ The support provided to injured Service Personnel and their families is described in Section 16.2.

28. The MOD reported in December 2003 that the FWSE had been well received.¹⁷ A survey undertaken by the Army Families' Federation (AFF) suggested that communication between families and deployed Service Personnel was good.

29. The FWSE was increased from £1 to £2.20 per week per person deployed on 1 November 2008.¹⁸ The increase meant that a typical infantry battalion could expect to receive in the region of £30,000 to support families during an operational tour.¹⁹

Delivery of the Operational Welfare Package

30. Lt Gen Palmer told the Inquiry that, rather than deliver a fixed OWP for Op TELIC, he worked closely with PJHQ to ensure that the OWP evolved over time to reflect “the views from soldiers on the ground”.²⁰

The free parcel service

On 24 March 2003, in an exchange with Mr Frank Roy in the House of Commons, Mr Blair undertook to try to ensure that arrangements to provide a free parcel service to troops in the Gulf were put in place as soon as possible.²¹

The free parcel service began on 17 April.²²

¹⁵ Minute Palmer to COSSEC, 9 April 2003, 'Personnel Issues Update – Op TELIC'.

¹⁶ Minute MOD [junior official] to HQ 2 Div, 25 October 2003, 'Welfare Provision for Op TELIC 3 – Chain of Command Instruction'.

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

¹⁸ Defence Instructions and Notices, October 2008, 'Amendments to the Family Welfare Grant'.

¹⁹ Paper MOD, June 2010, 'Operational Welfare Enhancements as at June 2010'.

²⁰ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, page 3.

²¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 24 March 2003, column 28.

²² Letter Davies to Cannon, 19 February 2004, 'Iraq: Termination of Free Postal Service'.

Lt Gen Palmer told the Inquiry:

“... free parcels, two kilograms, engraved on my heart ... this was a debate about how far we could stretch the logistic operation. I mean, delivering two kilograms of parcels to everybody in theatre over distances with ... not enough helicopters for operations, let alone for administration, was a real issue, but it was critical for the families back in the UK that they could send to their loved ones ... things that would remind them of home.”²³

The free service was terminated in April 2004.²⁴ In a written statement to Parliament, Mr Ingram stated:

“The provision of a free packet service recognised the difficult conditions Service Personnel were operating in and that it was not possible to provide the full spectrum of welfare support normally available to Service Personnel on operations. Whilst southern Iraq is not yet a benign environment, the level of welfare support and the facilities available on Operation TELIC are now comparable to those provided in other operational theatres.

“It has therefore been decided that from 8 April 2004 ... this free service will cease.”

31. Mr Ingram visited Iraq from 13 to 15 May 2003.²⁵ His Military Assistant reported that the Minister had been impressed by the morale of the troops, but he had been briefed that it could be undermined by (unspecified) small-scale and easily rectified “irritants”. Mr Ingram’s Military Assistant concluded:

“The Minister would be disappointed if we lost opportunities for ‘quick wins’ here (though he appreciates that troops in theatre examine these issues from one end of the telescope).”

32. On 22 May, Major General Robert Fry, Deputy Chief of Joint Operations (Operations) (DCJO(Ops)), listed those irritants and the actions being taken to rectify them in a report for Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Sir Anthony Bagnall, Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS):

- insufficient portaloos (more could be supplied);
- insufficient fresh rations (sufficient fresh rations were available; commanders had chosen to mix these with ration packs);
- a desire for a second Op TELIC medal covering Phase IV operations²⁶ (being discussed by Chiefs of Staff);

²³ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, page 27.

²⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 27 February 2004, column 69WS. The free parcel service was reintroduced in November 2007.

²⁵ Minute MA/Minister (AF) [MOD] to Sec(O) – Iraq, 16 May 2003, ‘Minister (AF) Visit to Iraq’.

²⁶ Phase IV is the military term for the post-conflict phase of operations.

- the recent decision to withdraw the second free welfare families warrant (that decision had been waived for Land forces deployed on Op TELIC);
- the troops' desire to be able to send parcels back to their families without charge (that facility was not available for any other operation, and would not be provided for Op TELIC);
- inadequate access to TVs (the absence of a final UK "disposition plan" for Phase IV and the low standard of camp infrastructure, and in particular the lack of reliable power supply, was hindering the installation of equipment); and
- inadequate access to the internet (equipment was being rolled out).²⁷

33. Maj Gen Fry concluded that sufficient weight was being given to providing support for deployed Service Personnel, who would see "incremental improvements" in the delivery of the OWP and infrastructure.

34. Mr Ingram told the Inquiry that he saw his role as one of getting "ground truth" of what was happening in Iraq, including by talking to soldiers in theatre.²⁸

35. A small team from the Army's Personnel Directorate and PJHQ visited MOD civilian staff in Iraq from 18 to 20 May.²⁹ They reported that comments on the OWP:

"... ranged from a claim that there wasn't a package in existence to the fact that in reality it didn't run smoothly. At Basra there was only one internet terminal available from 0000 to 0700 for [military and civilian] staff to send messages home ... Telephone facilities were similarly limited ..."

36. The team reported that other issues such as the availability of exercise equipment were being addressed by local purchases in theatre.

37. The 28 May meeting of the SPB was advised that Service Personnel were currently living in "basic tented accommodation, existing Iraqi buildings, or fighting vehicles".³⁰ Tier 1 facilities (hard-skinned or tented accommodation with air-conditioning) should be fully deployed by September and Tier 2 facilities (hard-skinned, semi-permanent accommodation) by December. A limited OWP, comprising telephone facilities, British Forces Post Office mail, British Forces Broadcasting Service radio and an electronic letter service, was currently available in all locations; internet and TV were available in some locations. PJHQ intended to provide the full OWP in all locations.

38. The SPB was also advised that a rest and recuperation (R&R) package would be introduced once roulement and force alignment had taken place; "Operational Stand-Downs" would begin on 30 May.

²⁷ Minute Fry to MA/VCDS, 22 May 2003, 'Minister(AF) Visit to Iraq'; Email MA/DCDS (Personnel) to MA/VCDS, 29 May 2003, 'Minister (AF) Visit to Iraq'.

²⁸ Public hearing, 16 July 2010, pages 13-14.

²⁹ Minute PS/Personnel Director to Brooke, 22 May 2003, 'Visit to Iraq 18th – 20th May 2003'.

³⁰ Minutes, 28 May 2003, Service Personnel Board meeting.

39. Lt Gen Palmer told the Inquiry that, initially, R&R was taken in theatre but, as the situation stabilised and in response to the needs of Service Personnel and their families, this was extended to allow Service Personnel to travel back to the UK.³¹ Lt Gen Palmer highlighted the costs of the initiative, particularly in terms of removing Service Personnel from their roles and the demand placed on air transport.

40. The R&R allowance established in Iraq was two weeks, including travel time from and to Iraq.

41. Air Marshal (AM) David Pocock, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel) from 2005 to 2007, told the Inquiry that the practice of flying Service Personnel back to the UK for R&R had evolved over the first years of Op TELIC:

“... as far as I can tell, there was never a careful policy discussion about what we were going to do and why. It started off as a means of getting the troops away from particular areas of danger, hardship. They could have a break, clean up, a rest and go back again, and then it gradually evolved from moving back from the actual areas of fighting to perhaps out of the country ...

“... it was never actually, so far as I could tell a formal policy. Like Topsy, it grew.”³²

42. The demands placed on air transport by that practice are considered later in this Section.

43. Lt Gen Palmer visited Iraq in early June 2003. He reported to General Sir Michael Walker, Chief of the Defence Staff, on 20 June that the OWP had been “well received”.³³ The main effort now was to provide air-conditioned accommodation as temperatures in Iraq rose.

44. An MOD official advised Mr Ingram on 27 June that many of the “welfare irritants” had already been resolved.³⁴ In general, problems in delivering the OWP had been caused by the rapid pace of operational deployment. The advice concluded:

“Overall, the OWP policy has held up well given the scale of operation and the specific demands imposed in Op TELIC.”

45. The MOD reported in July that, owing to the austere nature of the deployment and the lack of infrastructure in some locations, the OWP had been implemented in stages.³⁵ The first stage comprised:

- air letters (commonly known as Blueys) delivered electronically;

³¹ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, pages 22-23.

³² Public hearing, 19 July 2010, page 17.

³³ Minute DCDS(Pers) to DPSO/CDS, 20 June 2003, ‘Op TELIC – Theatre Visit Report’.

³⁴ PS/VCDS to PS/Min(AF) [MOD], 27 June 2003, ‘Minister (AF) visit to Iraq – Updated [sic] on Welfare Irritants’.

³⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: First Reflections*, July 2003.

- mail;
- welfare telephones;
- newspapers;
- radio broadcasting;
- limited internet access; and
- basic shop facilities.

46. By July, the OWP was being extended to provide additional internet access, fitness equipment, TV broadcasting and free books.

47. Lt Gen Palmer told the Inquiry that, over time, the MOD delivered a “very good” OWP.³⁶

48. Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin, the Adjutant General from 2003 to 2005, added that a key factor in delivering the OWP was managing and meeting increasing expectations.³⁷

49. The Inquiry heard mixed reports on the OWP from families and veterans of Op TELIC. Limited access to telephones early in the campaign and the fragility of the air bridge between Iraq and the UK were particular sources of frustration.

50. The Inquiry put those concerns to Mr Ingram.³⁸ On the issue of limited access to telephones, he told the Inquiry:

“... 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 ... 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 ...”

THE AIR BRIDGE

51. In January 2004, in response to concerns over the increasing threat to Air Transport (AT), the Chiefs of Staff agreed that only aircraft fitted with a Defensive Aids Suite (DAS)³⁹ should fly into Basra.⁴⁰

³⁶ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, page 12.

³⁷ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, pages 13-14.

³⁸ Public hearing, 16 July 2010, pages 21-22.

³⁹ A Defensive Aids Suite (DAS) is a military aircraft system which acts to defend the aircraft from attack. A DAS typically comprises chaff, flares, and electronic countermeasures combined with equipment to detect threats.

⁴⁰ Minutes, 28 January 2004, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

52. General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of the General Staff, visited Iraq from 10 to 13 October 2005.⁴¹ In his report to Gen Walker, he set out the heavy demands on the UK's Support Helicopter (SH) fleet, and continued:

“If our SH capability is inadequate, our AT fleet is worse. The air bridge to theatre is now so fragile that sustaining an efficient R&R schedule is nigh on impossible. Quite apart from the morale effect of inordinate delays, the difficulties with R&R are now beginning to impact significantly on the operational effectiveness of the Division. The situation is so bad that I am asking HQ Land to re-examine, at least in principle, whether we might not re-adopt 4 month operational tours without R&R. Since I suspect there will be very many reasons against this – continuity and our current training cycle to name but two – we really need to take stock of our AT capability in the round, especially in light of our impending commitment to Afghanistan.”

53. Later that month, the Chiefs of Staff “noted” that the UK's AT capability was “unable to meet current and prospective demands”, and that General Sir Timothy Granville-Chapman, Vice Chief of Defence Staff, would undertake a stocktake and scope increased availability.⁴²

54. Gen Granville-Chapman reported to Gen Walker in December that the main constraint on AT was the lack of DAS-equipped passenger aircraft to support current operations.⁴³ The decision that only DAS-equipped aircraft could carry passengers to Iraq and Afghanistan meant that only three RAF TriStar aircraft were currently available to support the air bridge.

55. Gen Granville-Chapman described the work that was under way to address the shortfall in AT availability. A further three TriStar would be fitted with DAS, and a fourth for DAS. Those aircraft would become available between May 2006 and February 2007. The MOD had chartered civil aircraft to shuttle between the UK and a “hub” at Al Udiyd airbase in Qatar, reducing the burden on TriStar. The first charter flight had been on 6 December.

56. The deployment of additional forces to Afghanistan in 2006 would “demand a surge in AT requirement”. To handle that demand, the MOD was exploring the possibility of establishing a Forward Mounting Base (FMB) for TriStar that shortened the transit time to and from theatre.

57. Gen Granville-Chapman also addressed a number of “more radical approaches” including using civil aircraft fitted with DAS to fly into theatre, and procurement of additional aircraft. On the latter, the only viable option that would make a difference to lift capacity within two years was the early acquisition of a fifth C-17 (currently scheduled

⁴¹ Report CGS to CDS, 18 October 2005, ‘CGS Visit to Iraq: 10-13 Oct 05’.

⁴² Minutes, 26 October 2005, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴³ Minute VCDS to CDS, 12 December 2005, ‘Air Transport Support to Operations’.

for procurement in 2011). The MOD was considering “innovative finance arrangements”, including leasing arrangements.

58. Gen Granville-Chapman provided Gen Walker with an update on the stocktake on 6 January 2006.⁴⁴ After further work, the early acquisition of a fifth C-17 remained a possibility. The “less good news” was that the Treasury now contended that fitting the additional TriStar with DAS was not a legitimate charge to the Reserve, given that the “hub and spoke” arrangement using Al Udied was now operational. Officials advised that the MOD should continue fitting DAS “at risks”.

59. In his post-operational tour report on 18 January, Major General James Dutton, General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division (South-East), wrote:

“The reliance on only 3 suitably equipped TriStar C-2 aircraft to support the UK-BAS [Basra Air Station] air bridge task has again created significant problems, especially as one aircraft has been in long term major maintenance for most of the period and the others have occasionally been required for Op HERRICK tasks ... consequently there is an indisputable need for additional Defensive Aids Suite (DAS) equipment for air transport assets.”⁴⁵

60. Gen Walker directed on 24 January that the MOD should “explore innovative funding operations for the early procurement of a fifth C-17 aircraft”.⁴⁶

61. In April 2006, the MOD’s Directorate of Operational Capability (DOC) published its third report of Op TELIC lessons, covering the period from 1 December 2004 to 28 February 2006.⁴⁷ The report is described in detail in Section 14.1.

62. On AT, the DOC reported:

“The availability of air transport assets became critical in October 2005. The strategic and tactical requirement for all aircraft to be equipped with Defensive Aids Suite (DAS) in theatre has compounded the problem. The air bridge to theatre became so fragile that the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) plot became close to untenable in Oct/Nov 2005 ... This affected morale and the operational effectiveness of the British personnel in MND(SE). The situation became so pronounced that HQ LAND was tasked to look at initiatives that would allow a shortened tour length without R&R ... the Op HERRICK deployment [to Helmand province, Afghanistan] brings with it more pain rather than respite and, as a result, the imperative to improve our AT capacity is stronger than ever.”

⁴⁴ Minute VCDS to CDS, 6 January 2006, ‘Air Transport Support to Operations’.

⁴⁵ Report HQ MND(SE) to PJHQ – J3, 18 January 2006, ‘Progress Report – Operation TELIC’.

⁴⁶ Minutes, 24 January 2006, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁴⁷ Report DOC, 4 April 2006, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study Volume 3’.

63. The DOC recommended:

“There is a requirement to assess and improve our AT capacity as an operational priority. The UK should consider civilian air charter to off-load capacity ...”

64. The House of Commons Defence Committee visited Iraq from 4 to 8 June.⁴⁸ On the air bridge, the Committee wrote:

“During our visit to Iraq, we heard that air bridge reliability remained a key concern among UK Service Personnel. We witnessed at first hand the disruption caused by delays of flights in and out of, and around, theatre. The difficulties stem from problems both with the commercial service between the UK and Al Udeid and with the C-130 Hercules in theatre and the availability of RAF air bridge TriStar, VC10 and C-17. Troops travelling home on leave are frequently delayed and this reduces their time on leave.”

65. The Defence Committee concluded:

“It is unacceptable that Servicemen and women, many of whom are serving greatly in excess of Harmony Guidelines, should have their leave disrupted by the MOD’s inability to provide a reliable air bridge.”

66. The MOD ordered a fifth C-17 aircraft in July 2006, and took delivery of that aircraft in February 2008.⁴⁹

67. In its 2009 report entitled *Support to High Intensity Operations*, the National Audit Office (NAO) wrote:

“The Department’s [the MOD’s] air transport fleet is small, consists of aircraft types that are old by comparison to modern civilian fleets and is therefore susceptible to mechanical breakdown. In addition, the integration of modern Defensive Aids Suites on to these aircraft has caused reliability problems. The availability of the TriStar fleet, the Department’s main passenger carrying aircraft, has been low. Of the seven TriStar passenger-carrying aircraft, on average 45.5 percent since January 2006, have been unavailable to support operations. Significant effort by those responsible for the air transport fleet has enabled the Department to deliver the overall task but the air bridge remains under considerable strain.”⁵⁰

68. On the fragility of the air bridge, Mr Ingram told the Inquiry:

“The air bridge ... was very fragile. We were dealing with ageing aircraft, you just need an aircraft to break down for a few hours and the whole thing is thrown into dislocation.

⁴⁸ Thirteenth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2005-2006, *UK Operations in Iraq*, HC1241, paragraph 69.

⁴⁹ www.raf.mod.uk, 22 February 2008, *RAF Prepares To Receive Fifth C-17 Aircraft*.

⁵⁰ National Audit Office, *Support to High Intensity Operations*, 14 May 2009.

“It is why ... 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 ...

“These were real issues, and there were not easy solutions to it.”⁵¹

69. AM Pocock, DCDS(Personnel) from 2005 to 2007, told the Inquiry:

“The first time I went out to Iraq ... the subject [the air bridge] was raised with me more often than anything else and, when I came back, I immediately went to see the Chief of the Air Staff, and he was already aware of it, but I made plain to him that, apart from it being a morale issue generally, it was disastrous for the reputation of the Royal Air Force. He understood completely.”⁵²

70. AM Pocock told the Inquiry that the problems with the air bridge were very well known, and were regularly discussed in Chiefs of Staff meetings.⁵³ He commented that “if there had been a solution, it would have been implemented”.

Concerns over the effect of Operation TELIC on retention

71. In late April 2003, Lt Gen Palmer wrote to Rear Admiral (RAdm) Timothy McClement, Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, Major General David Richards, Assistant Chief of the General Staff, and Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Philip Sturley, Assistant Chief of the Air Staff, requesting a subjective assessment of the likely impact of current operations on retention over the short, medium and long term, and how retention could be improved.

72. RAdm McClement assessed that Op TELIC would have a positive impact on retention in the Royal Navy in the short term (though there might be a slightly negative impact in some areas, including the Royal Marines).⁵⁴ A key factor in retention would be ensuring that Service Personnel had a period of “relative programme stability” after operations, to enable them to take leave and spend time with family and friends.

73. Maj Gen Richards assessed that there would be a “net benefit” on retention in the Army.⁵⁵ However, much would depend on how the recovery and recuperation phases were managed; the demobilisation of Reservists required particular attention. Measures which would improve retention included:

- recognition, possibly in the form of a memorial service and early agreement on the processes for Honours, Awards and medals;

⁵¹ Public hearing, 16 July 2010, pages 23-24.

⁵² Public hearing, 19 July 2010, pages 16-17.

⁵³ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, page 18.

⁵⁴ Minute ACNS to DCDS(Pers), 7 May 2003, ‘Recuperation – People Workstrand’.

⁵⁵ Minute ACGS to MA/DCDS(Pers), 7 May 2003, ‘Recuperation – People Workstrand’.

- minimising the impact on Harmony Guidelines by reducing other commitments;
- rolling out the OWP developed for Op TELIC – which had been well received – to other operations;
- establishing and resourcing appropriate immediate and long-term arrangements for stress management, including for Reservists; and
- improving accommodation.

74. Maj Gen Richards also highlighted measures which would improve the retention of Reservists, including:

- greater consistency with Regular Service Personnel, in terms of eligibility for operational benefits, allowances and medals; and
- ensuring that no Reservist was financially disadvantaged because of Op TELIC.

75. AVM Sturley assessed that “the combined effect of [Ops] FRESCO, TELIC and our other commitments has hurt”.⁵⁶ AVM Sturley identified a number of measures to improve retention, the first of which (for Regular Service Personnel) was to reduce future commitments.

76. Lt Gen Palmer told the Inquiry that, as DCDS(Personnel), his “major preoccupation” was to reduce the number of troops in Iraq quickly, to reduce the pressure on individual Service Personnel and the Harmony Guidelines.⁵⁷ He emphasised that those efforts were always in consultation with PJHQ and never at operational risk.⁵⁸

77. Commodore Noel Preston-Jones, Director Service Personnel Policy, briefed the 28 May 2003 meeting of the SPB that the responses from RAdm McClement, Maj Gen Richards and AVM Sturley “had, inter alia, highlighted the need for a reduction in commitments”.⁵⁹ The assessments of the impact of current commitments on retention varied. Overall, the Royal Navy and Army anticipated a net benefit from Op TELIC, while the RAF and Defence Medical Services anticipated a net loss. The emerging conclusions of the “people” work strand of the Recuperation Initiative included the need to relieve pressure on pinch points,⁶⁰ “for example by reducing commitments, resolving under manning or adjusting the force structure”.

78. At its 28 May meeting, the SPB also discussed priorities for the MOD’s Short Term Plan for 2004 (STP04),⁶¹ and in particular the “significant structural under-funding across the people area”. Lt Gen Palmer concluded that any STP bid needed to be underpinned

⁵⁶ Minute ACAS to DCDS(Pers), 7 May 2003, ‘Recuperation – People Workstrand’.

⁵⁷ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, page 75.

⁵⁸ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, page 79.

⁵⁹ Minutes, 28 May 2003, Service Personnel Board meeting.

⁶⁰ The MOD defines pinch point trades as trades or areas of expertise where there is not enough trained strength to perform operational tasks without encroaching on the time provided between deployments for recuperation, training and leave.

⁶¹ The Short Term Plan forecast MOD spending on operational costs, looking four years ahead.

by evidence “for example to demonstrate the link between retention and improved accommodation ... The process had to be placed on a more scientific basis.”

79. In advance of the 26 November meeting of the SPB, Lt Gen Palmer circulated a personal “think-piece” on STP04.⁶² It described STP03 as “relatively good for personnel”, although “recruiting and retaining Service Personnel is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive as demographics change, expectations rise and technology evolves”.

80. Looking ahead to STP04, Lt Gen Palmer assessed that, while the Services had made significant progress towards achieving manning balance targets and premature voluntary retirement (PVR) rates remained relatively low, “the current level of operational commitments ... is threatening to undermine or reverse the progress made”.

81. Emerging problems were:

- The Army reported that Op TELIC was having a “marked impact” on tour intervals, rendering it unable to meet Harmony/Separated Service Guidelines.
- The RAF reported a significant worsening in their figures for Separated Service.
- Across all three Services, pressure on pinch point trades was increasing. Medical services continued to be a specific concern.
- The number of Reservists available for mobilisation was falling.

82. Lt Gen Palmer concluded that the MOD’s forthcoming planning round was likely to be particularly challenging; the SPB would need to give direction on which personnel priorities should be “rerieved”.

83. Mr Ingram visited Basra in December 2003.⁶³ He reported to Mr Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary, that, while UK Armed Forces were in “excellent shape”, he had concerns for the future:

“Some units in Iraq have had exceptionally busy operational and training cycles before deployment ... I detected signs that the pressures of repeated long separations may be building in some areas. We will need to manage this carefully in the New Year ...”

Supporting Reservists

84. There are two key types of Reserve Forces:

- members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces (VRF) who serve within VRF units and usually train in the evenings, at weekends and for at least two weeks each year; and

⁶² Paper DCDS(Pers), 17 November 2003, ‘STP 04 – A Paper by DCDS(Pers)’.

⁶³ Letter Ingram to Secretary of State [MOD], 30 December 2003, ‘Visit to UK Forces in Basra 17-19 December 2003’.

- members of the Regular Reserve, who are ex-members of the Regular Forces who still have a liability for mobilisation.⁶⁴

85. The VRF comprises the Royal Naval Reserve, the Territorial Army (TA), the Royal Marines Reserve and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

86. In 2003, there were approximately 40,000 members of the VRF, of whom 35,000 were in the TA.⁶⁵

87. The Reserve Forces have three primary roles:

- to augment Regular Forces for enduring operations;
- to provide additional capability for large scale operations; and
- to provide specialist capability.

88. Lieutenant General Mark Mans, the Deputy Adjutant General from 2005 to 2008, told the Inquiry that for Op TELIC, as for other operations, Reservists were:

“... more often than not mobilised as individuals to support regular Army units. Sometimes they were mobilised in teams of 10 to 20, but that was quite unusual.”⁶⁶

89. Lt Gen Mans described the welfare support provided to members of the TA:

“As far as the support to the Territorial Army, when they were mobilised, they got exactly the same as the Regulars. So there was no distinction whatsoever. As far as support to their families, the same applied, but of course, it is more difficult, because the families of Territorial [Army] soldiers are spread far and wide ...

“... when they are mobilised, the [Territorial Army] soldiers do support a Regular unit of one form or another and, therefore, it is incumbent upon that Regular unit, and particularly the rear party back at the home base, to make sure that those individuals within the TA, and their families, are appropriately looked after in terms of maintaining contact, and also making sure they are aware of all the support and sustenance they can achieve.”⁶⁷

90. Lt Gen Mans added that once a member of the TA was demobilised, responsibility for their welfare reverted to their TA unit.

91. The MOD told the Inquiry that it had considered providing a separate “welfare pathway” for Reservists, but concluded that it would not aid integration.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Future of the UK's Reserve Forces*, 7 February 2005.

⁶⁵ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, 31 March 2006.

⁶⁶ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, pages 26-27.

⁶⁷ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, page 27.

⁶⁸ Paper MOD, 6 July 2010, ‘Iraq Inquiry Reservist Specific Welfare Provision’.

92. The initial call-out notice for Reservists for Op TELIC was issued in early January 2003.⁶⁹ By 19 March (when military operations against Iraq began), over 5,000 Reservists had been mobilised (comprising some 12 percent of total UK forces).

93. All TA and Regular Reservists deployed for Op TELIC 1 (the major combat phase of operations) were mobilised through the Reserves Training and Mobilisation Centre (RTMC) at Chilwell in Nottingham.⁷⁰ The briefing and preparation process at RTMC Chilwell provided Reservists with medical and dental examinations, additional operation-specific equipment, and information on pay and allowances.

94. In early June, the DOC produced a short note on lessons identified on personnel issues during Op TELIC 1; the note was sent to Mr Ingram's office on 11 June.⁷¹ The DOC stated that, although the mobilisation of Reservists had gone well, Op TELIC had thrown up "many issues" including:

- Many Reservists had found themselves "financially disadvantaged" because of mobilisation and deployment, or had not been paid properly.
- Some medical Reservists had been compulsorily mobilised from key NHS jobs but were not subsequently deployed where they could use their specialist skills. For many medical Reservists, it was their second or third operational deployment in recent years and this might affect retention.
- In some areas it had proved difficult to provide "active support" to the families of deployed Reservists, because of the dispersed and isolated locations of people's homes, particularly in relation to other Reservists and military bases.

95. The lessons identified were:

"A review of Reservist pay procedures is required to eliminate inefficiencies and to take into account the financial penalties likely to be incurred by Reservists as a result of mobilisation.

"A review of the mobilisation and employment of Reservist medical personnel on operations is required.

"A review of practical and emotional support to Reservist families is required."

96. The MOD has not been able to provide the Inquiry with papers on a number of issues relating to Reservists, including whether and how these recommendations were taken forward.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: First Reflections*, July 2003.

⁷⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 3 June 2003, column 302W. The Reserves Training and Mobilisation Centre (RTMC) was renamed the Reinforcements Training and Mobilisation Centre in 2011 and disbanded in 2015, when its responsibilities were taken on by the Mission Training and Mobilisation Centre (Individual).

⁷¹ Minute MA/VCDS to MA/Min(AF), 11 June 2003, 'Operation TELIC – Personnel Issues' attaching Paper MOD, [undated], 'Operation TELIC – Personnel Issues'.

97. The Inquiry asked Lt Gen Palmer what lessons had been learned from the mobilisation of Reserves for Op TELIC 1. He told the Inquiry that there were “big changes” between Op TELIC 1 and Op TELIC 2:

“We put in place a mounting centre at Chilwell, in order to try to administer them better, because there were issues definitely about inadequacies in handling Reserve mobilisation to do with their pay, to do with their jobs, and we were very involved in trying to make sure ... they could get their jobs back. Actually, I think we did have to resort to law on a couple of occasions.

“We also made sure that they had access to the same packages as the Regulars and obviously the same training, but I did take a number of criticisms from Reservists who did not feel they had been properly looked after administratively or, indeed, in a training sense, but ... they performed magnificently during the operation, and we simply could not have done without them.”⁷²

98. In October, the Army issued instructions on welfare provision for Op TELIC 3.⁷³ The instructions detailed the specific support available for mobilised Reservists, including:

- A TA cell had been established in theatre to handle any employment, administrative and pay concerns.
- All TA units were to ensure that they had a “proper focus established” to support the families of mobilised Reservists, and that there was regular contact with those families. The FWSE was designed to help with that work.
- All units were reminded that on mobilisation, “a Reservist becomes a Regular soldier”. There had been a number of cases where a mobilised Reservist had not been given full access to medical and dental care.

99. The instructions directed recipients to take “particular note” of the “aftercare policy” for demobilised Reservists. On demobilisation, TA soldiers should be advised that they should re-establish contact with their TA unit or the Reserve Force and Cadet Association (RFCA) if they experienced any difficulties associated with their operational service. The formal departure interview should impart “the clear understanding” that the Army remained engaged in their welfare.

100. In December, an MOD report on lessons from Op TELIC highlighted the particular difficulties faced by families of Reservists:

“The families of Reservists need particular consideration, as they may have had little or no contact with the Services and may not understand Service structures, administrative procedures, roles or jargon. Such families knew whom to contact, but ... still found it much more difficult than Regular Army families to find the

⁷² Public hearing, 21 July 2010, pages 84-85.

⁷³ Minute HQ Land Command to HQ 2 Div, 25 October 2003, ‘Welfare Provision for Op TELIC 3 – Chain of Command Instruction’.

information and answers they wanted. This will be borne in mind in considering how best to improve the support they need.”⁷⁴

101. The report also stated that, in order to preserve the volunteer ethos of Reservists and the goodwill of families and employers, the MOD had revised the “desired notice” period for mobilisation from 14 to 21 days. Operational requirements meant that for Op TELIC 1, some Reservists received only four days’ notice.

102. The report did not specify what action would be taken to address these difficulties.

103. In the same month, an NAO report on Op TELIC stated that some Reservists received as little as two or three days’ notice, due to absence from home, postal times and incorrect addresses.⁷⁵

104. The MOD set out the role of the Reserve Forces in the February 2005 publication *Future Use of the UK’s Reserve Forces*.⁷⁶ The paper stated that:

- In recognition of the fact that most members of the VRF joined to undertake activities which were a contrast to their civilian employment, the MOD would not mobilise a Reservist to take advantage of his or her civilian skills except with the express agreement of the Reservist and their employer. This would not preclude a commander on operations ordering an already mobilised Reservist to carry out a task for which he or she was qualified, as a short-term expedient and where no other alternative existed.
- While the Reserve Forces Act 1996 set a limit on the time any Reservist could be mobilised (generally one year over a three-year period), the MOD believed that this level of mobilisation was “unsustainable”. The MOD would therefore, where possible, limit the time that any Reservist would be mobilised to one year over a five-year period.
- The MOD would seek to provide 28 days’ notice of mobilisation (21 days previously).

105. In April 2005, the MOD introduced a new remuneration package for Reservists deployed on operations.⁷⁷ Under the new scheme, if Reservists were mobilised and their civilian pay was higher than their Service pay, they could claim the difference, including certain benefits in kind. There were additional allowances to compensate for other losses.

106. Reservists had previously applied for allowances to cover the additional costs of deployment. The scheme required a Reservist to collate a great deal of evidence of personal earnings and expenditure in the short time available before deployment.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

⁷⁵ National Audit Office, *Operation TELIC – United Kingdom Military Operations in Iraq*, 11 December 2003.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Future of the UK’s Reserve Forces*, 7 February 2005.

⁷⁷ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, 31 March 2006.

107. The NAO reported that the new scheme was “generous and less bureaucratic, and has been generally welcomed by the Reservists”.

108. The NAO published a report on the MOD’s use of the Reserve Forces in March 2006.⁷⁸ The NAO highlighted the finding from its survey of Reservists, that 41 percent of those intending to leave within one year agreed that inadequate support (relating to welfare and administration) played a part in their decision to leave. The NAO reported that, while the most used form of support was the unit’s welfare representative, some units had no full-time welfare representative to support deployed Reservists and their families.

109. The NAO recommended that the MOD should focus its attention and resources on those welfare services which were most used by Reservists and their families, especially those provided by local Reserve units. In particular, it should:

- ensure that information supplied to Reservists’ families was written in plain English;
- ensure that all TA regiments had adequate, dedicated welfare support, and that similar measures were available for Royal Naval Reservists and Royal Auxiliary Air Force Personnel; and
- improve the welfare support available to the families of deployed Volunteer Reservists who lived far away from the Reserve unit with which they trained and those Regular Reservists who had no unit.

110. The NAO also highlighted the lack of medical support for Reservists after their demobilisation, and recommended that the MOD should:

- undertake to provide medical treatment to all Reservists injured on operations to enable them to rejoin their civilian lives and careers as quickly as possible; and
- institute procedures for the diagnosis and treatment, through Defence Medical Services (DMS), of Reservists who develop mental health problems after the demobilisation process had been completed, as a result of an operational deployment.

111. In November 2006, the MOD established the Reserves Mental Health Programme (RMHP), to provide enhanced mental health care for current and former Reservists who had been demobilised since 1 January 2003 following deployment on an overseas operation. The RMHP is described in Section 16.2.

⁷⁸ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, 31 March 2006.

Increasing pressure on Service Personnel, 2004 to 2008

The decision not to deploy a headquarters and brigade to Iraq, June 2004

112. In mid-April 2004, the US made an informal request to the UK to send additional troops to Iraq.⁷⁹ Section 9.2 describes the Government’s consideration of that proposal, which focused on the question of the contribution that those troops might make to achieving strategic success.

113. On 12 May, Lieutenant General Robert Fry, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments) (DCDC(Commitments)), advised the Chiefs of Staff meeting that the effect of an additional deployment on “Harmony”, previously identified as one of the main concerns, was now assessed to be “less stressing”.⁸⁰

114. Lt Gen Palmer wrote to Lt Gen Fry the following day:

“You know my serious concerns about increasing the current level of commitments ... At best, deployment of an additional brigade would reduce average unit separation from our target of 24 months to 12 months. Within this, some trades and individuals (including pinch point trades) will inevitably suffer considerably shorter tour intervals. While recruitment and retention currently remain satisfactory in most areas, the situation is potentially fragile not least because the risk is difficult to quantify.”⁸¹

115. Lt Gen Palmer suggested that, if a “do nothing” option was judged to be unacceptable, the MOD should develop a “battlegroup only” option which would minimise “the stretch on our people”. He also highlighted the difficulty of following a decision for an additional deployment with the announcement of planned measures to reduce manpower costs.

116. The Chiefs of Staff considered the US request for additional UK military assets to Iraq on 19 May.⁸² Although they recognised there were risks and benefits to all the possible options, they agreed that the “best military option” was the deployment of HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (HQ ARRC) and a brigade to replace US forces in the provinces of Najaf and Qadisiyah (option six).

117. During the meeting, Lt Gen Fry cautioned against the long-term effects on the Armed Forces of an additional deployment, which militated against that option. Lt Gen Palmer rehearsed the arguments he had set out in his 13 May minute to Lt Gen Fry, adding that he feared a “precipitant retention problem”.

⁷⁹ Letter Baker to Rycroft, 21 April 2004, ‘Iraq: US Approaches for Additional UK Forces’.

⁸⁰ Minutes, 12 May 2004, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁸¹ Minute DCDS(Pers) to DCDS(C), 13 May 2003, ‘Expanding MND(SE) – People Implications’.

⁸² Minutes, 19 May 2004, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

118. Gen Walker summarised the conclusion of the Chiefs of Staff, that option six was the “best military option” although “there was current doubt whether it could be delivered and sustained”.

119. Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs on 25 May, setting out the Chiefs of Staff’s advice.⁸³ Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary stated that the option which would have the greatest effect and the least military risk was the deployment of HQ ARRC with an associated battlegroup, and a brigade to replace US forces. However, that option carried “significant penalties” including with regard to the wider impact on the Armed Forces.

120. Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary set out those penalties. Deploying HQ ARRC with an associated battlegroup would further reduce tour intervals for many Service Personnel. Some 40 percent of infantry soldiers already had tour intervals of less than 12 months (against a guideline of 24 months). The deployment would reduce tour intervals for combat service support units to an average of less than 10 months; some units would have even less.

121. Reduced tour intervals would effect training and future capability, and also significantly reduce the time that Service Personnel and their families could spend together. The letter concluded:

“For some, this may be the straw that breaks the camel’s back and leads to experienced personnel leaving the Service.”

122. Holding a brigade at readiness, even if it was not deployed outside the UK, would have even more significant impacts.

123. Given those penalties, and the fact that the situation in Iraq would evolve, Chiefs recommended that the Government should deploy HQ ARRC and an associated battlegroup now, but retain the brigade in the UK to be deployed if necessary.

124. In late May, Lt Gen Palmer asked the Chiefs of Staff to agree that he should develop a costed package of measures, focused on protecting untaken leave and enhanced allowances, to ameliorate the “worst consequences” of the increasing “operational load”.⁸⁴ It was conceivable that an increase in the UK’s commitment in Iraq would reduce tour intervals for some units, including medical units, to six months.

125. Lt Gen Palmer advised that the MOD did not have the management information to determine the extent to which increasing pressure on Service Personnel would translate into worsening retention, or when a “tipping point” in retention would be reached (work was under way to generate that information). Recruitment and retention

⁸³ [Letter Naworynsky to Rycroft, 25 May 2004, ‘Iraq: Options for a UK Military Contribution to the Wider South’.](#)

⁸⁴ Minute Palmer to COSSEC, 24 May 2004, ‘Increased Commitments – Ameliorating the Impact on People’.

were holding up well, but there was already evidence that people were starting to feel undervalued, particularly over the issue of pay.

126. Lt Gen Palmer concluded: “Every time we increase the operational load we increase the risk of a sudden, serious downturn in retention.”

127. Section 9.2 describes discussions between Mr Blair, Ministers and senior officials on the deployment of additional troops between late May and mid-June. The extent to which personnel issues featured in those discussions is not clear.

128. On 15 June, Mr Blair, Mr Hoon, Mr Jack Straw (the Foreign Secretary), Mr Hilary Benn (the International Development Secretary), Mr Paul Boateng (Chief Secretary to the Treasury), Gen Walker and others met to discuss Iraq.⁸⁵ The meeting concluded that the UK:

“... should not close the door to the possibility of sending further UK troops. We should keep the option open until around the time of the NATO Summit [28-29 June]. But there was no pressing military reason to send them, nor were we coming under much pressure from the US to do so.”

129. On 24 June, Lt Gen Palmer provided an update on his work to develop a package of welfare measures for Mr Ingram, at his request.⁸⁶ Lt Gen Palmer advised that, with only a limited understanding of the relationship between operational tempo, separation and behaviour, he was taking a “broad view” of potential measures. These might include new financial incentives for groups under “critical stress”, enhanced separation allowances, improvements to Service Accommodation and measures to protect untaken leave.

The decision to deploy troops to Afghanistan

130. In February 2005, Mr Hoon announced that the UK intended to switch its existing military effort in Afghanistan (around 1,000 Service Personnel based in northern Afghanistan) to Helmand province.⁸⁷

131. Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Mr Blair’s Foreign Policy Adviser from 2003 to 2007, told the Inquiry that “this was a proposal ... which came from the Chiefs of Staff”.⁸⁸

132. The 21 July meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP) agreed in principle proposals presented by Dr John Reid, the Defence Secretary, for both the transfer to Iraqi control of the four provinces in southern Iraq for which the UK had security responsibility, and for the redeployment of the UK effort in Afghanistan

⁸⁵ [Letter Rycroft to Baker, 15 June 2004, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s Meeting, 15 June’](#).

⁸⁶ Minute Palmer to PS/Minister (AF), 24 June 2004, ‘Increased Commitments – Ameliorating the Impact on People’.

⁸⁷ Paper MOD, 19 July 2005, ‘Afghanistan: Resources and Strategic Planning’.

⁸⁸ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 93.

from the north to Helmand province in the south, with an infantry battlegroup and full helicopter support.⁸⁹ Section 9.4 addresses the decision in detail.

133. The MOD paper which informed the decision advised that this option, which comprised “around 2,500 personnel in total”, would:

“Place greatest pressure on internal MOD resourcing. It would impact on the individual personnel deployed, particularly those in ‘pinch-point’ trades who may have been deployed on operations significantly more than Departmental guidelines advise; stretch the MOD’s logistic capability at a time when force level reductions in Iraq cannot be guaranteed; and place strain on key enablers ...”⁹⁰

134. The MOD paper concluded with a brief report on plans for UK military drawdown in Iraq. It cautioned that:

“... any substantial prolongation of the UK military commitment in Iraq at current force levels would have significant impact on individual personnel, the logistic feasibility of any commitment in Afghanistan, and overall resourcing.”

135. The minutes of the DOP meeting do not indicate that there was any discussion of the specific impact on the Iraq campaign of the proposed deployment to Helmand.⁹¹

136. Gen Jackson was briefed, in advance of a 17 January 2006 meeting with the House of Lords Defence Group, that:

“Depending on campaign progress in Iraq, there is potential for some ‘concurrency challenges’ in 2006/07. We must try to avoid ‘overstretch’, but not end up ‘under stretched’ – particularly when the competition for resources in Whitehall is so fierce.”⁹²

137. On the same day, Dr Roger Hutton, MOD Director Joint Commitments Policy, provided Dr Reid with advice on the timing and detail of the deployment of UK forces to Helmand province.⁹³ Dr Hutton advised that the Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate deployment of the full Helmand Task Force (HTF). That recommendation was “crucially dependent” on fulfilling three criteria, including:

“Achievability within current UK commitments. The HTF, taken together with the HQ ARRC deployment, calls on a variety of capabilities, and a lengthy and complex logistic tail. With the continued commitment to Iraq through 2006, this presents significant but manageable challenges, particularly for logistic enablers (including air transport). During this period we will still be able to undertake immediate contingency operations, but on a limited basis.”

⁸⁹ Minutes, 21 July 2005, DOP meeting.

⁹⁰ Paper MOD, 19 July 2005, ‘Afghanistan: Resources and Strategic Planning’.

⁹¹ Minutes, 21 July 2005, DOP meeting.

⁹² Briefing, [undated], ‘CGS Address to House of Lords Defence Group – 17 Jan 06’.

⁹³ Minute Hutton to APS/SofS [MOD], 17 January 2006, ‘Afghanistan Deployments’.

138. Annex C to Dr Hutton’s briefing provided more detail on key issues, including the sustainability of the proposed deployment. It stated:

“It remains the case that, with likely timelines for transition in Iraq, the HTF deployment is achievable without serious damage to Harmony, though certain niche trades and capabilities (particularly air transport) will be placed under increased, but manageable, stress.”

139. The decision to deploy to Helmand was approved in Cabinet on 26 January.⁹⁴ The minutes record that Dr Reid “was looking carefully at where the burden on our troops could be reduced, including in Iraq and Bosnia and hoped to be able to report troop and cost reductions in coming months”.

140. There were different views within the MOD over the effect of the deployment on personnel. Lt Gen Palmer, DCDS(Personnel) from 2002 to August 2005, told the Inquiry that, as he left post, he expressed his concern that deploying two brigades simultaneously (to Iraq and Afghanistan) would breach the Harmony Guidelines and the Defence Planning Assumptions, and was “too big a risk”.⁹⁵

141. Sir Kevin Tebbit, MOD Permanent Under Secretary from 2001 to 2005, told the Inquiry:

“I was apprehensive [about the deployment of UK forces to Helmand] and I made my concerns known to my planning staff and to the Chiefs of Staff. I think their view was that they could do it and it was manageable ... since it was [the Chiefs of Staff] who would actually have to ensure they could do this, I did not press my objections fully.”⁹⁶

142. The impact of the decision on the availability of key equipment capabilities for Iraq is addressed in Section 14.1.

143. UK troops began to deploy to Helmand in May 2006.

Concern that the Army is “running hot”, autumn 2006

144. In August 2006, concerns emerged over the treatment of injured Service Personnel being treated on civilian wards at Selly Oak hospital in the UK, and the adequacy of the welfare package provide to them and their families. The concerns are described in Section 16.2.

⁹⁴ Cabinet Conclusions, 26 January 2006.

⁹⁵ Public hearing, 21 July 2010, page 80.

⁹⁶ Public hearing, 3 February 2010, pages 15 and 16.

145. General Sir Richard Dannatt, Commander-in-Chief Land Command, wrote to Mr Des Browne, the Defence Secretary, on 31 August setting out his most serious concerns.⁹⁷ His letter focused on the pressures on Service Personnel:

“... as an Army, we are running hot, and our operational deployments are well above planned levels set out in current Defence Planning Assumptions ... you should be aware that, in my opinion, the demands of the organisation are currently greater than our ability to provide satisfactorily for the needs of the individuals ... Quite properly, we often talk about an implied contract – the ‘military covenant’ – that as an Army we have with our soldiers and their families and I fear that it is somewhat out of balance.”

146. Gen Dannatt stated that the concerns might seem misplaced, given that current “outflow levels” of personnel (which he described as the classic gauge of morale) were low. But the cumulative effect of the high tempo of operations, short tour intervals, hectic training and activity between tours, and under-manning gave rise to “a severe risk akin to a cliff-edge experience”.

147. Gen Dannatt identified several pre-emptive actions to prevent any increase in outflow, including:

“Away from the field, I sense that basic pay for our more junior people is becoming an issue, as are some allowances, particularly those that are related to operational deployment. I am not at all sure that a take home pay of £1,150 a month is fair return for a month’s work in Helmand or Basra. But it is the standard of both single and family accommodation when our people are back home that is probably the most emotive issue ...”

148. Improvements in those areas would require a “modest shift” of resources from the Equipment Programme into the Short-Term Programme.

149. Gen Dannatt took up post as Chief of the General Staff the following month.

150. Gen Dannatt told the Inquiry:

“When the military covenant is in balance, then the engine [the Army] can do a lot of work. When the covenant is out of balance, we have problems. I think we progressively got out of balance as the amount of work we were being asked to do increased through 2005 and 2006.

“I say this not in any shape or form as a criticism of any of my predecessors, but merely as a reflection of the additional work that we were being asked to do as a consequence of decisions taken to stay in Iraq until we had successfully completed our operations there, but also take on Afghanistan as well.

⁹⁷ Letter Dannatt to Browne, 31 August 2006, [untitled].

“The way to bring the covenant back into balance was to make sure we were expending sufficient resources on looking after the legitimate needs of individuals, soldiers and their families in terms of their pay allowances, accommodation, and the equipment ... you would want to give these people.

“That’s where I think we were deficient. That’s where we had to work quite hard to get it back in balance. I know I said in 2006 the army was running hot. That is correct ... I think we were getting quite close to a seizing-up moment in 2006.”⁹⁸

151. The Inquiry asked Gen Dannatt whether work to bring the military covenant back into balance should not have begun earlier.⁹⁹ He told the Inquiry that he had no criticism of his predecessor, and that it was:

“... often easier to start something at the start of an appointment when you have had the chance to survey the landscape ... and coming from the position of Commander-in-Chief ... with time to go round the Army, [I] could sense both at home and abroad the pressures building on soldiers and their families and deciding something had to be done.”

Introduction of the Operational Allowance

152. Mr Browne’s Private Secretary wrote to No.10 on 9 October, setting out proposed new arrangements for supporting Service Personnel on operations.¹⁰⁰ The letter reported that, to reflect the current, high operational tempo and provide an immediate boost to the lowest paid Service Personnel, Mr Browne had agreed with Mr Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the Government would introduce a tax-free Operational Allowance of £2,400 for all Service Personnel who completed a six-month tour in either Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans or certain other operations. Proportional amounts would be paid to those who completed shorter tours. The Allowance would be backdated to 1 April 2006.

153. The MOD had considered offering tax-free pay while on operations, but had concluded that this would not target the lowest paid and would be difficult to administer.

154. The letter also advised that the MOD would discuss the scope for abating Council Tax charges for Service Personnel deployed on operations with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The failure of Local Authorities to exercise discretion on those charges was a “regular complaint”.

155. The letter also advised that the free telephone call allowance would be raised from 20 to 30 minutes a week.

⁹⁸ Public hearing, 28 July 2010, pages 20-21.

⁹⁹ Public hearing, 28 July 2010, page 98.

¹⁰⁰ Letter PS/Secretary of State [MOD] to Phillipson, 9 October 2006, ‘A Package for Service Personnel on Operations’.

156. In his autobiography, Gen Dannatt described the Operational Allowance as the product of “some journalistic pressure and keen discussions with the Treasury”.¹⁰¹ He also described it as the beginning of his campaign to “improve the soldiers’ lot”.

157. Mr Browne announced the introduction of the Operational Allowance on 10 October.¹⁰²

158. Mr Browne raised the issue of Council Tax charges for deployed Service Personnel with Ms Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, on 19 October.¹⁰³ MOD and DCLG officials subsequently met to explore options for abating Council Tax charges. The MOD’s preferred option was a statutory discount of 25 percent (which would equate to a discount of £132 based on the average Council Tax bill).

159. Mr Browne announced in September 2007 that Service Personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan would receive a £140 rebate on their Council Tax bill (based on a six-month tour).¹⁰⁴

Reports on recruitment and retention

160. The NAO published a report entitled *Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces* in November 2006.¹⁰⁵ The report stated that, at July 2006, the trained strength of the Armed Forces stood at around 180,690 Service Personnel, a shortfall of some 5,170 (2.8 percent) against the MOD’s estimated requirement.

161. This figure masked significant shortages in 88 “pinch point” trades, where there was insufficient trained strength to perform operational tasks while enabling the Harmony Guidelines to be met. While 14.5 percent of the trained strength of the Army had exceeded the Harmony Guidelines at some point in the previous 30 months, this percentage rose to more than 33 percent for some pinch point trades.

162. The NAO concluded:

- Although the Armed Forces had consistently operated at or above the most demanding combination of operations envisaged by the Defence Planning Assumptions (DPAs) since 2001, and the MOD expected that this would continue to be the case for some time, the Armed Forces’ manning requirements had not been adjusted to reflect the current levels of activity. The NAO reported that, while the MOD accepted that operating at that level could result in it placing additional strains on its people, the DPAs were guidelines only and were not intended to constrain decisions taken on the employment of the Armed Forces.

¹⁰¹ Dannatt, R. *Leading from the Front*. Bantam Press, 2010.

¹⁰² BBC, 10 October 2006, *Soldiers to get ‘tax bill’ bonus*.

¹⁰³ Minute Baker to PS/SoS [MOD], 8 December 2006, ‘An Improved Package for Service Personnel on Operations – Council Tax Discounts/Rebates’.

¹⁰⁴ *The Guardian*, 26 September 2007, *Council tax rebates for war zone soldiers*.

¹⁰⁵ National Audit Office, *Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces*, November 2006.

- There were signs that the numbers of Service Personnel choosing to leave the Armed Forces early were beginning to increase for some key groups.
- A variety of factors influenced Service Personnel in their decisions to leave the Services, but workload, separation and the impact on family life were key factors.
- Service Personnel considered that the increased operational tempo had led to heavier workloads and more separation from families.

163. The NAO reported that the MOD was successfully using a range of short-term measures (including financial incentives) to improve retention and alleviate under-manning.

164. The NAO also reported that the MOD was facing current and future challenges to its ability to recruit sufficient numbers of new entrants as a result of demographic changes, changing attitudes to careers, and negative publicity affecting public perceptions of the Armed Forces. The MOD was taking steps to respond to each of those challenges.

165. The NAO made a number of recommendations, including:

“The Department should review the overall manning requirements within individual operational pinch point trade groups to determine whether they are set at sufficient levels to support enduring operational commitments.

“The Department is constrained in its ability to reduce the operational tempo, which is impacting on personnel, but should look to investigate measures to provide greater stability and certainty of work patterns for personnel between operational deployments. Whilst recognising the limitations in how much workload can be reduced, the Department should look to improve its ability to let serving personnel know their work patterns over a longer time horizon.”

166. Mr Bill Jeffrey, MOD Permanent Under Secretary, responded to these conclusions later that month in his evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) during its consideration of the NAO’s report.¹⁰⁶ He argued that frequency of deployment was only one factor in people’s decisions to stay or leave, and that polling and opinion survey evidence suggested that it was not quite as significant a factor as it might appear.

167. Mr Jeffrey told the PAC that he agreed with the view expressed by Ministers, that the Armed Forces were “stretched quite significantly, by the combination of deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan with other things”, but not overstretched. He described overstretch as the inability of the Armed Forces to fulfil the tasks allocated to them.

¹⁰⁶ Public Accounts Committee, Session 2005-2006, *Ministry of Defence: Recruitment and retention in the armed forces*, 15 November 2006. Uncorrected transcript of Oral Evidence given by Mr Bill Jeffrey CB, Permanent Secretary, Mr Chris Baker OBE and Brigadier Stephen Andrews CBE, Ministry of Defence.

168. He also stated that there was not a direct link between the MOD's Defence Planning Assumptions and the "degree of stretch". Each operation was different and required different capabilities. Deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan had stretched different capabilities to different degrees; it was a "matter of military judgement" whether the Armed Forces were overstretched. Manning requirements (which flowed from the Defence Planning Assumptions) would be reviewed at the next spending review.

169. In early March 2007, Gen Dannatt wrote to Mr Browne:

"Two overall themes dominated my introductory letter [of 31 August 2006]: the Army is running hot; and the 'military covenant' is out of balance. I am pleased to say that I think both these concerns are now well understood across the Department and, importantly, we are taking steps to address both. Nevertheless ... the level of operational commitments is still well above Defence Planning Assumptions and looks set to remain so for some years. There is now an acceptance, however, that the Army is effectively *fully* operationally committed and hence any rebalance between theatres – as we will undertake this year in Iraq and Afghanistan – has to be a 'zero sum'..."¹⁰⁷

170. Gen Dannatt:

- welcomed the Operational Allowance and the recent pay award which together sent Service Personnel a "powerful message" on how highly they were valued;
- confirmed that the "general care" provided to casualties was, slowly, improving; the issue would continue to require constant, senior level attention; and
- restated his concerns that there was a risk of a "cliff-edge fall" in Army manning (although retention was holding up, recruitment was falling).

171. The PAC published its report on recruitment and retention in the Armed Forces in June 2007.¹⁰⁸ It echoed the conclusions and recommendations of the NAO's November 2006 report. The PAC reported that:

"Deployments overseas have been more frequent because the Department has been operating above Defence Planning Assumptions for several years and manning levels have not kept pace with commitments ... Decisions about whether the Armed Forces can undertake operations above the Assumptions are matter of military judgement. The Department intends to review [the] Defence Planning Assumptions and the funding of the Armed Forces in the light of the demands placed on them, as part of the next Comprehensive Spending Review."

¹⁰⁷ Minute CGS to SofS [MOD], [undated], [untitled].

¹⁰⁸ Thirty-fourth Report from the Public Accounts Committee, Session 2006-2007, *Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces*, HC43.

172. The PAC concluded:

“The increasing frequency of deployments on overseas operations and time away from home are factors causing people to leave the Armed Forces. More than 15 percent of Army Personnel are away from home more often than is planned for under the Department’s ‘Harmony’ Guidelines which are being consistently broken. The Department has little scope to reduce the operational tempo which is impacting on personnel but in case of enduring operations, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, it needs to provide people with greater stability of work patterns.

“There are indicators of overstretch in specific areas, such as the severe shortfalls in personnel in some specialist trades, such as nurses, linguists and leading hands, and the routine breaking of harmony guidelines. The longer this situation continues the more it will begin to affect operational capability. The Department maintains that the Armed Forces are stretched, but not overstretched, and would only be overstretched if there was a failure to meet military commitments. But the Department also needs to ascertain the ‘tipping points’ where the degree of stretch itself precipitates the loss of scarce skills, putting operational capability at risk.”

173. The Inquiry asked AM Pocock what he understood by the concept of “overstretch”.¹⁰⁹ He told the Inquiry:

“This is a subject where it is easy to let the heart rule the mind. If we are going to be completely objective about it, I would say there are two things ... can we retain our people? And ... are we doing them long-term harm? The first one, for virtually the whole period of the 2000’s, certainly up to 2007, retention was virtually static. The Services were short of people, yes, but that was largely down to recruitment issues ...

“On the subject of, ‘Were we doing our people harm?’ we didn’t know, but we were looking really hard [at that issue] ...”

174. Vice Admiral (VAdm) Peter Wilkinson, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel) from 2007, added that, in his view, the Harmony Guidelines provided a useful, objective measure of the degree of stretch:

“I think they [the Harmony Guidelines] were a very good check on the department to make sure they understood, perhaps better than before, what actually they were asking of their people.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, pages 70-71.

¹¹⁰ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, page 72.

175. Lt Gen Mans told the Inquiry:

“... recruiting is quite a complex area, so although ... on balance, I think Iraq was positive [for recruitment], there were some other issues which made recruiting more difficult. At this stage, the economy in the country was doing very well and, therefore, unemployment was comparatively low. Therefore, we were competing for recruits in quite a difficult market in that respect. There were other issues associated with the phrase that has been used before, ‘gatekeepers’, parents and teachers. Were they actually going to encourage either their children or their pupils to join the military? Well, on balance, they probably weren’t, in terms of that sort of overall perception. So overall, you had to take into consideration all these other rather complex factors, because the army was under-recruited during the period in question.”¹¹¹

The impact of operations on the Harmony Guidelines

176. The MOD told the Inquiry that, since 2002, the Armed Forces had been consistently operating at or above the level of concurrency defined in SDR 98.¹¹² That had “inevitably constrained” their ability to meet Harmony Guidelines particularly for Service Personnel in “Pinch Point specialist trades”.

177. The MOD provided the Inquiry with figures for the percentage of Service Personnel in each Service for whom the Harmony Guidelines on Individual Separated Service were breached between 2002 and 2009; these figures are presented at the end of this Section.¹¹³ The Navy’s Guidelines were breached in respect of less than 1 percent of Navy Personnel in each of the years covered by the Inquiry. The Army’s Guidelines were breached in respect of over 18 percent of Army Personnel in early 2004 (the first period for which data is available), falling to 10 percent in early 2007. The RAF’s Guidelines were breached in respect of between 2 and 10 percent of RAF Personnel over the period covered by the Inquiry.

178. Professor Christopher Dandeker, Professor of Military Sociology at King’s College London and Co-Director of the King’s Centre for Military Health Research, told the House of Commons Defence Committee in March 2008:

“... so far as our own research is concerned ... I think that the Harmony Guidelines have been well constructed because the evidence suggests that if you stay within them they [Service Personnel] do not suffer; if you go beyond them there is a 20 to 50 percent likelihood that they will suffer in terms of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder].”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, pages 79-80.

¹¹² Paper MOD, 25 November 2009, ‘Harmony Guidelines’.

¹¹³ Paper MOD, 22 October 2010, ‘Harmony – Statistics’.

¹¹⁴ Fourteenth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2007-2008, *Recruiting and retaining Armed Forces personnel, Oral and Written Evidence (25 March 2008)*, HC424.

179. In his evidence to the Inquiry, AM Pocock questioned whether Professor Dandeker was right to suggest that the Harmony Guidelines were an appropriate basis for assessing the effect of operational deployment on individuals.¹¹⁵ The Guidelines had been derived in a straightforward way from the planning assumptions used in SDR 98 (“what operations have we got? How many people have we got? ... that means that they can spend this long away”). AM Pocock’s focus had been on the broader relationship between time deployed on operations and the risk of mental health issues.

180. Lt Gen Palmer told the Inquiry that, while his “prime concern” with regard to reducing tour intervals was for individuals, he was also concerned that reduced tour intervals could affect operational capability, as units would not be able to undertake collective training and other development and preparatory activities.¹¹⁶

Rebuilding the military covenant

181. In September 2007, in response to growing concerns that the military covenant was being steadily undermined, the Royal British Legion (RBL) launched its “Honour the Covenant” campaign.¹¹⁷ The RBL argued that the covenant was being breached with respect to three key issues:

- the operation of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme;
- healthcare and welfare support for serving Service Personnel, their dependants and veterans; and
- support for bereaved families at inquests.

182. In July 2008, partly in response to that campaign and the support it generated, the Government published a command paper entitled *The Nation’s Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans* (known as the *Service Personnel Command Paper*).¹¹⁸ The paper was underpinned by two principles:

- to end any disadvantage that armed service imposes upon Service Personnel, their families and veterans; and
- to better support and recognise those who have been wounded in the service of their country.

183. The paper covered a wide range of topics: compensation, health, housing, education and skills, transport, support for families, benefits, careers and pay.

¹¹⁵ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, pages 68-70.

¹¹⁶ Public hearing, 16 July 2010, page 77.

¹¹⁷ House of Commons Library, Standard Note SN/IA/5979, 9 June 2011, *Armed Forces Covenant*.

¹¹⁸ Command Paper, July 2008, *The Nation’s Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans*, Cm 7424.

184. Mr Bob Ainsworth, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, described the production of the Command Paper to the Inquiry as an:

“... opportunity ... to get for the first time at every single area of Government and deal with the things that had never been given the importance that they had been given before. There are lots of ways in which Government accidentally, local Government and central Government, discriminates against our Armed Forces because of the juxtaposition of the way that services are delivered and the way that we make them work and the way that we keep moving them around ... So in the Services Personnel Command Paper what I wanted to try to do was sweep up as many of those complaints as there were, analyse them, see whether or not there was a reality to them and have them dealt with as a one-off process, but set up an ongoing process.”¹¹⁹

185. Mr Ainsworth went on to describe how the Command Paper was used to co-ordinate the Government’s response to veterans’ needs, including on issues which had not been explicitly considered in the paper:

“We had the Prime Minister’s stamp on the *Service Personnel Command Paper*. We were able to use that as we went round different departments and say ‘This is the Government’s intent’ ...

“I had problems from different Departments, but that’s understandable ... Government tends to work in silos ... So you have to go political in order to get those things sorted out.”¹²⁰

186. VAdm Wilkinson told the Inquiry that the implementation of the Command Paper had been challenging, but that progress had been made:

“The challenges were that there was very little new money attached to the proposals and therefore, to gain the support of other Government departments was very difficult ... the second challenge was to make the gains made enduring. I think we have achieved both of those, in that other Government departments were made to change their plans and programmes to take account of the Command Paper ...”¹²¹

187. In May 2010, the new Government committed to “work to rebuild the Military Covenant”.¹²²

188. An independent Task Force on the Military Covenant, chaired by Professor Hew Strachan, was established in summer 2010 to inform that work.¹²³ The Terms of

¹¹⁹ Public hearing, 6 July 2010, pages 5-6.

¹²⁰ Public hearing, 6 July 2010, pages 24-25.

¹²¹ Public hearing, 19 July 2010, page 100.

¹²² HM Government, *The Coalition: our programme for government*, May 2010.

¹²³ Task Force on the Military Covenant, September 2010, *Report of the Task Force on the Military Covenant*.

Reference of the Task Force were to identify innovative ways in which the Government, and society as a whole, could fulfil its obligation to rebuild the covenant.

189. The Government published a written *Armed Forces Covenant* in May 2011.¹²⁴ The *Covenant* incorporated a number of the Task Force's recommendations. The *Covenant* stated that members of the Armed Forces should expect respect, support and fair treatment in return for the sacrifices they made on behalf of the nation. The *Covenant* set out two core principles:

- No current or former member of the Armed Forces, or their families, should be at a disadvantage compared with other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
- Special consideration was appropriate in some cases, particularly for those who had been injured or bereaved.

190. These core principles were enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011.¹²⁵ The Act did not create legally enforceable rights for Service Personnel, but required the Defence Secretary to report annually to Parliament on the Covenant with a particular focus on four areas: healthcare, education, housing and the operation of inquests.

191. The Inquiry's conclusions and lessons on the pressures on Service Personnel and the support provided to them and their families are set out in Section 16.4.

¹²⁴ Ministry of Defence, *The Armed Forces Covenant*, 16 May 2011.

¹²⁵ Armed Forces Act 2011.

Table 2: Percentage of Service Personnel for whom the Harmony Guidelines on Individual Separated Service were breached¹²⁶

Year	Royal Navy	Army	RAF
2002/03 Q1	<1	No Record	5.3
2002/03 Q2	<1	No Record	5.4
2002/03 Q3	<1	No Record	5.1
2002/03 Q4	<1	No Record	5.0
2003/04 Q1	<1	No Record	6.8
2003/04 Q2	<1	No Record	6.2
2003/04 Q3	<1	No Record	6.2
2003/04 Q4	<1	18.1	5.4
2004/05 Q1	<1	17.0	3.6
2004/05 Q2	<1	16.8	3.8
2004/05 Q3	<1	15.5	3.6
2004/05 Q4	<1	15.5	3.9
2005/06 Q1	<1	15.6	4.1
2005/06 Q2	<1	15.3	4.1
2005/06 Q3	<1	15.1	4.2
2005/06 Q4	<1	14.5	3.9
2006/07 Q1	<1	14.0	2.9
2006/07 Q2	<1	13.4	1.7
2006/07 Q3	<1	12.4	5.2
2006/07 Q4	<1	10.3	6.2
2007/08 Q1	<1	Not available	6.7
2007/08 Q2	<1	Not available	9.2
2007/08 Q3	<1	Not available	10.0
2007/08 Q4	<1	Not available	9.2
2008/09 Q1	<1	Not available	9.4
2008/09 Q2	<1	Not available	6.1
2008/09 Q3	<1	Not available	5.9
2008/09 Q4	<1	Not available	5.9
2009/10 Q1	<1	Not available	5.4
2009/10 Q2	<1	Not available	5.0

¹²⁶ Paper MOD, 22 October 2010, 'Harmony – Statistics'. The MOD informed the Inquiry that no data was available for the Army for the period Q1 2007/08 onwards due to migration to a new personnel administration system. The reporting baseline for the RAF's Harmony Guidelines changed from Q2 2008/09.